

**The Ethics of Being With/in**

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of

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## ABSTRACT

### The Ethics of Being With/in

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Inspired by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, this thesis develops an environmental ethic out of his work. While the main threads of Levinas' philosophy exclude nature from ethics, a deconstructive reading of his work finds that it remains open to the possibility of ethics beyond the interhuman. While for Levinas the other is always a human other, I contend that his ideas on thematization and totalization ultimately require us to refuse to apply the labels "human" or "nonhuman" before being obligated in ethics. We need an ethic that does not ask who the other is before hearing the other's calling of oneself to responsibility. Responding to Levinas' work, I endeavour to articulate such an ethic, adequate to all others in the more than human world, including nonhuman (and more than human) others. I call these ethics the ethics of being with/in. I write "with/in" to emphasize that we are always both with and in: with others, and within contexts of relations, embodied in the world. In addition, the conjunction "with/in" illustrates the interrupted nature of an ethical subjectivity envisioned as a decentred conjunction of relations, always interrupted by others. As Levinas teaches, in ethical subjectivity oneself is interrupted by another, torn out of one's concern for oneself, creating a sense of ethics that comes before one's own philosophy and interrupts one's own thinking.

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## Preface

The ethics of being with/in are Levinasian ethics beyond the interhuman, postmodern environmental ethics affirming that nonhuman others can be met as persons, and obligate oneself in ethics, in the manner that Levinas describes ethics in terms of face to face relations, and ethical subjectivity as the one for the other. For those familiar with the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Levinasian ethics might initially seem a strange choice for developing ethics beyond the interhuman, since Levinas associates being with nature and animality in contrast to the human, which, he says, transcends being and nature as ethics come to pass. For those unfamiliar with Levinas' work, a few words of introduction may be in order.

Levinas was a philosopher of eastern European Jewish origin, who spent most of his academic career in France, publishing his major philosophical works in French. He lived from 1906 to 1995, and published most of his work between 1930 and 1975. He grew up in Kovno, in Lithuania, which was then part of Russia (Friedlander 1990, 80). Judith Friedlander indicates that Levinas was raised in an assimilated, yet traditionalist home. William Desmond notes that the family was orthodox (Desmond 1984, 156). The family spoke Russian rather than Yiddish at home, but Levinas remained a practicing Jew, and studied Hebrew and Bible (Friedlander 1990, 64).

The family moved to Ukraine in 1915, when the government forced Jews out of Russia, and back to Kovno in 1920, when anti-Semitic harassment and

violence there made Lithuania the more stable alternative (Cohen 1994, 115). His family survived while thousands of other Jews were murdered in Ukraine during the Russian Civil War, but he was the only one of his family to survive the Holocaust, having gone to France for school at the age of 17 and remained there afterwards (Friedlander 1990, 86). During WW2, having become a citizen of France, Levinas was drafted into the French army, in 1939. He was captured shortly thereafter, and was held as a prisoner of war by the Nazis, protected somewhat by his status as a soldier (Cohen 1994, 118). His wife and daughter survived in hiding (Cohen 1994, 119). Levinas' experiences in the Holocaust, and as a Jew more generally, exerted a deep influence on the development of his philosophy, notably in his struggles with the work of Hegel and Heidegger.<sup>1</sup>

Levinas' work is challenging, in the sense of being difficult to understand, as well as being provocative. It is also compelling, often disturbingly so, in his radical sense of the obligation inspired in oneself by the other person. Desmond notes that Levinas' work is particularly difficult for Anglophones (Desmond 1984, 156), and those who are unfamiliar with the work of Husserl and Heidegger. Desmond describes "Substitution," the pivotal essay in Levinas' *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, as "bold and provocative," "brilliant and profound," giving a characteristic response to Levinas in expressing an inability

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<sup>1</sup> Additional biographical details can be found in Richard Cohen's *Elevations* (1994), Judith Friedlander's *Vilna on the Seine* (1990), William Desmond's article on "Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas" in *Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* (1984). Simon Critchley has compiled a useful chronology in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* (2002).

to “do justice here either to its claims or to the questions it provokes” (Desmond 1984, 167).

Although a few important texts engaging Levinas’ work appeared in the 1960s, notably Jacques Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics,” his work was not widely read even in France until the 1980s, following a renewed interest in phenomenology (Critchley 2002, 3). Yet, he has been called one of the two greatest French philosophers of the twentieth century, the other being Henri Bergson (Critchley 2002, 2). As ethics has come to prominence in recent philosophical work, Levinas has come to play an increasingly vital role beyond French philosophy, in analytic philosophy and American pragmatism, addressed, for example, in the work Hilary W. Putnam, Richard J. Berstein, Stanley Cavell, and Richard Rorty (Critchley 2002, 5).

Levinas introduced phenomenology into France, beginning in 1929 after studying with Husserl and Heidegger in Germany (Cohen 1994, 117; Critchley 2002, 1). Phenomenology is the study of perception and how things come to mind. It can be viewed as the backbone of continental thought, which is often contrasted with the analytic philosophy of the United States and Britain (Sokolowski 2000, 3). Levinas attended the Kant seminar in Davos in 1929, in which Ernst Cassirer (a disciple of the influential modern Jewish philosopher and theologian Hermann Cohen) debated Heidegger on Kant. Critchley describes this seminar as “part of a wider Franco-German philosophical meeting by younger philosophers” (Critchley 2002, xvii). This dialogue between French

and German thought was the beginnings of continental thought, in which Levinas' work was vital.

Levinas wrote his dissertation on Husserl's phenomenology, which became the first book-length treatment of phenomenology in French, published in 1930, and inspired Sartre to go to Freiburg to study with Husserl (Cohen 1994, 118). Levinas published the first articles in French on both Husserl and Heidegger, in 1929 and 1932, respectively (Critchley 2002, xvii-xviii). Between his own works, and translating Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* into French, with Gabrielle Pfeiffer (Cohen 1994, 118), Levinas made one of the initial crossovers between German and French philosophy, acting as a key participant in the of the initial impetus for what has come to be known as continental thought.

Phenomenology has been influential in recent philosophy, spawning hermeneutics, chiefly through Hans-Georg Gadamer, and deconstruction, through Jacques Derrida (Sokolowski 2000, 224-225). Phenomenology is itself a significant area of philosophy, but Levinas has an importance beyond introducing phenomenology to France and thereby stimulating existentialism (through Jean-Paul Sartre's work<sup>2</sup>) and deconstruction. Derrida studied Husserl's work, but developed deconstruction as a method of reading Levinas, initially in his early essay "Violence and Metaphysics," but developed further in

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<sup>2</sup> In his obituary essay for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre stated that he, meaning Sartre, "was introduced to phenomenology by Levinas" (quoted in Critchley 2002, xvii).

“At this very moment in this work here I am” (Derrida 1978, 1991; see also Bernasconi and Critchley 1991, xii).

Of particular interest for the development of this thesis, Levinas is a primary inspiration of postmodern ethics, evidenced in the works of Derrida (1997), Zygmunt Bauman (1993), and Paul Ricoeur (1992). John Caputo, an interpreter of Derrida and a philosopher in his own right, notes that “It is by now widely recognized... that the first Levinas essay [“Violence and Metaphysics”] is crucial to everything that Derrida has been saying of late about the other and justice” (Caputo 1997, 171). In his commentary on the Villanova Roundtable Caputo indicates that Derrida follows Levinas in his understanding of the other, and oneself for the other (Caputo 1997, 52). Caputo suggests that the Levinasian dimension, that is, the ethical dimension, of Derrida’s work has intensified over time (Caputo 1997, 127). He describes Derrida’s work as “deeply Levinasian” (Caputo 1997, 127). Derrida credits Levinas directly in the Roundtable, published in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, using “justice” where in English translation Levinas tends to say “ethics,” saying that Levinas says “justice is the relation to the other,” that justice is never exhausted or fully answered (Derrida 1997, 17), which is the inverse of saying that ethical responsibility is infinite, in Levinas’ terms.

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur begins and ends with Levinas, explicitly referring to “my debt to Lévinas” (Ricoeur 1992, 189). He also cites Levinas in borrowing the phrase “Here I am” (Ricoeur 1992, 22), which is of great

significance for Levinas, as the response of oneself called by the other to ethics. Ricoeur uses a number of phrases and concepts that exhibit the influence of Levinas in his thinking about ethics and the other. Ricoeur, for example, speaks of "attestation" much as Levinas speaks of witnessing. There are many other similarities, and a clear influence shown, and cited, with regard to the primacy of other over the self, and the irruption (interruption, in Levinas' terms) of the other breaking the enclosure of the same, the self identified with itself (Ricoeur 1992, 168).

Derrida, and Bauman, who was a student of Levinas, focus on undecidability and ambiguity in their development of postmodern ethics. This focus in Derrida leads others to critique him for lack of decisiveness necessary for ethical action, but Caputo defends Derrida on this count (Caputo 1997, 137-138). For Levinas, undecidability is itself an ethical issue. In Levinas' work, the issue of undecidability appears in a different form, in his insistence on the incomparability of others in ethics, but the necessity of comparing the incomparable in justice. Levinas, in his later work, differentiates between ethics, as the primary ethical responsibility or obligation of the one for the other in face to face relations, and justice, as the mediation of conflicting claims in relation with more than one other. Levinas focuses on ethics rather than justice. Some readers will see this a significant limitation in using Levinasian ethics to develop ethics beyond the interhuman. His ethics are not programmatic: Levinasian ethics do not give a list of principles that can be applied in creating policies to

use to adjudicate conflicting moral claims. Following Levinas, my argument proceeds through an ethical structure rather than a logical structure. The demands of my argument are such that I solicit your ethical response, rather than attempt to convince a generalized anonymous reader of the rational correctness of a proposed program of action to ameliorate the environmental crises. Consequently, this thesis is not policy-oriented.

A certain familiarity with Levinas' philosophy would be an asset in reading this work, although I have endeavoured to make it accessible to nonspecialists. It is perhaps worth noting that this thesis is written in the tradition of continental thought, and as such exhibits a preference for equivocation rather than precise clarity. If something can be interpreted in a double-voiced manner, I probably intend it to be. It is designed to stand up to re-reading. To facilitate understanding, there is some repetition of significant concepts from Levinas' work and my development of them, which may be irritating to careful readers. For example, I reiterate Levinas' distinction between ethics and justice, the absolute responsibility inspired by the other in face to face relations, what John Llewelyn and David Clark refer to as "proto-ethical responsibility," and the mediation of conflicting claims involving others beyond the relation of oneself and the other, respectively, because if this distinction is forgotten, my argument will not be understood.

Some readers will find Levinasian ethics lacking in limits. Levinas insists that one's obligation to the other in ethics is infinite. Why would I want to hear

the infinite command of the other infinitely multiplied in extending Levinas' radical ethics beyond the interhuman? The infinite command of others is not a hindrance to environmental ethics, but should be heard as fuller voicing of ethics. The attempt to place bounds on our obligation to others is precisely what Levinas' critique of ontology, what he calls "being at home with itself," is about – and it is extremely valuable for developing ethics beyond the interhuman -- to inspire oneself to hear more calls to ethics, to hear more others. In broadening ethics to include the nonhuman I should naturally want more voices to be heard, not restrict them to "reasonable" levels. My thesis is meant to challenge one's right to be, to the point you ask yourself what you can eat that is not murder: "where to be, how to be, writhing in the tight dimensions of pain." This is Levinasian ethics. It should make you tremble.

Levinas makes a number of innovations in phenomenological thought, creating a radically provocative ethic. He takes from the phenomenological understanding of how things come to mind a critical questioning of philosophy in general. He finds the process of how things come to mind unethical. He describes this in terms of "being at home with itself," the subject taking everything into itself as objects of thought, and contrasts this with meeting with the Other face to face, an ethical relation in which one perceives the infinity of the Other. I contend that if nonhuman others can be met "face to face," environmental ethics can be developed out of Levinasian ethics.



Given his influence on ethics in postmodern philosophy, Levinas' work is important for developing any postmodern ethics. The utility of his work in developing postmodern ethics specifically beyond the interhuman is perhaps less obvious. Levinas' work may seem at first to offer little to developing ethics beyond the interhuman, since he identifies nature and animality with being, which he sees as devoid of ethics. However, his understanding of ethical subjectivity, the responsibility of oneself for the other, is fruitful in constructing ethics beyond the interhuman. While Levinas did not develop a theory of ethics beyond the interhuman, his understanding of ethics can be applied beyond the interhuman as a logical and consistent extension of his understanding of ethical sensibility and the other's surpassing of one's own categories of interpretation.

Martin Buber might seem a more obvious choice for developing interpersonal ethics beyond the interhuman, since for Buber, one can meet anyone or anything in an I-Thou relation, meeting any other as a person, including entities such as other animals and plants, "from the stones to the stars." Indeed, I did begin my research into this area of study with Buber's work, but was soon convinced that Levinas could provide a more useful basis for interpersonal ethics beyond the interhuman. I can cite Buber as an authority for saying that nonhuman others can be met as persons, but Levinas' work provides a deeper background argument for why this is the case. Nonhuman others can be met as persons because the other obligates me before being recognized, before

thematization; the other obligates me before I know whether or not the other is human.

Ethics beyond the interhuman, as I develop them here, may not entirely coincide with what is usually thought of as environmental ethics. Environmental ethicists such as J. Baird Callicott argue that environmental ethics must be ecocentric, ethics that protect ecosystems, habitat, or "the environment" as a collective. Some environmental ethicists feel that protecting groups, particularly species at risk, is more important than individual rights or responsibilities to specific individual others. My ethics are not particularly "environmental" in this sense. Their strength, following Levinas' work, is in recognizing one's own responsibilities for and to specific others.

For Levinas, the other person is always a human other. Levinas distinguishes between other persons, the other as *l'autrui*, and other things (*les autres*) as objects. I disagree with him at this point, and move beyond his ethics to develop the ethics of being with/in as an ethic beyond the interhuman. All others can be conceived as objects of thought and/or met as other persons, humans and other than human persons alike.

I argue that following Levinas' work in a consistent manner requires a broader understand of "the other" and who can be met as a "person." It is inconsistent to maintain that one's responsibility to the other does not depend on their reciprocity or one's knowledge of the other derived from applying themes or categories of interpretation, and to also insist that only human others inspire

one's responsibility. If the other obligates oneself before being recognized, as Levinas says, it is irrelevant whether or not the other is human. Any other can obligate oneself in responsibility, even a dandelion. What other ethics would allow that this lowly flower, generally maligned as a weed, could express infinity, and hold me in responsibility? For Levinas, the other obligates oneself beyond reason, with an infinite demand. It is not their majesty that obligates oneself -- it is the widow, the orphan, the poor, who command with the words, if not voice, of God, in Levinas' work. What obligates oneself is the nakedness of the other, their destitution, their lowliness. If Levinas' work opens beyond the interhuman, this lowly flower can call oneself to responsibility.

In my expansion of Levinasian ethics, to meet the other face to face is to meet the other as a person, whether a human person, or other than human person. All others, including other than human persons, are more than human perceptions of them. A nonhuman other is not a person like me, but they are still persons, if "person" is recognized as a transhuman category.

Phenomenologically, a person is a person when met as a person. One's perception of the other as a person depends not on characteristics of that other determined through thematic knowledge, but on inviting the other to be a person in interaction. Inviting rocks and trees to be persons is not silly, fanciful, or romantic. It is serious, for ethics, and for justice.

In other cultural systems, nonhuman others are not necessarily regarded or categorized as non-persons. Not only indigenous and folk knowledge

consider other than human persons as ethical beings and/or beings to whom humans have ethical obligations. Jains, for example, regard all beings as worthy of moral consideration, since all beings have the capacity for both pleasure and pain through the minimal sense of touch. Mainstream Western culture and philosophy needs to open itself to nonhuman others, rather than continue the cultural trend of being at home with itself.

This thesis is not yet post-Western. I have not read enough work on environmental thought outside Western sources, and I especially regret the lack of indigenous sources. J. Douglas Rabb's recent article in *Environmental Ethics* (Rabb 2002), criticizing other environmental philosophy for marginalizing and misusing indigenous thought, cites a wealth of sources in indigenous philosophy. Non-Western ethics have a lot to offer environmental thought. Especially relevant to my development of Levinasian environmental ethics and justice are Jain ideas on restricting harm to others, recognizing all beings as ensouled and thus deserving of consideration.<sup>3</sup>

I hope that the ethics of being with/in, inspired by Levinas' understanding of ethical subjectivity as the one for the other, can contribute to this opening of Western culture to nonhuman others. This opening, of course, already exists in Western culture, and has been explored by a great many thinkers beyond those cited in this work. There is a lot more I could have looked

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of Jain ideas regarding human obligations to all beings in relation to environmental ethics, see Christopher Key Chapple's anthology *Jainism and Ecology* (2002).

at in researching this work, and there remain lacunae in sources as well as content. This is an inevitable problem in working on the edges of multiple subject areas and drawing together different fields. Despite my infinite desire to do so, it is not possible to read everything that is relevant, even all the sources that some might consider essential to the topics I discuss.

This work remains incomplete, but, I hope, useful. I attempt to relate a few concepts in environmental thought to selected themes in Levinas' work, and respond to certain themes in postmodern thought. A number of questions arise from this work, suggesting directions for further inquiries and future research. The contrast of metaphors between bioregional ideas on becoming "at home on the earth," inhabitation and ethical dwelling, and Levinas' criticisms of "being at home with itself" is intriguing. How can William Cronon's (1995) ideas on being at home on (or within) the Earth be reconciled with Levinas' writings against being at home with itself? This raises the issue of the relation between the work of Heidegger and Levinas, and how this relates to discourses in the phenomenology of place, such as collected in David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer's anthology (1985), arising from bringing together Heideggerian and environmental thought.

I would also like to connect this work more deeply with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. Unfortunately Levinas' writings are sufficiently complex to preclude an in depth examination of the work of both thinkers. I have similar regrets regarding other postmodern thinkers who have written about the

environment (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and ethics (Bauman 1993; Caputo 1993; Ricoeur 1992). The density, complexity, and some would say, obscurity, of such postmodern writing, while thought provoking, encourages a troubling level of technical jargon in my own work.

I have not contextualized Levinas' thought as Jewish philosophy, which would have added depth and richness to my analysis. Levinas' metaphors of exteriority are influenced by Jewish narratives of exile, and life in the Diaspora; literature on Zionism and bioregionalism, and Judaism and the environment more broadly, such as discussed by the contributors to Martin Yaffe's *Judaism and Environmental Ethics* (2001) would be useful in this regard.

Additionally, I have largely ignored feminist criticism of Levinas, such as the work of Luce Irigaray. Such analysis of Levinas' philosophy is necessary, but is being ably done by others, such as Deirdre Butler. I am grateful to Michael Oppenheim, my supervisor, for his knowledge and appreciation of such work, because it has freed me to engage with other aspects of Levinas' work. There is also more ecofeminist literature that could be fruitfully brought into dialogue with Levinas' understanding of ethical subjectivity, particularly regarding relational models of the self, and the ethics of care.

In a project devoted to the ethical appreciation of others, acknowledging my debts to others takes on special significance. First, I thank Michael Oppenheim, for guidance and encouragement throughout my doctoral research. His understanding of Levinas is present throughout this work, perhaps "too

often to be cited," although I have tried to give appropriate documentation. I also thank the other members of my committee, Frederick Bird, for so much practical advice about life in academics, and Marie-Françoise Guédon, for her teaching beyond academics. I would also like to thank John Llewelyn, for going beyond the bounds of collegiality and providing me with a copy of his book on Levinas and ecology.

I also thank my family. My parents have instilled in me the confidence to undertake almost any task, whether graduate studies, building a canoe, or changing the world. My brothers and sister have taught me to expect the best from others, which is often self-fulfilling. I also appreciate my in-laws gestures of support at key times in my academic development. Thanks to Milo and Phoebe, who have taught me so much about the value of interruption.

Thanks to my friends Eric, James, Mary, Chris, the other Chris, Lloyd, Oksana, and Paula for helping me keep things in perspective, whether by email, through pints at the pub, or retreats to go skiing, canoeing and camping. Thanks also to Moe, for endless conversations that we never want to end. Thanks to Sheri, for helping me to see. Samantha Boswell in particular has my gratitude, not only for swimming, IRC chats, and more kindness than you could expect to find in one person, but because she has read this thesis in its entirety, bringing her excellent editing skills to bear on my sometimes wayward grammar and typing skills. There are not sufficient words to thank Mark Bason, my spouse, for

providing the constant support in every sense that saw me through the completion of this task.

Two places have sustained me in the writing of this work. The neighbourhood where I live, in Sandy Hill, in Ottawa, is so comfortable, nurturing, and friendly that I could not bear to leave it even while doing my doctorate through Concordia University in Montréal. Canoe trips to Obabika Lake, and hiking within the old growth forests surrounding it, satisfied a deep thirst I hardly knew was there, and awakened the Desire to learn more about the place and its inhabitants.

This work is dedicated to the Ottawa Valley, and all who dwell with/in.



## Chapter 1. Introduction: Ethics for a More Than Human World

On the hither side of the zero point which marks the absence of protection and cover, sensibility is being affected by a non-phenomenon, a being put in question by the alterity of the other, before the intervention of a cause, before the appearance of the other. It is a pre-original not resting on oneself, the restlessness of someone persecuted -- Where to be? How to be? It is a writhing in the tight dimensions of pain, the unsuspected dimensions of the hither side. It is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothingness... (Levinas 1998, 75)

I am guilty. My everyday complicity in Western civilization causes environmental destruction. I am obsessed by the suffering of others: waterfowl and sea otters covered in oil,<sup>4</sup> beluga whales whose bodies have such high levels of PCBs that their carcasses are classed as toxic waste,<sup>5</sup> mountains and hillsides eroding from enormous clear cuts,<sup>6</sup> northern lands flooded to power southern cities.<sup>7</sup> Suburban developments replace forests, and moose and bear are left

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<sup>4</sup> The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill off the coast of Alaska killed between 3 500 and 5 500 sea otters, and perhaps as many as 500 000 seabirds, including loons, bald eagles, marbled murrelets, and harlequin ducks. Pacific herring spawning grounds were also contaminated, the effects of which continue to this day as their subsequent population crash reduces food options for more than 40 other species (Survivors of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill 1999).

<sup>5</sup> The endangered population of the St. Lawrence River's beluga whales suffers from bioaccumulation of at least 24 contaminants, due to industrial pollution in the river. Levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are so high in the whales the chemicals kill, that according to federal law the bodies must be disposed of as toxic waste (Marine Mammal Center 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Clear cutting in Canada did not end with the protests in Clayoquot Sound and Temagami's Red Squirrel Road blockade. The government of Ontario recently increased the size of allowed clear cuts through their "Natural Disturbance Pattern Emulation Guide," against the protest of almost 300 scientists, and an estimated 92% of the population of Ontario, based on a poll conducted by OraclePoll Research in September of 2001 (Earthroots 2001). The Red Squirrel Road is again being opened in preparation for clear cutting in Temagami (see chapter eight for an extended discussion of ethical issues in and around Temagami).

<sup>7</sup> The completed first phase of the James Bay project in northern Québec altered the courses of multiple rivers in an area of 176 000 square kilometres, flooding an area of more than 10 000 square kilometres, including the most productive harvest lands of the local Cree populations, to supply electricity for cities further south in Québec and for export to the United States (Hornig 1999, xi, 24, 123).

wandering lost through city streets and schoolyards.<sup>8</sup> I am obsessed by the horrible lack of those we will never see again, because they are extinct. There will never be another Eastern Elk.

As Roger Gottlieb says, despair at environmental devastation is the starting point of environmental ethics, “the problem before the problem” (Gottlieb 1996, 3). He finds it necessary in teaching environmental philosophy to start by addressing the emotional anguish his students feel, because despair prompts people to avoid thinking about environmental devastation. He asks a student, “What would happen if you *did* think about it?” ‘I don’t know,’ he replies, ‘I’m not sure I could go on with what I’m supposed to do in this life. If I started to cry, I might never stop” (student quoted in Gottlieb 1996, 3). That despair is the starting point of ethical sensibility in environmental ethics. We feel it because we believe we are guilty,<sup>9</sup> and we fear that we are powerless to change the situation. Those who hear the voices of the others in nature are writhing in pain, torn by the suffering of others, much as Levinas describes the ethical subjectivity of the “hither side.” Levinas’ work resonates with the desire many

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<sup>8</sup> As sprawl increases, large animals are increasingly found in urban and suburban areas. When a black bear wandered into a schoolyard in Kanata, an area of intense recent suburban developments, it was shot with a tranquilizer gun, and moved to another location (MacGregor 2001). A moose who appeared in downtown Ottawa shortly afterward was not so lucky. It, and two other large mammals were shot and killed, because police officers were not equipped with tranquilizer guns (Mohamed 2001). The MNR (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) had scheduled a meeting with the police for that day to discuss arming city police with tranquilizer guns to deal with this increasingly common urban problem.

<sup>9</sup> I use “guilty” in a commonsense meaning of the word, as I think Levinas uses it, to include a range of states that might be distinguished as shame, negligence and complicity. In Levinas’ sense of ethics, one feels responsible for everything, including pre-existing and unintended situations.

environmentalists and social justice advocates feel to put themselves in the place of the suffering of others, to bodily *do something* about environmental destruction and the suffering of those losing their habitats, and their lives.

The global environmental crises are so overwhelming that no solution seems possible. It is for this reason that I restrict the scope of this work to Canadian, and often local examples from my neighbourhood, and a few specific areas in and around my bioregion about which I care deeply. It is this land at the edge of the Canadian Shield that obsesses me, that makes the most intense claims upon me. Here I canoe through small rivers, across windy lakes, amongst old pines. This land is not mine. It is home to moose, black bears, otters, and white, red and jack pines, red maples, and the Anishnabai. This land can only be called "mine" by calling it *Daki Menan*, Anishnabe<sup>10</sup> for "our land." It is not "my place in the sun"<sup>11</sup> but part of the more than human world,<sup>12</sup> to be shared in justice rather than owned exclusively by anyone.

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<sup>10</sup> "Anishnabai" refers to the people, while "Anishnabe" refers to their language. English spelling conventions for these words, as well as "*Daki Menan*," sometimes rendered "*n' Daki Menan*," are not entirely standardized.

<sup>11</sup> Levinas points to this phrase, "'my place in the sun,' that is how the whole usurpation of the world began," from Pascal, in developing his understanding of what he calls "being at home with itself." I will return to this concept of Levinas', and his alternative of ethical subjectivity often throughout this work.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase "more than human world" is from David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (1996). It points to the way the world extends beyond human beings and human perceptions. There is more to the world than human beings, human categories of thought, and human perceptions of the world. The more than human world is the natural world inclusive of all living entities, including others generally not understood to be alive or part of the natural (as opposed to supernatural) world, such as rocks and spirits.

I also want to stick to Canadian, and particularly local examples from my bioregion, which can be roughly equated with the watershed of the Ottawa River, because I want to develop ethics that are adequate to the environmental problems I witness, and participate in, on a daily basis. I want to work toward real solutions to real problems, not develop an abstract or universal theory of ethics. Theory is necessary, but it should be grounded and contextualized in actual life.

It is important to do theory to articulate how and why nonhuman others matter in such a way that this can be communicated to human others who might not agree that these others matter at all.<sup>13</sup> Theory can help teach us to be able to say that rocks and trees matter. My concern here is more to include things like rocks and trees than other animals, since animals have been ably included in ethics in previous animal welfare and environmental discourses, such as in the work of Peter Singer (1985), Tom Regan (1985), and Michael Allen Fox (1999), among others. It remains awkward to say that rocks and trees matter. Writing theory helps articulate concern for such nonhuman others, but this teaching remains somewhat clumsy. As Neil Evernden has noted, it is an “awkward compulsion” (Evernden 1985, 3) to feel obligated to defend the environment, to take the risk of saying that even stones matter. But my saying this makes it more

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<sup>13</sup> In philosophy, this sort of work is referred to as “ethics,” as learned discourse about what is right and good. Although this work participates in such discourse, within it I generally restrict my use of the word “ethics” to Levinas’ meaning of ethical sensibility, the impetus to ethical action inspired by face to face relations. Similarly, I follow Levinas’ restricted use of “justice” to refer to relations beyond the face to face.

likely that others will start to feel like it is acceptable to say that rocks and trees should be recognized as others with whom we are in relation. In saying this I am feeling my way toward some sort of language through which human others can understand what I mean when I say that nonhuman others are not dependent on humans valuing them to give them meaning. Some environmentalists use the language of "intrinsic value," others favour "rights" language in making such arguments. Intrinsic value arguments have been much criticized, and I will look at this concept in greater depth in the next chapter, "Speaking of the Other(s)." Writing in this area is awkward, and none of it is completely adequate, including this work, because language is being stretched in conjunction with our changing perceptions.

Regarding the extension of "rights" language beyond the interhuman, John Llewelyn says that the problem is not in extending it beyond the "human legal context where it is at home to the context of nonhuman beings where it is not," but is in our deafness to ecological responsibility (Llewelyn 1991, 261). He suggests that "to speak of a non-human being having a right will sound all right once our hearing has improved" (Llewelyn 1991, 261). I am not advocating the extension of legal rights into our relations with nonhuman others.<sup>14</sup> Nor does Llewelyn; he is more interested in influencing how people think than setting policy or legislating how people act (Llewelyn 1991, 253).

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<sup>14</sup> Animal welfare is often pursued through rights-based approaches, but it is more difficult to extend legal rights to entities that are less like humans than other animals are.

Like Llewelyn, I am not writing policy, but doing something more basic, and prior to arguing legal definitions. Policy work is certainly necessary, but that is not the task of this work. I seek a way to articulate what I hear from nonhuman others in a way that human others might come to understand why someone might find herself taken hostage by a tree, to provoke others to hear the polyphonic voices of this more than human world. I aim to articulate a theory of ethics adequate to the more than human world, that is also adequate to persons, including nonhuman (and more than human) others, and provide guidance for living in a more than human world. These ethics recognize that it does not matter whom the other is who calls oneself to responsibility. We need ethics that do not ask who can make such calls before feeling obligated. I call these ethics the ethics of being with/in.

Being with/in is a form of ethical subjectivity, a way of being in the world that is an ethical dwelling with others, including not only human others but all the others in our environments and local habitats, "from the stones to the stars."<sup>15</sup> I write "with/in" to emphasize that we are always both with and in: with others, and within contexts of relations, embodied in the world. The ethics of being with/in are ethics for a more than human world. We need an ethic not for "the environment," and not merely derivative from interhuman ethics, but an ethic that does not ask who the other is before hearing the other's calling of oneself to responsibility. The ethics of being with/in is intended as an ethic that

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<sup>15</sup> This phrase is from Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (Buber 1970, 173).

comes before the scission of self and world, subject and environment, a middle voiced ethic.<sup>16</sup>

As an ethic for the more than human world, the ethics of being with/in are environmental ethics that are also ethics of the other, interpersonal ethics for human interaction with other than human persons. A. Irving Hallowell's phrase "other than human person," developed in his anthropological study of Ojibwa people, conveys a broad understanding of the world in more than human terms, in that it indicates an understanding of "person" that includes entities not generally considered to fit into the category of "persons" in Euro-Canadian and Euro-American discourses. An awareness of other than human persons recognizes that not only human persons, but rocks and spirits as well as plants and animals are participants in the more than human world. I discuss Hallowell's understanding of other than human persons in greater depth in chapter four, "More than Human Others."

"Person" is often used interchangeably with "human," but there is no consensus about how to define the term, or what criteria one might use to distinguish "persons" as a category. In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Arthur C. Danto indicates that there is no universal concept of "person" either in philosophy or common usage (Danto 1967, 110). Similarly, in *The Oxford*

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<sup>16</sup> John Llewelyn uses the phrase "middle voice" to describe the ethics he develops out of a chiasmic reading of Levinas' understanding of passivity more passive than all passivity in ethical subjectivity, and Heidegger's understanding of *gelassenheit* (Llewelyn 1991, especially 87, 223). Llewelyn interprets *gelassenheit* as a responsible, mutually upholding sort of letting be. Llewelyn finds that both Heidegger and Levinas attempt to make language point to a neither/nor, both/and in pointing to a beyond.

*Companion to Philosophy*, Paul Snowdon finds that there is no consensus about what might constitute “necessary and sufficient conditions” for establishing criteria for the identity of “person” (Snowdon 1995, 154). However, both note that certain views are influential. Danto suggests that recently “person” as “human being” tends to be contrasted with “thing” (Danto 1967, 110), following Immanuel Kant’s understanding of persons as ends in themselves, who have unconditioned worth, in contrast to mere things (Danto 1967, 110).

Levinas follows Kant in making this distinction between “persons” and “things.” My reasons for challenging the exclusive identification of “person” with humans would seem obvious. If it is to persons that we have responsibility, I need to extend the reference of “person.” This is how the Western tradition has come to acknowledge enslaved people, Jews, Blacks, and women in ethics. If persons are those, being ends and not means only, to whom one is obligated, or has responsibility to and for in ethics, and I want to include nonhuman others in ethics, I cannot allow “person” to be equated exclusively with “human.”

Snowdon comments on the influence of John Locke’s definition of “person.” According to Locke, persons have the capacity of self-consciousness, (Snowdon 1995, 655), and can act as morally responsible agents (Penelhum 1967, 97). A person, in Locke’s definition is “a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and seems to me essential to it” (quoted in Danto



1967, 111). For Locke, a person is the rational self, the thinking self, the subject, the "I."

Locke, and David Hume, speak of "persons" as "minds" (Penelhum 1967, 96), regarding the essential aspect of the person as non-corporeal, or not necessarily corporeal. For Locke, memory is a necessary condition to establish identity; having a body or soul is not necessary. Others influenced by his view require persistence in substance, as physical or immaterial (Snowdon 1995, 655). For Locke, the "person" is not one's corporeal self, but one's consciousness (Danto 1967, 112). Similarly, Hume's understanding of "person" as a "bundle of perceptions" is non-corporeal, but is unclear what persists to conserve the identity of a person in the Humean view. Brian Garrett, in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, suggests that for most of the history of Western philosophy persons were taken to be non-corporeal souls or egos (Garrett 1998, 318), as in Plato and Descartes. However, the Cartesian self has been rejected in more recent philosophy, moving the understanding of "person" in three directions: persons as human animals, Hume's sense of person as a "bundle of perceptions" and Lockean views of person as reducible neither to animality nor embodiment (Garrett 1998, 318). Garrett indicates that Locke's view is important for not presupposing anything about what ontological category persons belong in, that is, whether or not persons are essentially immaterial souls or material bodies (Garrett 1998, 319).

Locke's definition of "person" meets the requirements that Quassim Cassam specifies, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, for a functional description of "person." Cassam says "On a purely functional view, possession of a range of specific psychological capacities is both necessary and sufficient for being a person. The characteristics in question are determinable a priori by reference to our concept of a person" (Cassam 1995, 655). Locke gives such a functional description, Cassam says, in defining a person as "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (Cassam 1995, 655). However, if the psychological capacities are determinable before the fact, before encounter, this precludes any knowledge of, meeting with, or communication with, persons outside one's predetermined idea of what a person is. It precludes encounters with other than human persons, which in my view is an unethical prejudgement. Persons do not share any essential characteristics in terms of rationality, consciousness, sentience or species membership. Persons might be said to have the quality of being undefined, or resisting thematization as Levinas says. The other is an instance of infinity, always beyond one's own grasp, always transcendent of oneself.

For me, a person is an entity who is met as a specific other, understood similarly to Levinas' use of *l'autrui*, although not restricted to human others as is common for the French understanding of *l'autrui* (the other person) as distinct from *l'autre* (the other thing). Phenomenologically, a person is a person when

met as a person. A person is one who is met as an other over against oneself, rather than totalized into an object of thought. The person faces oneself, interrupts oneself, and inspires ethics. A person is one who obligates me, one who deserves moral consideration. In my usage, a person is not necessarily human or "alive" in the general understanding of the term, but can include entities like rocks, air, water, plants, insects, and animals of any kind. My understanding of "person" is thus somewhat akin to the Jain sense of "beings" as including one-sensed elemental beings such as entities of rock, water, and air.

Jainism has developed a highly articulated sense of the animation of all existence. According to Jainism, elemental beings (earth beings, water beings, air beings, and fire beings) deserve moral consideration in their own right, because each can embody a soul (*jiva*). Each being, existing as a specific rock, fire, or body of water, for example, has a unique consciousness or awareness. Every being has at least the sense of touch, and thus can suffer and be harmed. Plants and other vegetation, as well as *nigoda*, group-souled beings that have a collective food source and respiration, are regarded as one-sensed beings.<sup>17</sup> My understanding of "person" differs from this Jain sense of beings as embodying souls, in that I do not distinguish in this manner between the body and the soul as an incorporeal entity. Whether or not another has a soul is not something that can be determined in phenomenological perception of the other, and is not

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<sup>17</sup> This description of Jain views on one-sensed beings is derived from Kristi L. Wiley's essay "The Nature of Nature: Jain Perspectives on the Natural World" in Christopher Key Chapple's *Jainism and Ecology*.

relevant for meeting the other as a person. Another way of thinking about this might be that the other's soul becomes apparent when the other is met as a person. Whether or not someone has a soul is thematic knowledge, and thus this category does not come into play until after ethics should come to pass. For ethics, I must meet the other as a person, in Levinas' terms, a "face," before applying themes.

Levinas attaches special meaning to the term "face," which might be dissonant with how the term is used in other philosophy. Erving Goffman, for example understands "face" in terms of its social significance associated with dignity and status, as in the expression "saving face." Influenced by Chinese understandings of the category of face (Goffman 1982, 5-6), Goffman understands "face" as a positive valuation of the role one takes, governed by social codes. For Goffman, the "face" is essentially a social mask, while for Levinas "the face" is precisely not a mask but the expressivity of the other that cannot be effaced, but is unethically masked by themes of interpretation. In Goffman's usage, the face exists in the relation between people, becoming manifest in interpretation (Goffman 1982, 7). One might say, in accordance with Goffman's use of the term, that the face appears in a middle-voiced way. In Chinese understandings of "face," one can not only lose face, but give it. One does not just save face for another, but can give it to them (Goffman 1982, 9).

Levinas speaks of the face rather differently, differentiating the other person, who has a face, from the "faceless indefinite" of Heidegger's ontology of

the neuter (Desmond 1984, 157), what Levinas discusses as the “there is.” For Levinas, “Ontology marks a philosophy of being that always ends up reducing the other to the same. Ontology is a philosophy of the neuter which cannot do justice to the other, and especially the other as ethical. It is built upon the logic of a movement from the same to the other which is always for the same, and always returning to the same. One is reminded of that strand of the tradition that privileges the movement of thought thinking itself” (Desmond 1984, 159). Things, understood in terms of ontology, do not have faces, but appear only as objects of thought, reduced to the same. Things, in Levinas’ view, do not resist thematization, and reduction to the same in the totalization of being at home with itself the way faces do. The face confronts oneself as wholly other, not correlative to oneself, not dependent on oneself for meaning, but expresses of itself over against oneself. As William Desmond explains, “The unguarded face is beyond all instrumentality and beyond all finality in the sense that it does not constitute a determinate purpose or *telos* that could be conclusively comprehended and mastered or encompassed. Something overflows in the face of the other that is infinite, and this infinite is the command of goodness” (Desmond 1984, 165).

Levinas teaches that the face is the quality of the other that faces or confronts oneself as other than oneself, otherwise than being, beyond any themes of interpretation one might apply to the other, interrupting one’s thematization with his/her themes. The face, in its ability to express, gives the world in

common, as opposed to the interior world one creates for oneself in thematizing objects into a totalizing world picture. The face is exterior to this interior world of being at home with itself, and breaks oneself out of one's concern for oneself, creating ethics. The face of the other obligates oneself in breaking one's self-absorption, inspiring oneself beyond being.

Levinas understands this in metaphysical terms, as the other revealing a trace of God, God speaking through the face of the other, issuing the command "Thou shalt not kill." This formal description corresponds to his theological commitments, which I do not share. For Levinas, God is necessary for ethics to come to pass. The command of ethics, for Levinas, comes from the coming to pass of the infinite, when God speaks through the face of the other. For me, the language of the speaking of "God" through the face of the other does not resonate. I do not conceive of, or experience, the sacred in this way. I do not think of the sacred as something separate or transcendent of the natural world. For some readers, my rejection of a theological basis for the obligation toward the other will present a problem.

G. E. M. Anscombe posits that the idea of "obligation" is a theistic remnant, bound up with a religious and legalistic sense of having to obey God's law. She argues that the idea of "obligation" is no longer intelligible, since the frameworks of thought that supported it no longer function (Anscombe 1981, 31). She explains that the understanding of ethics required for the idea of obligation is essentially legalistic: that unethical action in this framework is conceived of as

transgressing divine law. One is obliged, in such systems, by the author of the law, or the law-giver (Anscombe 1981, 30).

Anscombe identifies Judaism, Stoicism, and Christianity as the original supporters of this sense of obligation (Anscombe 1981, 30). Apart from the fact that Judaism and Christianity, if not Stoicism, remain functional frameworks structuring the way many people think about ethics, Levinas would disagree with Anscombe's argument at a few different points. First, while God is important for Levinas' understanding of ethics, God is not foundational. He insists that ethics are without arche, even the foundation of God. His sense of God is not as something that could be a foundation, rather God transcends infinitely beyond being. Secondly, ethical obligation is not part of a system, or dependent on a system of law for its functioning, in Levinas' understanding. Levinas locates ethics and God exterior to being, transcending oneself outside any system that might be used to compare the claims of others.

Furthermore, Anscombe's suggestion that an alternative way of thinking about ethics, in contractual terms, might be preferable misunderstands the fact that within Judaism, at least, the divine law is perceived as a contract, a covenant, between the people and God. The commandments should be obeyed, from a faith standpoint, not only because God has codified them and given them to the people, but because the laws accord with what is right. People want to obey the laws not only because they are divinely sanctioned, but ultimately because they are correct. This might be related to Charles Taylor's discussion, in

*Sources of the Self*, of role of the idea of “the Good” in ethics. He indicates that one wants to feel that oneself is good, acting in accordance with the Good as one perceives it. For Levinas, following Plato, this is the Good beyond being. The desire to act in accordance with the Good is not merely derivative of Jewish and Christian ideas of law, but can be seen, as Antonio Gualtieri suggests, as part of a general religious desire to act in accordance with ultimate reality (Gualtieri 1993, 26).

Anscombe and Taylor appear to share a common perception in philosophy, of associating “obligation” primarily with obligatory action, often negatively conceived as a constraint on one’s will. Hepburn, in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, for example, says “Essential to the moral ‘ought’ is the sense of a strong constraint laid upon the will: it contrasts with the operating of a moral ideal which, rather, beckons and attracts the moral agent” (Hepburn 1995, 638). Both Anscombe and Taylor would like to draw attention to other aspects of ethics, for Taylor, “what it is good to be” or “the good life” rather than “what it is right to do” (Taylor 1989, 3), and for Anscombe, injustice, instead of obligation understood as a duty.

Taylor defines “the Good” as “the love of which moves us to good action. The constitutive good is a moral source...it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good” (Taylor 1989, 92). He explains that “To love the constitutive good (however conceived) is to be strongly motivated in just that way which is defined as part of doing the good (on that conception). That is why



being good involves *loving* something and not just *doing* something" (Taylor 1989, 534). Levinas' sense of ethics is perhaps closer to Taylor's idea of the Good than the sense conveyed by the term "obligation" in common philosophical usage, since Levinas is talking primarily about ethical sensibility, rather than specifying actions one ought to do. His ethics are explicitly non-programmatic.

However, "obligation" remains an fitting term in the context of Levinas' work, drawing the on sense of being bound associated with the word, rather than focusing on its usage associated with a constraint on one's will.

"Obligation" resonates with Levinas' description of the one for the other being bound by the other in ethical subjectivity. To oblige is to bind. The Latin root *obligatio* refers to the bond that binds one to fulfill the actions of duty. This fits with Levinasian ethics, in that in ethical subjectivity one is bound, "a knot and a denouement." In ethical subjectivity, as the one for the other, one is bound by the other, he says, to point of being held hostage, compelled by the other, inspired by the other. Similarly, when I say "obligation," I do not intend to it connote duty, or actions one is required to carry out. I do not mean primarily something one ought *to do*, in the sense of obligatory action that Charles Taylor discusses as a lamentable diminution of the range of ethics in much contemporary moral philosophy (Taylor 1989, 84), but the state of being bound by the other, as Levinas says, to the point of being held hostage.

For Levinas, obligation is not only a negative constraint, but part of one's Desire for the other. One Desires the other and feels obligated. Levinas

combines aspects of constraint and attraction in his description of ethical relations. The other obligates me in the sense of commanding, binding me, but is also who I Desire. One Desires the other precisely because of their otherness, their infinite elusiveness, always beyond one's grasp.

Additionally, "obligation" is a term more suited to Levinasian ethics than is "responsibility." For Levinas, the other obligates me; the other is active in the relation, while oneself in ethical relations is passive. The other inspires the sense of obligation, binding oneself. "Responsibility" is less obviously inspired by the other. It connotes reciprocity in a way contrary to the spirit and tone of Levinas' work. Levinas criticizes Buber's discussion of I and Thou in his essay "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," for presenting the I-Thou relation as reciprocal (Levinas 1989). Levinas instructs that "responsibility" depicted in reciprocal terms, describes a state of being in the third person. In responsibility, response can move from oneself to the other, and the other to oneself, whereas Levinas stresses movement from the other to oneself, the other inspiring oneself, obligating oneself: "In the face to face the I has neither the privileged position of the subject nor the position of the thing defined by its place in the system; it is apology, discourse *pro domo*, but discourse of justification before the Other" (Levinas 1969, 293).

Furthermore, "obligation" is more appropriate to Levinasian ethics than "responsibility" because obligation is described in the past tense. "I am obligated" is always an expression in the past tense, whereas "I am responsible"

can be rendered in the present tense. For Levinas, ethics come to pass in saying, but can only be thematized in the past tense, a description after the fact.

Consequently, he speaks of obligation in terms of being "always late and guilty for being late." I am always late in recognizing my obligation to the other.

But how does the face of the other obligate oneself? Meeting the other as a person who can interrupt oneself, one's thematization of the other, inspires ethical sensibility. For Kant, the compulsion that creates obligations comes from reason. Kant presents moral obligations as necessary actions that "oblige one to do something in a way analogous to the way, for example, a closed road obliges one to find another route: they force or demand a course of action" (Dent 1995, 632). Kant portrays obligation as duty, something one must do, or is compelled to do, much as one is compelled to accept a reasonable argument (Marenbon 2000, 395). For Levinas, the compelling force of obligation arises from the coincidence of vulnerability and the transcendence of the themes one applies to the other expressed in the face of the other. To remove God from Levinasian ethics does not remove the coherence of the compulsion because its force comes from the other.

In Levinasian terms, what is important for ethics is that the other expresses infinity, expresses beyond the themes one applies to the other in interpretation. Ethical sensibility is a feeling, as "sensibility," but this does not mean that it is merely sentiment, a passing emotion, irrelevant to rational perception. Rather, the inspiration of oneself by the other has a force of

compulsion beyond reason, an anarchic unlimited force. As Ricoeur says, the compelling force of ethics, for Levinas, is from that which is without foundation, without arche (Ricoeur 1992, 338). Ricoeur is hesitant to specify a source of ethical injunction, aside from saying that it is something other than oneself. He writes: "Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is not representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God -- living God, absent God -- or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end" (Ricoeur 1992, 355). I am compelled to stand with Ricoeur, Levinas, and Kant, in saying that I do not understand the origins of moral compulsion. Critchley notes a similarity of Levinas with Kant, in that Kant says, "while we do not comprehend the practical unconditioned necessity of the moral imperative, we do comprehend its *incomprehensibility*. This is all that can fairly be asked of a philosophy which presses forward in its principles to the very limit of human reason" (Kant, quoted in Critchley 2002, 12).

Levinasian ethics do not explain how the face obligates, but describe the coming to pass of ethics. Critchley explains that "Levinas does not posit, *a priori*, a conception of ethics that then instantiates itself (or does not) in certain concrete experiences. Rather, the ethical is an adjective that describes, *a posteriori* as it were, a certain event of being in a relation to the other irreducible to

comprehension. It is the relation which is ethical, not an ethics that is instantiated in relations" (Critchley 2002, 12). Ethical sensibility is inspired by the other -- it is an inspiration, the creation of Levinasian Desire, not a Kantian duty.

It is the face of the other that inspires me to recognize the other as a person. Building on this understanding of face to face relations in Levinas' work, I find that I am already obligated before I notice if the other is human or not, has a soul or not, because I cannot perceive the other as a person, as one who has/is a soul without first letting that be a possibility. First I need to extend the invitation to the other to be a person, an essentially ethical gesture.

While I define "person" primarily inters of "other," Western philosophy tends to define "person" in terms of "self." Danto, for example, suggests that we can use "person" "to mean 'self,' the individual as such (to treat someone as a person is to treat him as an individual..." (Danto 1967, 111). Charles Taylor begins *Sources of the Self* by equating the "modern identity" with "a human agent, a person, or a self" (Taylor 1989, 3). This use of "person" to indicate an individual derives from the original root of the word, in Latin "*persona*," which referred to "mask" or "actor," or perhaps the one speaking through the mask<sup>18</sup> (Danto 1967, 110), appearing first in the context of ancient Greek drama. Later, this aspect of the term led to the use of "person" to include the three persons in

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<sup>18</sup> This last interpretation is questioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online 2003).

one God (Danto 1967, 111), as well as the understanding of “person” as agent, actor, one who acts, and/or one who speaks.

Interestingly, Danto also provides “part” as a translation for *persona*, in connection to its initial meaning as role or part in a play (Danto 1967, 110). In this context, the person is not necessarily the self, but could be any one of a number of other characters in a play, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* renders the early meaning of *persona*. Conceiving of person as “part” provides a sense of person as part of a larger narrative, not necessarily the protagonist (corresponding to the self, or one’s own self). Perhaps the protagonist is usually thought of as human, but the initial use of *persona*, to refer to a character in a play, includes a variety of nonhuman characters. The early tragedies, such as those by Aeschylus (525-426 B.C.E.), Sophocles (496-406 B.C.E.) and Euripides (485-406 B.C.E.) include a number of god-characters. Several of the early comedies by Aristophanes (450-385 B.C.E.) include other nonhuman characters. Most of the characters in *The Birds*, for example, are birds. *The Wasps* includes a chorus of wasps, and two dog characters.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to popular ideas, “person” initially did not, and need not now, refer to “people like us.” “Person” need not be defined in terms of what one’s self is like, the human “self,” but can be understood in terms of “other.”

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<sup>19</sup> The text of plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, including lists of *dramatis personae*, are available online at Daniel C. Stevenson’s *The Internet Classics Archive* (Stevenson 1994-2000).

The terms "self" and "other" require some further discussion. In Western philosophy, "self" tends to refer to oneself, as a subject, "a thinking or feeling entity" (OERD 1995, 1437). It is often understood as interchangeable with the term "person," but with a focus on the mind as opposed to the body (Lowe 1995, 816). E. J. Lowe, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, says that the self is essentially self-conscious, able to think in the first person, knowing that its thoughts are its own (Lowe 1995, 817). This is the self understood as one's ego. Levinas critiques this understanding of the self, calling it being *chez soi*, usually translated as "being at home with itself" or "being at home with oneself." Another possible translation is "one's own." Levinas draws on the meaning of the Latin term for the self, *ipse*, which means literally "the same" (OED Online 2003). "The same" is a special term in his work, with which he problematizes the way things come to mind. In knowing things, one reduces them to a theme or category of interpretation, totalizing them into one's own conception, rather than meeting them face to face, in the essentially ethical relation of oneself and the other person. The self as "the same" is, for Levinas, unethical subjectivity. In ethical relations, one meets the other face to face in ethical subjectivity, which he calls "the one for the other."

In my understanding of the term "self," a self is "a thinking or feeling entity" in the minimal Jain sense of including one-sensed beings as feeling entities. A "self" is a person, but in discussing "the self" in philosophical terms I also use the term in the way Levinas uses it, to refer to unethical subjectivity. In

contrast to this, I develop an understanding of ethical subjectivity as being with/in, following Levinas development of ethical subjectivity as “the one for the other.”

Levinas’ phenomenological account of “the Other” as the other human being, as different, understood not as different from oneself, but wholly different, is one of his major contributions to philosophy. Robert Bernasconi explains, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, that “it is only with Levinas that the philosophy of the Other was freed from the epistemological problematic” (Bernasconi 1995, 637) of the problem of knowing whether or not others have minds. For Levinas, the question of other minds is irrelevant. What matters is that the other obligates me, hence the value of his work in developing ethics beyond the interhuman, where many think it obvious that nonhumans do not have minds.

Writing in French, Levinas is able to use the terms *l’autrui* and *les autres* to distinguish between the other person and other things, neatly distinguishing between the other who one meets face to face as a person, and other things that lack faces, which for Levinas includes things like other animals, as well as plants. In English, “other” refers to other things as well as other persons, so in English translations, *l’autrui* is often rendered “the Other” to distinguish it from other things. However, I deliberately do not capitalize “the other,” because I aim to present other things as being possibly other persons. According to Levinas’ phenomenological account of the other, the other is not primarily something



known, but someone met as a person. Hence, I argue, I can meet another, and be obligated by another, before recognizing the other as human. It is not a matter of knowledge. Levinas teaches that ethics come before knowledge, disputing Hegel's claim that awareness as possession is the only, or primary, way of meeting another. The other is not a phenomena, not an object of thought, but an enigma (Critchley 2002, 8).

Derrida questions that the other really is wholly other, asking "whether the absolute alterity of the Other is *other than* what is given initially" (Bernasconi 1995, 637). He questions that the other is ever understood or met in terms not correlative to oneself. Levinas instructs that knowledge of the other is correlative, because all knowledge enacts being at home with itself, but insists the other can be understood face to face through their expression, beyond whatever themes of interpretation one might apply. Levinas disputes the understanding of the other as correlative to the self. For Levinas, the other person (*l'autrui*) is absolutely other than oneself, not understood in terms correlative to oneself.

There is a common supposition that "the other" should be understood primarily as not oneself, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives this as a late meaning of "other." In modern usage it implies "opposite," but "other" used to indicate "different." Initially, it indicated "one of the two" or "the one (of two)" (OED Online 2003), distinguishing between others without reference to oneself. This is a reference along the lines of "not that one but this one," or "not the blue

one but the red one." It need not be understood as distinguished from oneself, but first distinguishes between others. Levinas' understanding of the other approaches this older meaning of "other," but restricts its reference to other humans.

In recognizing other than human persons, I develop Levinasian interpersonal ethics beyond the interhuman, to include the more than human world. The more than human world is the natural world, but not limited to human ideas about it. This world is perceived by humans in what phenomenologists call "the natural attitude," and reflected upon through the phenomenological attitude, reflecting on the world and how it surpasses human understanding and perception. Conceptual or reflective thought inevitably thematizes and reduces the world to human categories. However, phenomenology strives to recognize this, and overcome it by bracketing, to allow space for things to manifest themselves as themselves.

The more than human world is the natural world as we live in it; not the world as mere phenomena, but the awe-inspiring world. The more than human world is the living world within which we live and are amazed by, not the objective world, but the intersubjective life world. Abram's notion of the more than human world adds to phenomenology an understanding of the world as not limited to human perceptions, an open understanding, open to surprise, to wonder. In this, Abram follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty's tradition of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the method of phenomenology is

best described by Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink, "when he spoke of 'wonder' in the face of the world." He explains that

Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. Husserl's transcendental is not Kant's and Husserl accuses Kant's philosophy of being 'worldly,' because it makes use of our relation to the world, which is the motive force of the transcendental deduction, and makes the world immanent in the subject, instead of being filled with wonder at it and conceiving the subject as a process of transcendence towards the world. (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Evernden 1985, 138)

As Neil Evernden puts it, "Wonder is the absence of interpretation" (Evernden 1985, 139), "to be continually surprised," (Evernden 1985, 141) and to suspend "cultural imperatives" (Evernden 1985, 141). Phenomenology, as used by Merleau-Ponty, Abram, and Evernden, can facilitate "transcendence towards the world," beyond the human, a perception that finds a wonder-full more than human world.

The more than human world is something like Jacques Lacan's sense of "the Real." These are not identical or interchangeable ideas, but both seem to point to the world that eludes human representation of it. For Lacan, "the Real" is what we talk about in words, but never manage to grasp. There is always a gap between what can be said, "the Symbolic" in Lacanian terms, and the actual world. The more than human world similarly transcends human language, but also human perception. In my use of these terms, the more than human world is

not experienced in terms of "lack," as in Lacanian thought, but as surplus, a world that overflows what can be grasped, named, or categorized. The more than human world is always beyond the merely human, but the human remains in sensuous contact with and in it. In my understanding, in the more than human world we experience the wonder of the Real, and our limits in speaking of it.

The more than human world is an understanding of nature, wherein nature is not just "other than human," but "more than human." The more than human world is not nature understood as a correlate to "human," but is within us as living beings, and beyond us as it includes others beyond our grasp. As in the work of critical ecofeminist theorist Catriona Sandilands (1999), nature thus can be understood in terms of Lacan's "the Real." Sandilands astutely points out that the unthematizability of nature as "the Real" circumscribes limits to not only what we can claim to know about nature, but should also draw attention to any claim to speak for nature. Others of "the Real" interrupt any attempt to speak for nature as a whole. Consequently, my work necessarily remains inadequate and in demand of further questioning. While it aims to be adequate to persons and the environment, it cannot be completely adequate or comprehensive. As a responsive ethic, I hope it remains open to questioning and interruption.

Being open to questioning and interruption also contributes to the awkwardness, or unfamiliar style, of my writing. This clumsy speech allows reflexive questioning to interrupt my narratives. In using this method of

writing, I am following in the tradition of scholars of cultural and environmental studies such as Adrian Ivakhiv, who writes that his work is “an extended argument for a slippery, muddy, densely entangled, interactive, and hermeneutic view of the world,” through he which intends to “encourage greater interpretive flexibility and reflexivity” (Ivakhiv 2001, 282-283).

Ivakhiv links this reflexive and responsive method with hermeneutics and deconstruction, citing Gianni Vattimo’s idea of “weak thought,” “a form of hermeneutics which is constantly reminding itself of its limits,” as well as John Caputo and Drucilla Cornell, who, “both inspired by the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, have argued for a similar approach -- a hermeneutics which is responsive to the world, but which undercuts its own system-building and interpretation-imposing tendencies through a self-deconstructive reflexivity” (Ivakhiv 2001, 284). This self-deconstructive reflexivity, open to interruption and further questioning, is inspired by Levinas’ development of ethics out of the methods of phenomenology.

Levinas identifies his work as phenomenological, at least in terms of method (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 14), but his ethics go far beyond phenomenology. In Levinas’ work, Franz Rosenzweig’s “new thinking” interrupts phenomenology (see Cohen 1994, 227), reflecting the way Levinas finds ethics to interrupt philosophy in general, conceived as ontology (Bernasconi 1988, 119). I follow Levinas within the stream of those provoked by

his work into self-deconstructive writing, writing that strives to become aware of its own limits, and remain open to interruption and further questioning.

Levinas' method is perhaps not so much phenomenological, as emergent from phenomenology. His work shifts in focus from understanding that all our knowledge is mediated by consciousness, to awareness that while our perceptions are conditioned by culture and concrete situations, others are not merely what we know of them through thematizing discourses. Levinas discusses this in terms of "otherwise than being" or "beyond essence," finding ethics in transcendence of being.

Levinas' use of phenomenology as a method is not transparent in his work. As Charles Reed concludes, after having written a dissertation on Levinas' methodology, Levinas has "a way of proceeding that often seemed closer to a style than a method" (Reed 1986, 73). Levinas' method in writing is solicitation: a saying that unsays the already said, to use his terms. He writes to express himself to the reader, to give of himself and provoke a response. His method is to solicit an ethical response -- not to prescribe ethical behaviour, but provoke it (Levinas 1985, 90; Levinas 1998, 126). Inspired by Levinas, but also Abram, I aim to write a philosophy, not "otherwise than being," but "more than human" -- ethics for living in a more than human world, in relation with more than human others.

I want to solicit you to hear the voices of the Earth, to respond to the calls of all others, human and more than or other than human. I cannot speak for the

Earth, but I can amplify what I hear in the voices of some of the many others with whom we share this planet, and call on you to listen, and to respond. To live in a more than human world is to live in a meaningful world. It is to be addressed by the world, to be answerable -- not just in the sense of speech, but to be responsive with one's body, and to act responsibly in relations with all others. In this I follow Martin Buber's sense of being called not only by God, but by everything. Buber speaks of becoming aware that "living means being addressed" not only by humans but also other animals, plants, and even stones (Buber 1947, 27, 28). Although we encase ourselves "in an armour whose task is to ward off signs. Signs happen to us without respite" (Buber 1947, 27). One might prefer to think that "nothing is directed at you, you are not meant; it is just 'the world,' you can experience it as you like, but whatever you make of it in yourself proceeds from you alone, nothing is required of you, you are not addressed, all is quiet" (Buber 1947, 28). But -- you are addressed.

My ethics are prompted in part by Buber's call, but are inspired primarily by Levinas, by his style and methodology in his development of ethics out of phenomenology through solicitation. I employ Levinas' ethics of the other to question who should be considered as other, and what it means to decline to totalize all others. While for Levinas the other is always a human other, I contend that his ideas on thematization and totalization ultimately require us to refuse to apply the labels "human" or "nonhuman" before being obligated in ethics. We need to recognize our responsibilities for and to the other irrespective

of such thematizing designations. Applying categories such as "human," "animal," and "inanimate" reduces the other into an object of thought, a theme of discourse, rather than meeting the other "face to face."

Levinas' work cannot simply be extended into environmental ethics, but, I argue, an environmental ethic can be developed out of his work. The main threads of Levinas' work exclude being and nature from ethics, arguing that ethics is otherwise than being, that humans (and only humans) transcend nature in ethical action. However, as I argue in chapter three, "Doggone Others," a deconstructive reading of Levinas' work finds it partially open to the possibility of developing an environmental ethic of the nonhuman other(s) out of his ethics. From this opening, I question Levinas' understanding of the face as human, and the requirement of ethics to transcend being and nature. I suggest that being at home with itself is a human mode of being, and furthermore, that it is a culturally specific mode of human being. I do not discard Levinas' notion of being at home with itself, but reinterpret it in terms of contemporary mass consumption: the environmentalist insistence that we need to stop relating to the earth in terms of use, or as resource, coincides with Levinas' analysis of being at home with itself, all-consuming being that turns everything into nourishment for the self.

John Llewelyn's *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience: A Chiasmic Reading of Responsibility in the Neighbourhood of Levinas, Heidegger and Others* (1991) is the only previous work, of which I am aware, that directly assesses Levinas'



work together with ecology or environmentalism. Llewelyn argues that it is the needs of others that create responsibility for others, and that since nonhuman others, even inanimate things, have needs, one is directly obligated to them. However, Llewelyn advocates including nonhuman others in ethics by speaking for them, while I would like also to provoke a form of listening to nonhuman others. Humans should speak on behalf of other than human persons, habitats, and the environment as a whole, but this is not all that is required in environmental ethics. In fact, in Levinas' terms, at least as he develops them in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, this is not actually ethics, but justice. Levinas distinguishes between interpersonal ethics and societal justice. Ethics come to pass in face to face relations between oneself and another, whereas justice addresses relations with third parties beyond face to face relations. I argue that it is not only that nonhuman others have needs that motivate our responsibility in justice, but that we have interpersonal relationships with nonhuman others in which ethics come to pass. Humans have felt obligations toward nonhuman others beyond, and prior to, our obligations to them in justice.

I cannot do justice to so complex a work as Llewelyn's *Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience* before reading Heidegger's and Derrida's work in greater depth. Llewelyn's book develops a chiasmic supplementation, via Derrida, of Heidegger and Levinas. Here I take on the smaller task of relating a few concepts in environmental thought to selected themes in Levinas' work. This is

incomplete, but, I hope, useful. My work is intended to be responsive to postmodern work such as Llewelyn's, and to pose questions for further inquiries.

Environmental ethics need not be postmodern to be useful,<sup>20</sup> but there is a need for environmental ethics that are responsive to postmodern thought.

Postmodern environmental ethics need not replace environmental ethics based in modern paradigms, but we do need postmodern alternatives for those whose thinking is already shaded by postmodern thought. For those influenced by Levinas, and indirectly by his work through Derrida and his followers, an adequate ethic cannot be based in the Cartesian paradigm of subjects and objects; it cannot be objective or subjective. However, nor is a fragmented sense of self adequate for ethics. An adequate postmodern environmental ethic requires a rethinking of ontology and epistemology, thinking prior to the separation of self and world, subject and object, that preserves or rebuilds a sense of self as ethical subjectivity oriented by others.

Ethics in modern thought are derived from truth through reason. Truth and goodness are equated, knowable by the human subject. When universal reason and the autonomy of the subject are questioned in postmodern philosophy, new methods of doing ethics are necessary. Different understandings of intersubjective relations require, but also allow, a different

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<sup>20</sup> Consider, for example, Peter G. Brown's recommendations in *Ethics, Economics and International Relations: Transparent Sovereignty in the Commonwealth of Life* (2000). A great deal of environmental problems can be addressed through recognizing the finitude of resources, and the limits of ecosystems to absorb human wastes (sewage, greenhouse gases, and other pollutants) and accidents (oil and chemical spills, and nuclear accidents like Chernobyl). These problems can be addressed through modern arguments that appeal to human rationality and self-interest.

understanding of ethics. Responding to, and tacking across, current streams in postmodern thought, I posit a post-Cartesian theory of interpersonal relations and ethics, wherein the self is understood as an embodied participant embedded in the world, interdependent with others, where others are understood to include nonhuman others. Oneself, in this system, recognizes the interpenetration and overlap of categories, including self and other, and human and nonhuman persons, so that one perceives oneself as being with/in a continuum of being, responsible to all others.

Using Levinasian methods, and working within the tradition of self-deconstructive reflexivity of thinkers like Adrian Ivakhiv and Catriona Sandilands, my work is situated within an interface between the fields of environmental ethics, and postmodern thought. Superficially, environmental ethics and postmodern thought may appear to be opposed in their orientations, since environmental ethics is a type of applied philosophy and is practical and results-oriented in its outlook, whereas postmodern thought has a reputation for being abstract and even denying that there is any such thing as “nature” or “the environment” to be saved. However, precisely because of their apparent contradictions, postmodern thought and environmental ethics can supplement one another.

Much work in environmental ethics, especially within ecological philosophy, tends to be more theoretical than practical in its approach, but there is a growing body of work that is both philosophically sophisticated, and

practically oriented, notably in the works of Jim Cheney (1992; 1998; 1999; 1987), Anthony Weston (1994; 1998), and Thomas Birch (1993). This thesis aims to contribute to this area of work, to be meaningful and compelling not only in the sense of being philosophically coherent, but also useful. I look at a specific empirical problem, involving a dispute between logging interests, Anishnabai, and wilderness enthusiasts, in chapter eight, investigating how the ethics of being with/in can be negotiated in justice.

However, I suspect this work will be more useful in thinking and the ethics that come to pass in saying<sup>21</sup> than in developing a pragmatic model for taking specific steps to particular empirical problems. This work returns to an early impulse of environmental theory that continues to animate and inspire much environmentalist work, often done in the name of the "intrinsic value" of nature. Evernden laments a shift in tactics, away from speaking of the intrinsic value of nature or the environment, to using arguments grounded in science and economics. He writes:

Where once only an anguished cry could be expected in defence of a threatened mountain or an endangered species, now a detailed inventory and a benefit-cost analysis are sure to be forthcoming. The system will say all that needs to be said about the mountain -- and say it with numbers.

This shift in tactics has constituted a change in emphasis as well, from the personal testimony of experienced value to an 'objective' elucidation of public interest. That is, while in the past the naturalist-orator tried to evoke in his listener a sensation reminiscent of his own in the presence of nature, it is now possible

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<sup>21</sup> "Saying" refers to how ethics come to pass in speech, face to face, as opposed to the always already past of the thematized "said."

simply to show the man in the street what's in it for him. By exciting emotion and concentrating on numbers the environmentalist can show even the disinterested that it is prudent, economic to retain a particular mountain in its present state. And since economics in this broad sense is believed to be fundamental to everyone's well-being, what was formerly a minority concern becomes a cause for all. We must protect and/or wisely manage our natural resources, because if we do not we may compromise our standard of living. Through such arguments the new managerial form of environmental action attempts to accomplish what decades of inspired prose and rhetoric could not. (Evernden 1985, 9)

So why would I return to the emphasis on felt obligation, what he calls the "awkward compulsion," when "inspired prose and rhetoric" have failed?

Managerial ecology is not adequate by itself. As Evernden explains, environmental protection is too often ignored when short-term economic gains come into conflict with it. "The basic attitude towards the non-human," he says, "has not even been challenged in the rush to embrace utilitarian conservation. By basing all arguments on enlightened self-interest the environmentalists have ensured their own failure whenever self-interest can be perceived as lying elsewhere" (Evernden 1985, 10). This unfortunately appears to be the case for logging in Temagami: it gained some protection in the Red Squirrel Road blockade, but the next generation needs to be convinced again of its worth. A deeper form of environmentalism<sup>22</sup> is necessary, because "Ecology can help one to criticize inefficient exploitation or destructive utilization of nature, but it

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<sup>22</sup> Evernden links the impulse to defend the intrinsic value of nature with deep ecology. If a return to an emphasis on felt obligation constitutes deep ecology, in this sense my work might be classed as deep ecology, because it does not employ arguments based in rational self-interest. However, I am not sure to what degree deep ecologists accept Evernden's classification.

cannot help illuminate the experience that inspires one to be an environmentalist" (Evernden 1985, 22). It is this inspiration, what Levinas calls the other in oneself, that I hope to provoke.

Evernden's work exhibits a number of affinities with Levinas, in his emphasis on bearing witness to the ethical impulse to defend others (Evernden 1985, 29), exposing oneself in the process, and "becoming a perpetual outsider" (Evernden 1985, 31). There are differences, of course. Where Levinas speaks of the "hither side" of being, Evernden is comfortable with phrases like Schiller's "onward to Elysium" that Levinas might find too "pagan."

There are more obvious affinities between the work of Cheney and Weston, and Levinas. There is a striking similarity between Cheney and Weston's appeal for an ethics based epistemology that puts ethics first, and Levinas' appeal for ethics as first philosophy. Each of these arguments, along with Evernden's, emphasize a deeper sense of ethics that comes before one's own philosophy and interrupts one's own thinking. I hope my work might contribute to an emerging consensus that ethics must come first, for all others in the more than human world.

This thesis is developed in three parts, comprised of nine chapters. The three parts are modelled on Levinas' treatment of ethics in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, putting "The Other(s)" first in addressing ethical alterity, then speaking to ethical subjectivity as "Oneself," and finally tracking the justice of the third party in "Third Parties."

In part one, chapter two, "Speaking of the Other(s)" examines different language strategies for recognizing nonhuman others in ethics, moving from the idea of otherness through ideas of intrinsic value and universal consideration to recognizing other than human persons in neighbourhoods of the more than human world. Chapter three, "Doggone Others" makes a deconstructive reading of Levinas' understanding of the ethics of face to face relations, to hold it open to the possibility of developing an environmental ethic out of his work. Chapter four, "More than Human Others" questions Levinas' understanding of the face, and the adequacy of Llewelyn's solution to including nonhuman others in justice, in parallel with Silvia Benso's (1996; 1997) ethic of things. Both of their readings supplement Levinas' ethics of the other person with Heidegger's understanding of things. I insist on letting others be persons with whom we should have ethical relations.

In part two, chapter five, "One's Own Domain," investigates Levinas' idea of being at home with itself, and delineates Levinas' response of ethical subjectivity. I relate Levinas' themes of substitution, proximity, exteriority, and hospitality, to relations with others in the more than human world. In chapter six, "Being With/in," I develop another form of ethical subjectivity, being with/in, a responsible, constructed, embodied, and embedded sense of oneself.

Part three, "Third Parties" consists of two chapters, "Just Society," which discusses Levinas' understanding of justice in relation to the more than human world, and "Ethics and Justice in *Daki Menan*," which applies Levinasian ethics

and justice to the situation in *Daki Menan*, an area of land in northern Ontario near Temagami. This land is claimed by the Teme-Augama Anishnabai, but legally owned by the province of Ontario, whose Ministry of Natural Resources has authorized clear cutting within the disputed land. There are multiple parties making claims to the area, making this a good example for testing the extensibility of Levinasian ethics and justice into the more than human world. Finally, I conclude the thesis with chapter nine, "After Thoughts."



## Part One. The Others

### Chapter 2. Speaking of the Other(s)

A basic, and persistent, problem in environmental ethics is the question of how to recognize value in nature or the environment, or how to include the nonhuman or other than human, in ethics. These two phrasings of the question represent distinct approaches to the problem. The first, looking for a way to recognize value in nature, pursues the inclusion of nonhuman others in ethics through intrinsic value theory. Intrinsic value theory is derived from, although at times goes beyond, modern philosophical arguments. The second approach eschews intrinsic value theory in favour of including nonhuman others in ethics by other means, often through arguments that are postmodern in orientation.<sup>23</sup>

Intrinsic value theory, the postmodern arguments suggest, is mired in a modern understanding of the self and nature in terms of a binary opposition of subject and object. An alternative to intrinsic value theory, termed "universal consideration" in environmental thought, argues that all others should be given moral consideration, before inquiring about their capacities or how they might be categorized. Universal consideration aims at a perception of the other in terms of what I call polythetic differentiation, recognizing that there is always more to know about the other, beyond the themes one applies to the other. The

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<sup>23</sup> The distinction I am drawing here between modern and postmodern could be deconstructed to find postmodern arguments continuing modern projects, and modern arguments transcending the boundaries I have assumed. I am using modern and postmodern as a sort of heuristic shorthand for distinguishing arguments based in a view of the world as composed of subjects and objects, and arguments that problematize certain ideas about subjectivity.

invitation involved in universal consideration moves beyond binary categories to perceive the other in polythetic differentiation. Giving universal consideration means putting ethics first, before oneself, prior to the division of subject and object, or self and environment. I am obligated to nonhuman others before finding myself, or thematizing the other.<sup>24</sup>

I propose not to recognize intrinsic value or inherent worth in "nature" or "the environment," but to include nonhuman others in ethics as specific others in community who each can potentially call oneself to responsibility. Like Levinas, for me the other is always a specific other, but unlike him, for me the other is not necessarily a human other.

### Otherness

In common Euro-Canadian and -American usage, "nature" is generally the opposite of the human, or culture. Nature is conceived as other in the sense of other than us, not-us, what we are not. Clarence Glacken, in *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (1976), has charted the theme of understanding nature in opposition with culture in the history of ideas in Euro-American thought, from ancient philosophy up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>24</sup> Recollecting the first meaning of "other" (*OED Online* 2003) clarifies how obligation to the other does not require awareness of oneself as a self. "Other" first refers to distinguishing between others, as in "the red one, not the blue one," rather than meaning different from oneself in the sense of "you, not me." Obligation to the other precedes recognition of self or other. Consider the perceptions of a child. A child has a sense of who mother is, and father is, as distinct persons before being able to distinguish her/himself. As the phenomenologist William Barrett explains, a child is as likely to point to mother or father as itself when asked who its name applies to (cited in Evernden 1985, 64), but has no difficulty in identifying which is mother and which is father. Perception of the other does precede understanding of the self. Ethics precede the knowledge of conceiving of another as opposed to oneself.

In much Western thought nature is conceived in binary opposition with the human, defined in correlative, derivative, and reciprocal terms to the human. Similarly, "the environment" is "everything else" that is not-us, rather than the context in which we are embedded, and of which we are participant. Nature is one of the basic "others" of the human subject, the other understood as a category of difference, in a binary opposition of a dominant term and its other conceived as its opposite.

Some defenders of wilderness areas espouse the idea of pristine nature, untouched by humans. This is a form of the idea of nature as not-human, a place where there are no humans, and never have been humans. It is, of course, generally a fictional idea. As I. G. Simmons explains, the northern boreal forests of Europe have been humanly occupied throughout their existence, that is, since the last glaciation (Simmons 1993, 73). The "natural" state of these woodlands is to be inhabited by humans. Places like the European boreal, and the Canadian north, are called "wilderness" not because they are uninhabited but because they are uninhabited by "people like us," from "our" group. Wilderness is perceived as other than "us," a place where strange things<sup>25</sup> are, including other humans and other animals.

However, it is to these other inhabitants of nature that we need to give moral consideration in environmental ethics, not nature as other to the human.

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<sup>25</sup> The prevalence of the theme of strangeness in writings about nature in the Canada has led Margaret Atwood to title one of her books on Canadian Literature *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (Atwood 1995).

The others are not just other than human in the sense of being human's other, but beyond the human, more than human. Levinas makes this point regarding the opposition of self and other in interhuman relations, in insisting that the other not be understood only as the correlative or reciprocal in a set of paired opposites (Levinas 1969, 53). When the difference of the other is based only on correlative or reciprocal difference, the self measures the otherness of the other only in relation to itself. Nothing then is known of the other except in relation to what the self knows about itself. Similarly, to understand "nature" only in terms of what the human is, or to understand another animal only in terms of human capacities, is not ethical. To argue for animal rights on the basis of self-awareness, arguably a capacity other animals share with humans, or to argue against their rights due to some human capacity other animals lack (or are presumed to lack), such as speech, does not recognize actual others on the basis of how they are, rather than how they are like us. Recognizing all the others as part of our community means rejecting the opposition of "us" and "them," effectively rejecting the meaning of "other" as an oppositional category of difference, and instead meeting the actual others, as neighbours.

### **Neighbours**

My neighbourhood includes others that I do not always get along with, and sometimes in anger I forget to interact with them as I should. In years past, during the winter, the only trace of my neighbours to the north has been a big

mound of snow with bits of pavement and rocks pushed over top of the fence. This has been a pretty good indicator of my relationship with these neighbours -- it seems they want the fence there so that they can pretend they do not really have any neighbours. Things they do not want or cannot use are simply pushed to the other side of the boundary between their place and mine. The fence has divided "us" and "them" for those of us on each side of the fence.

One morning last winter I woke to find my two young birch trees bent flat to the ground, crushed by a mound of snow and ice pushed over the fence from the parking lot behind my neighbours' houses. I was angry, since I had planted these trees only a few months before, and I had grown attached to them. I saw my neighbours' actions as an example of people preferring cars and convenience to trees and green spaces, and an example of urban disregard for neighbourliness. After digging out the trees, and helping them to stand up again, I called the landlord of the house next door. We ended up shouting at each other. Eventually, I found out which neighbour arranged to have the parking lot ploughed, and met him face to face. I explained that since I had planted a garden here, and the birch trees, they could no longer push excess snow over the fence. He agreed, and there has not been a problem since. The fence is still there, but we are no longer projecting things over it, mostly.

When we meet the others in our neighbourhood, we can stop seeing them as simply "other" than us, and as opposed to "us." They can be met as specific others rather than "other" as a category of difference. "Other" is often a catchall

term for difference, not-self, not-us, what does not fit the identified categories. "Other," used as a category, indicates what is not part of the main category, or what does not fit the defined categories, as in "other" for religion on census forms.

As a catchall category, this understanding of otherness is negative, but it also may point to a more positive understanding of the "other" as undefined. The specific other is beyond definition, on the "hither side" of binary categorizations. This is "the Other" in Levinas' terms, beyond being and being's other, otherwise than being. For Levinas, the face of the other expresses infinity, the height of transcendence. For me, another expresses infinity in the sense of being always beyond definition. There is always more to the other than one self's thematization of the other. The other has infinite depth, not only the differences I see on the surface. The other is an other person, a specific other. Milo, for example, is not summed up by saying he is a cat, even if I add that he is a white cat with grey spots, is five years old, has green eyes, and likes to chase birds. No matter how much I say about him there are always more details -- and there are things about him that I do not know, like where he disappears to for hours at a time. He interrupts my work, asking to be let out.

The others are not only different in terms of being other than what I am or we are. The difference between oneself and another can be understood not only in correlative binary terms of self and not-self, as a separation, but also a point of interaction. One can meet another face to face, and recognize similarities as well

as differences. The boundary between oneself and another is not only a point of difference, but a conjunction, a point of communication and relation, an interface.

In my neighbourhood, the fences do not mean much to the other animals. The birds find them to be handy perches at times, but they do not present any barrier to those who can fly. The squirrels, and my cats, know where the holes in the fences are, and also scramble over the top. It is the humans that build the fences, and then have to construct gates in them.

Of course, fences are not all bad. They prevent larger dogs from being able to chase my cats very far. They also give substance to property lines, so that I can confront my neighbour about dumping snow and debris over the fence. At another step removed, I can go inside my house, and lock the door, if I do not feel safe. Depending on how I feel, the time of day, with whom I am interacting, and where I am, my boundaries shift and become more and less permeable. For the most part, my perceptions enact my boundaries, so that I can close the gate in the fence bounding my yard from my neighbours' parking spaces, or lock my doors if I feel the need. Within my house, I choose who to let in, how close I will let them approach, how permeable I am.

Boundaries are necessary. If we do not recognize differences between oneself and others, we cannot have healthy relationships with them. However, these boundaries need not be understood in terms of binary oppositions such as "us" versus "them," as though the others are nothing other than what is not us, or what we would like to be other than us. The differences of others can also be

understood in terms of polythetic differentiation, a multi-themed understanding of others in terms of differences, overlaps, similarities, and relations between others.

Polythetic differentiation is a way of understanding difference that considers multidimensional relations between another and oneself, and between others. It involves a different understanding of oneself and of others in relation than the Cartesian division of subject and object, providing an alternative way of understanding identity and boundaries. In terms of polythetic differentiation, the territory of myself has overlapped extensively with my spouse since we met. Still, there is a boundary between us, and it too fluctuates. We identify with each other, but are not identical. We are married, and comprise a unity in that sense, but also each identify with a variety of others, ideas and practices. The bond between us is of primary importance, but it is not our only relationship -- we would not be healthy if we tried to be everything to each other. His territory and mine overlap, but we are not the same. There is always still a boundary between oneself and another -- even the bonds of love are boundaries. To love another requires that the other still be other rather than identical with oneself.

Similarly, to have an ethical relationship with any other, the other must be differentiated from the self. However, it need not be defined as other than the self in a binary sense. The other need not be construed as not-me, or through correlative terms based on differences from oneself. My spouse is unique in a variety of ways, not only in ways that correspond to what I am like. Similarly,



other animals can be differentiated from humans in nonbinary terms. An animal of another species is not only nonhuman in relation to a human, but, for example, my cat Phoebe is there sleeping on the couch, ever alert to the birds coming to the feeder out the window. To define another animal as nonhuman is a result of a different sort of understanding from saying what a specific animal's relations and situation are. The former is denotative and binary, the latter narrative and polythetic.

Once we start using multiple themes of interpretation and narrative understanding, we can start to know the others not only as nonhuman, but perhaps as other than human persons, to come to live in a more than human world. Other animals and plants, and components of the natural world like soil, water, and air, are not just other than human, but also more than human. They are not just other, but others. There is more to know about the others than their differences relative to humans. We can come to understand others more deeply if we also look for overlaps and similarities between humans and other animals, and between all living beings, and all things that exist. Interpreting the world through binary categories of thought like human/animal, living/inanimate,<sup>26</sup> and person/thing yield some understanding, but these categories limit our perception of actual others. When we look closer at actual others, the boundaries between these polarizations become problematic.

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<sup>26</sup> I contrast "living" and "inanimate" rather than "animate" and "inanimate" because I dislike the connotation of "animate" as matter animated by soul. Part of what I am trying to communicate in this work is that things are alive in themselves, not requiring animation by an outside force.

Consider the difference between the category “alive” and the category “inanimate.” This distinction becomes problematic as soon as we try to consider actual things and others. Can we find any naturally occurring thing on earth that is empirically demonstrably not living? We cannot separate what is living from what is not in empirical rather than categorical terms, except by artificial means. Separating the inanimate from the living requires killing whatever is alive in the material examined. Removing the living things from soil, for example, requires an artificial process of sterilization. Generally, the earth is filled with living things. Even stones have bacteria and viruses, and not only on their surfaces. Also consider where we might situate the boundary between the living and the not living in a human body. Is the air any less a part of our being than our blood? The air is not just gases, but also contains any number of yeasts, moulds, viruses, and bacteria. It is no less alive than blood. The removal of either of these living substances causes death in mammals. Is there any such thing as a “dead” body? Look closer, and see the new life that appears as the human leaves.

### **In a Neighbourhood of the More than Human**

When others are not conceived simply as not-us, who are the others? Who are our neighbours, and who else lives in this community? I live in a big neighbourhood; I have a lot of neighbours. Some their names are Archie, Mitzy, Peanuts, Tuxedo, and Felix. I do not know all the others’ names. In fact, I do not

know the names of most of my human neighbours, because they are not so close to me as these. They do not come over for a drink like these do. Some others besides these cats come and drink at the bowl I keep full outside my backdoor: a dog from down the street, when he gets loose, and the occasional squirrel or raccoon. I mostly fill it for Milo and Phoebe, the cats who live with me, but I do not mind sharing if they do not.

Other members of my neighbourhood are an apple tree, an elm, the birch trees my father and I transplanted from where I grew up, as well as a maple tree, copious ground ivy, lavender, thyme, dandelions, sage, echinacea, white clover, heavy clay soil, and the Rideau and Ottawa rivers. Bumblebees and viceroy butterflies, as well as cucumber beetles frequent my garden. There is also a family of black squirrels who live two doors down. I saw them in their house last spring: the mother and two young ones looking out through a hole in the eaves. Crows and sparrows abound, as well as house finches. Blue jays and cardinals nest here each year, although someone decided to cut one of their favourite trees, a mature maple twice as tall as my house, last summer.

Conspicuously absent from this neighbourhood, are any living farm animals. The only chickens I see are packaged and labelled at the store. Pigs and cattle have been turned into pork, bacon, and beef. Also missing are bears, moose, deer, wolves, and other displaced wild species, not to mention those that

are now extinct, such as passenger pigeons (since 1914) and the Eastern Elk<sup>27</sup> (since about 1850). When bears and moose venture back into suburbs recently constructed out of their habitats, they are often shot.<sup>28</sup>

My neighbourhood is a specific place, one of the places to which I belong. It is a physical world of streets, houses, stores, parks, and rivers. It is also a community of living beings: humans, soil, cats, trees, and probably too many other species to count, despite the loss of biodiversity this region, and too many parts of the world, are experiencing. The community within which I live, described in terms of the more than human world, includes many others. Most of the others are other than human, but they might be people too. They are part of my neighbourhood, and part of my community.

Mary Midgley has pointed out that the “human community” is hard to circumscribe, since human communities have always included animals (Midgley 1983, 112). Domestic animals have been present for as long as humans have lived in communities. Most human communities have involved dogs, but Midgley also mentions the cattle of the Masai, the horses of nomads, and the roles of animals in “totemic” traditions. Animals, she observes, “play so important a part in social life that the community cannot be properly thought of

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<sup>27</sup> The elk described as “reintroduced” by the Ontario government are Western Elk (*Cervus elaphus*), of which the Eastern Elk (*Cervus elaphus canadensis*) was a subspecies.

<sup>28</sup> Sometimes animals are tranquilized and removed to more remote areas. Ottawa police are lobbying to get training for this, so that they do not have to shoot the increasing number of bear and moose coming into the city’s ever expanding edges. (Mohamed 2001; MacGregor 2001).

without them" (Midgley 1983, 110). This leads Midgley to speak of the "mixed community."

I would add to Midgley's notion of mixed community not only domesticated animals in human neighbourhoods, but also wild animals, and other nonhumans. Human communities are mixed communities including not only domestic plants and animals, but also many wild others, and the rest of nature. Any actual mixed community cannot be separated from the rest of the world, the soil, the air, and the water. The mixed community can be lived within as a more than human world. Our communities have never been comprised only of humans, and the others include not only those we have domesticated, but also the persistent wild ones with whom we live: the mice, rats, ants, cockroaches, spiders, squirrels, raccoons, and so on. Communities are not made up only of social beings, but also those we in North American culture often do not recognize as social beings. (Some humans do, of course, recognize a much wider variety of nonhuman others as social beings than those of mainstream Euro-Canadian culture.)

Gary Snyder recognizes the persistence of wildness within our communities, in "ineradicable populations of fungi, moss, mold, yeasts, and such that surround and inhabit us. Deer mice on the back porch, deer bounding across the freeway, pigeons in the park, spiders in the corners" (Snyder 1990, 14). He invites us to recognize levels of organization in human society that include the nonhuman, such as "the commons" and bioregions. According to Snyder,

the commons is both a locale and the social institutions "governing" it. It refers to specific land, as well as the "the traditional community institution that determines the carrying capacity for its various subunits and defines the rights and obligations of those who use it, with penalties for lapses" (Snyder 1990, 30). The commons is a neighbourhood that still functions like we think a neighbourhood should, a place where people know and respect each other.

A bioregion is a neighbourhood writ large. Thomas Berry describes bioregions as functional communities, "regions with mutually supporting life systems that are generally self-sustaining" (Berry 1988, 67-68). A bioregion is a geographical area that is big enough to support communities sustainably, and small enough to be considered home. Bioregions are regions defined not by political boundaries, but the natural contours of the land, and the often culturally distinct groups living within the natural territories of watersheds. The watershed of the Ottawa River, where I live, is divided by provincial boundaries along the main channel of the river. This boundary also signifies cultural differences between the mostly Anglophone population on the Ontario side and mostly Québécois population on the eastern side. The portion of the watershed that is in Ontario is already identified as a region, frequently referred to as "the Ottawa Valley." We are even said to have a unique accent and idiom.

In addition to bioregions, Berry also speaks of the "earth community," and the need of humans to heal our relationship with the earth. He is quite clear in indicating that what is needed is not an abstract relation with the earth as a

whole, but that we need to establish and recognize relations with all aspects of the earth in the place where we live. His idea of "earth community" is thus something like Aldo Leopold's land ethic, an understanding of the land as a community. Leopold argues that we need to think about the land as community rather than commodity. This understanding of community includes all that collectively makes up "the land," including not only plants and animals, but also soil and water (Leopold 1966, 219). Leopold suggests that we need to start thinking about humans as members and citizens of the land-community, to have respect for other than human members of this community, as well as the community as a whole (Leopold 1966, 219-220). Concepts like Berry's "earth community," and Leopold's understanding of "the land," expand the notion of community to include more than human others. As Berry explains, this need not expand the idea of community beyond a meaningful scope to include the whole globe in one community. Rather, we need to recognize all the others in the neighbourhoods within which we live as part of our communities.

Recognizing all the others in our communities, in ethics, requires that we perceive them not only through the familiar binary categories of subject and object, but through polythetic differentiation. Within environmental thought, this transition is already underway, in arguments for universal consideration. Before discussing universal consideration in greater depth, I first need to discuss its precursor, that to which it was created in response: intrinsic value theory.

## **Intrinsic Value**

Intrinsic value theory expresses the idea that not only humans are deserving of moral consideration by attributing intrinsic value not only to humans but also to nonhumans. Some environmentalists have adopted the term intrinsic value, and its variants as a primary way of speaking of the others. The term is in regular use in the media and casual conversation, and is commonly used by activists. However, its usage is debated within environmental thought. Not everyone uses it the same way, but what the different uses have in common is that intrinsic value is meant to contrast instrumental value, and often anthropocentric value. It is generally assumed that instrumental values are human use-values, rather than the use a tree has for water, for example. Intrinsic value inheres in the other, independent of human valuation. In the work of environmental ethicists like Tom Regan, Paul Taylor, Aldo Leopold, Albert Schweitzer, J. Baird Callicott, and Mary Midgley, intrinsic value theory recognizes value in nonhuman others, including individuals, species, and ecosystems, based on the reasoning that "they are valuable in and of themselves, independently of any instrumental or anthropogenically originating valuations" (Morito 2001, 1).

Holmes Rolston III, another prominent environmental ethicist, argues for the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities in an exchange with Ernest Partridge (Rolston 1998; Partridge 1998). In this debate, Rolston argues that value is intrinsic in natural objects, that value exists objectively in nature. Value, in his



view, need not be experienced to exist (Rolston 1998, 146). Rolston's concern is that if we cannot recognize intrinsic value in nature, we will find only instrumental value (use-value for humans). He posits that while some values come into existence through being conferred by human consciousness, it does not follow that all value is conferred and none found or discovered, arguing that "value can be embedded with the facts, quite as real as the information organisms contain, sometimes just the same thing differently described" (Rolston 1998, 74). He gives examples of the protective colouring of a hawk, and the structure of haemoglobin molecules, arguing that such things are important in themselves, rather than due to human awareness.

Ernest Partridge suggests that this line of reasoning confuses properties with values placed on properties (Partridge 1998, 83). This is the basic point of non-comprehension between them in this exchange, a confusion which I think results from philosophers arbitrarily arguing that values can be intrinsic in humans or attributed by humans, but that members of any other species or things cannot have intrinsic value or value themselves. If values cannot be intrinsic in nonhuman others then they cannot be intrinsic in humans, unless intrinsic value is associated with some property of humans that nonhumans demonstrably lack.

Humans, it can be argued, have intrinsic value because they are rational, or because they are created by God. Some animal welfare advocates and environmentalists, following Bentham, have countered that rationality is not as

good of a grounding for valuing others as is their capacity to suffer (e.g. Singer 1985). Others, following in the tradition of Augustine, argue that all that has being is good, and thus all have value, or that because all creatures are created by God, they all have intrinsic value (e.g. Gustafson 1981-1984).<sup>29</sup> However, these arguments obscure what I think is a basic point environmentalists are trying to make with intrinsic value arguments. The point is that if intrinsic value is actually intrinsic, rather than attributed, it should not depend on some observed characteristic or property of the one under consideration. If something has intrinsic value, the value should inhere in it, rather than be attributed by a subject. This becomes clearer in arguments for universal consideration, which sidestep the issue of who or what can be said to have value as subjects or objects.

Rolston's intrinsic value theory recognizes that value is generated in interaction (Rolston 1998, 75), and suggests a broadening of the meaning of "subjects" in value theory. A loon, he says, "while nonhuman, is itself a natural subject. There is something it is like to be a loon; its pains and pleasures are expressed in the call. Those who cannot conceive of nonexperienced value may allow nonhuman but not nonsubjective value. Value exists only where a subject has an object of interest" (Rolston 1998, 78). However, this extension only goes so far, and Rolston insists on the objective intrinsic value of nonhuman others:

Centres of experience vanish with simpler animals. In the botanical realm, we find programmes promoted, life courses generated and held to, steering cores which lock onto an individual centredness.

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<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to Frederick Bird for drawing these arguments to my attention.

There is a kind of 'object with will,' even though the feeling is gone. Every genetic set is, in that sense, a normative set; there is some 'ought to be' beyond the 'is,' and so the plant grows, repairs itself, reproduces and defends its kind. If, after enjoying the *Trillium* in a remote woods, I step around to let it live on, I agree with this defense, and judge that here is intrinsic objective value, valued *by me*, but *for* what it is *in itself*. Value attaches to a nonsubjective form of life, but is nevertheless owned by a biological individual, a thing in itself. (Rolston 1998, 78)<sup>30</sup>

Rolston characterizes his view as "projective" (Rolston 1998, 89) rather than objective, because he speaks of the value of "natural *projects*," saying "some are *subjects* (loons); some are individual organic objects (*Trilliums*); some are individual material *objects* (crystals)..." (Rolston 1998, 78). Rolston recognizes that in his version of intrinsic value theory "'Value in itself' is smeared out to become 'value in togetherness.' Value seeps out into the system, and we lose our capacity to identify the individual, whether subject object, as the sole locus of value" (Rolston 1998, 79). Rolston moves beyond a strictly modern understanding of intrinsic value, but continues to work within the frame of value theory instead of moving into fully relational ethics such as universal consideration, or Levinasian ethics.

In ambiguous praise of Rolston's defence of intrinsic value, J. Baird Callicott argues in favour of what he calls "truncated intrinsic value," which he defines as "value we ascribe to something *for* itself even if it has...no value *in* itself" (Callicott 1992, 132). Callicott faults Rolston for failing to fully appreciate

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<sup>30</sup> While I use Canadian spellings in this thesis, I have not altered American and British spellings as they occur in quoted material.

that intrinsic value is not objective in nature, but attributed. In his 1985 essay "Intrinsic Value, Quantum Theory and Environmental Ethics," Callicott following Hume, presents a subjectivist argument for the inherent value of nonhuman others. In this article he argues that values can be conferred on nonhuman others for their own sake, rather than being valued only for their instrumental or use value to humans. Thus he argues for what he here calls the inherent value of nonhuman entities. In both arguments Callicott maintains that the existence of value depends on a valuer: value is conferred or attributed.

Callicott's views are complicated by his unreconciled defence, noted by Jim Cheney (Cheney 1992, 234), of a subjectivist argument and his admission that the subject-object dichotomy is untenable. Callicott generally presents a subjectivist argument in favour of inherent value, or "truncated intrinsic value," but does not reconcile this with his acknowledgement of the dependence of these arguments on the unsupported foundation of Cartesian dualism. In his 1985 article, Callicott advocates the inherent value of nature as an extension of the intrinsic value of the self (Callicott 1985, 274).<sup>31</sup> In some of his more recent work, such as the essays "Moral Considerability and Extraterrestrial Life," and "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again" (Callicott 1989), he does not address the debate of terms, but uses the term "moral

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<sup>31</sup> Extending others moral consideration in this manner, common in deep ecology, is vulnerable to the Levinasian criticism of totalizing the other into oneself.

considerability," favoured in theories based on universal consideration, rather than inherent or intrinsic value.

Some ecological philosophers strictly differentiate inherent and intrinsic value. Norton, for example, exclaims:

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this distinction between autonomous intrinsic value and attributed inherent value; in particular, advocates of inherent value believe that attributions of value to nature are culture-specific and always projected within a culture-laden milieu, whereas the main motivation for defenders of intrinsic value is to avoid cultural relativity by insisting that natural value is independent of human consciousness. (Norton 1992, 214)

However, there appears to be an emerging consensus that values are conferred intersubjectively, both by defenders of intrinsic value, such as Rolston, and inherent value/truncated intrinsic value, such as Callicott. As Bruce Morito, who does not espouse intrinsic or inherent value, puts it, humans are "loci of valuational activity" (Morito 2001, 9), as are members of other species (Morito 2001, 11). Neither humans nor others have absolute value because values are assigned intersubjectively, not pre-existing in humans alone. As John Llewelyn might put it, value arises and is expressed in the middle voice.

Attributions of value remain in a conceptual structure of binary opposition, in positing that only subjects can confer values. A further problem arises in the insistence on the equality of the intrinsic or inherent value or worth of others. Paul Taylor, for example, in "The Ethics of Respect For Nature," advocates the inherent worth of nonhuman entities, asserting that all have the

"*same inherent worth*" (Taylor 1992, 118). This value does not depend on the merit of the other; the other is deserving of respect, as part of nature. The problem with inherent worth, or intrinsic value, conceived in this manner is that either value is restricted somehow to living entities, or, critics argue, it ceases to mean anything. Partridge sums up this argument, saying "if everything 'has value,' then nothing does, since 'value' applied to everything would fail to qualify (distinguish) anything" (Partridge 1998, 84).

Partridge cannot conceive of non-binary value, and thus requires a class of entities that do not deserve moral consideration. Partridge, like many others, draws the line at sentience. "Why this insistence upon sentience (at the very least)? Because, without at least minimal feeling and awareness, nothing can 'matter' to a being" (Partridge 1998, 85). To this, Rolston responds, "though things do not matter *to* plants, a great deal matters *for* them....If it is lacking in sunshine and soil nutrients and we arrange for these, we say, 'The tree is benefiting from them'; and *benefit* is -- everywhere else we encounter it -- a value word. Objectively, biologists regularly speak of the 'survival value' of plant activities" (Rolston 1998, 89). Partridge remarks that we also speak of cars benefiting from a tune-up (Partridge 1998, 92).

For John Llewelyn, and myself, it is not the notion of inanimate things having intrinsic value that presents a problem with basing ethics on the attribution of value. Rather, it is the necessary comparative evaluation of others in the language of attributing value. As Llewelyn explains:

A desire to avoid such comparative evaluation seems to be at the bottom of Levinas's restriction of direct responsibility to the sphere of the human *vis-à-vis* the human. Perhaps it is at the bottom of Kant's introduction of the word 'dignity' when explaining what he means by an end in itself. Kant and others, however, equate this notion with that of what has intrinsic, inherent or absolute value or worth. Although this succeeds in marking a difference from instrumental value or worth, it fails to exclude altogether the idea that what is being referred to is a maximum on a scale. This may be no cause for alarm where what is being said to be of intrinsic value is an abstraction like benevolence, knowledge or virtue. There is cause for concern however where the phrase 'intrinsic value' is predicated of human beings and other beings one considers to be ends in themselves. For the description of value as intrinsic, as not being instrumental or otherwise extrinsic, is consistent with and perhaps suggests the idea of one value's being lower than another. (Llewelyn 1991, 249-250)

Giving ethical consideration to things does not present a problem for Heideggerian influenced philosophers like Llewelyn, who argues that if something matters for things, they have needs, which is enough to provoke ethical obligation. As Llewelyn argues, in extending Levinasian ethics whether or not value resides in others and things is not at issue.<sup>32</sup> Rather, what matters is whether or not they can provoke oneself. Applying Levinas ethics to environmentalism, Levinasian environmental ethics should be about human responsibilities rather than others' rights. Ethics are about human obligation, not necessarily about value in nature. We need an ethic prior to the division of self and nature, prior to thematization and categorization, transcendent of the human to the more than human. Universal consideration, along with an environmentalist adaptation of Levinas' work, provides the structure for such an

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<sup>32</sup> I shall return to the matter of "things" in chapter four.

ethic. Universal consideration, rather than arguing for the rights, intrinsic value, or inherent value of nonhuman others in terms of possessing value or moral standing, focuses on human obligations.

### **Universal Consideration**

Thomas Birch introduced the concept of universal consideration in his 1993 article "Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration" (Birch 1993). Birch's argument builds on that of Kenneth Goodpaster (Goodpaster 1978), who distinguished between moral rights and moral considerability, advocating moral respect and consideration for all living beings. This respect is given without requiring evidence of nonhuman others' status as morally considerable beings, or reasons for granting such others rights. Goodpaster's introduction of the term "moral considerability" allowed discussion of the moral considerability of nonhuman entities "without commitment to a specific theory or position" (Hargrove 1992, xv), paving the way to refocus on human obligations in environmental ethics, rather than proving the moral status or reasonableness of rights for nonhuman others.

Birch argues for universal consideration, to give moral consideration to every other, including entities such as rocks. He posits that to give consideration we must assume the other "is prima facie valuable" (Birch 1993, 328). We need to assume the other is valuable, without first requiring evidence. This bears some similarity to Paul Taylor's assertion that inherent worth does not depend



on merit. However, Taylor's position still presents the issue in terms of possessing value rather than giving consideration. Birch argues that moral worth should not be based on measuring up to a humanly derived standard of worth. Arguments that accept that there is a criterion of moral considerability such as the possession of sentience, consciousness, or being a subject-of-a-life, implicitly require what Birch calls a class of "nonconsideranda."<sup>33</sup> It is unethical to apply criteria of considerability, because this functions to create a class of beings to whom no obligations whatsoever are owed. As Birch says, this is itself unethical, hence everyone and everything should be given moral consideration, including rocks. The problem, as Llewelyn indicates, is in the evaluative comparison that suggests a ranking is possible in deciding who deserves consideration, or can obligate oneself in ethics.

Birch revives the archaic sense of "consider" in giving moral consideration to the other, recommending "a recovery of the older priority, according to which the primary meaning of giving consideration is thoughtful, reflective, meditative attentiveness" (Birch 1993, 327). Anthony Weston feels that Birch's "universal consideration," applied as a sort of mindful attentiveness, may be too passive.<sup>34</sup> He offers an alternate model of universal consideration, which he calls "invitation." He explains: "Here the kind of practice asked of us is to venture

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<sup>33</sup> Birch suggests that Tom Regan, Paul Taylor and John Rodman pose criteria for considerability. Tom Regan clearly does impose the criteria of sentience. However, it is debatable whether Taylor should be included here. I am unfamiliar with Rodman's work, and so cannot comment on it.

<sup>34</sup> It appears as though Weston's understanding of mindfulness leads him to misinterpret Birch. Mindfulness need not be limited to passive meditation, but can be fruitfully employed in the activities of daily life.

something, to offer an invitation to, or to open a possibility toward another being or some part of the world, and see what comes of it. We are called, in fact, to participate in a kind of etiquette: the task is to create the space within which a response can emerge or an exchange can coevolve" (Weston 1998, 284).

Weston argues (Weston 1994; 1998) that if we do not begin by assuming that the other is morally considerable, we may not be able to perceive their worth, because of what he calls "self-validating reduction." If we do not expect the other to be capable of moral interaction, we will likely treat them in such a way that their moral capacities will not become evident. For example, if an animal is continuously treated as though it is merely a mute beast, it will not become apparent to the observers that it is a social being and capable of moral behaviour. Moral behaviour is demonstrably a natural capacity of many species, but for it to become evident requires inviting the other into relationship. Others have to be invited into relationship for us to discover their capacities.

Weston continues this development of universal consideration as "invitation" with Jim Cheney (Cheney and Weston 1999). They write: "only in this way are we likely to discover what kind of relationship actually is possible. To 'invite,' then, is not merely to make a space for something, to let it in: it is, literally, bringing new possibilities to *life*. Without it, without venturing real-world invitations, we cannot begin to know what the real possibilities are" (Cheney and Weston 1999, 127). For Cheney and Weston, invitation recognizes that the characteristics or capacities we know about another "do not exhaust the

thing's possibilities. Knowledge does not and cannot come first; first must come the invitation. Consequently, invitation cannot represent some formal kind of respect, but rather an experimental, open-ended and sometimes even personally risky kind of offering" (Cheney and Weston 1999, 126).

As Cheney and Weston argue, the value of nonhuman others should not be based on known facts about their capacities. Rather, as a matter of basic courtesy, humans should begin by assuming that every other they meet is an other who deserves moral consideration. In this argument, Cheney and Weston approach a Levinasian understanding of ethics, apparently without any knowledge of Levinas' work. They, like Levinas,<sup>35</sup> argue that "Ethics must come *first*" (Cheney and Weston 1999, 118). Cheney and Weston advocate "an ethics-based epistemology, rather than an epistemology-based ethics" (Cheney and Weston 1999, 115).

As Cheney and Weston argue, to give nonhuman others moral consideration, this giving of consideration must precede what we know about them. They write: "we will not readily understand them -- until we *already* have approached them ethically -- that is, until we have offered them the space and time, the occasion, and the acknowledgment necessary to enter into relationship. Ethics must come *first*" (Cheney and Weston 1999, 118). Ethical perception of the other requires that oneself not apply categories to the other, to classify the other

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<sup>35</sup> In his essay "Ethics as First Philosophy," Levinas argues that ethics must precede not only epistemology, but also ontology. Ethics are prior to being and knowledge (Levinas 1989, 75-87). For Levinas, first philosophy is the questioning of one's own right to be, that is, ethics.

as human, animal, plant, inanimate, and so on, in order to determine what ethical obligations are owed to the other. Rather, the ethical obligation to extend universal consideration, to invite the other to be a person in relation with oneself, precedes any epistemological application of categories of considerability.

The recognition of universal moral considerability does not specify moral obligations toward the other. As Kenneth Goodpaster noted in his introduction of the concept of moral considerability, "We should not expect that the criterion for having 'moral standing' at all will be the same as the criterion for adjudicating competing claims to priority among beings that merit that standing" (Goodpaster 1978, 311). Birch suggests that our primary obligation is to "consider" the other, in his special sense of the term. "The point is," he says, "that giving consideration in the first sense of giving attentive contemplation *should* involve an initial generosity of spirit toward all others in terms of their value potential ....It is a matter of giving others of all sorts a chance to reveal their value, and of giving ourselves a chance to see it" (Birch 1993, 328).

Birch finds it necessary to distinguish between this "deep practice of consideration," and "*daily*, or normal, practices of consideration" (Birch 1993, 329), so that we can meet the practical necessities of using nonhuman others to sustain ourselves while still giving them consideration. Birch follows in the tradition of Goodpaster, who distinguished between regulative and operative consideration. In Goodpaster's terms, "An agent may, for example, have an obligation to grant regulative considerability to all living things, but be able

psychologically and in terms of his own nutrition to grant operative consideration to a much smaller class of things (though note that capacities in this regard differ among persons and change over time)" (Goodpaster 1978, 313). Thus, regarding the objection that we cannot live by such ethics, because we must eat, Goodpaster argues that "there clearly are limits to the operational character of respect for living things. We must eat, and usually this involves killing" (Goodpaster 1978, 324).<sup>36</sup>

As an interpersonal ethic, universal consideration is also limited in its ability to deal with entities other than individuals. The obligation to give universal consideration is an obligation to consider the individual, not groups.<sup>37</sup> Universal consideration provides a means of giving all others moral consideration in interpersonal ethics, if not the justice of third parties.

## Conclusion

Universal consideration articulates an ethical theory that can recognize others through polythetic differentiation. Giving universal consideration means putting the other first, prior to any division into categories of subject and object, self and world. It is not only the human other who is before me, who commands me with an anarchic ethic. I am already obligated by nonhuman others, before I recognize their humanity, their being plants, other animals, animate or not.

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<sup>36</sup> In terms of Levinasian ethics, questions of operative or daily consideration necessitate the mediation of justice. I explore such questions of justice in Part Three.

<sup>37</sup> Jain tradition presents an interesting solution to problems such as this with a class of beings called *nigoda*, who are held to have a collective soul. *Nigoda* are generally beings like microbes (Chapple 2002, 39,54).

This is a Levinasian ethic, but applied to nonhuman others. Levinas' philosophy precludes the reduction of the other to mere otherness, conceived only in terms of opposition. However, his philosophy does not generally recognize nonhuman others as participant in ethical relations. For Levinas, the other is a human other. In the next chapter I will investigate the possibility of developing an environmental ethic out of his work.

### Chapter 3. Doggone Others

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas seeks a way of responding to the call of “the Other” (*l'autrui*) that does not reduce the other to a correlate of the self in terms of being at home with itself. He develops the phrase “otherwise than being” to mark the otherness of the other beyond being. Ethics, he instructs, interrupts the logic of the correlative pair being and being’s other with not the opposite, but the superlative, beyond being. In ethics “logic [is] interrupted by the structures of what is *beyond being*.... It is the superlative, more than the negation of categories, which interrupts systems, as though the logical order and the being it succeeds in espousing retained the superlative which exceeds them” (Levinas 1998, 187). Levinas’ work may be seen to prepare a way to recognize nonhuman others in providing a way of speaking of the other(s) that avoids the problems of conceiving of the other in terms of binary opposition discussed in the last chapter. Nonhuman others are not simply “nature,” conceived as other than human, but others who obligate oneself in ethics.

Admittedly, the main threads of Levinas’ theory of ethics instruct that ethics require transcendence of being and nature, which he describes in terms of a transcendence of animality to the human. This apparent devaluation of the nonhuman would seem to preclude the development of Levinasian environmental ethics. However, a deconstructive reading of Levinas recognizes a subtext that interrupts the main threads of his argument. Through this reading of Levinas, I find an ethic extraneous to his transcendent ethics, an ethic outside

Levinas' "otherwise than being." This is an ethics of doggone others, ethics beyond the interhuman, a step toward the ethics of being with/in.

Working from this opening in Levinas' ethics, I begin questioning some of the categories he uses in speaking of the other: the face, expression, and solicitation, the issuing and hearing of the call or command that obligates oneself.<sup>38</sup> As Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley have suggested, an ethical, rather than appropriating, reading of Levinas necessarily puts his work in question rather than harmonizing its dissonant notes into a totality. Levinas' work thus demands a deconstructive reading. They explain that

what distinguishes deconstruction as a textual practice lies in double reading, that is, a reading that interlaces at least two motifs, most often first by following or repeating the intentions of a text, in the manner of a commentary, and second, within and through this repetition, leaving the order of commentary and opening up the blind spots or ellipses within the text's intentionality. It is not for a double reading to decide between these paths of reading, these two motifs, but rather to render such choice undecidable. (Bernasconi and Critchley 1991, xii).

While my reading of Levinas finds his work partially open to the possibility of ethics beyond the interhuman, I also necessarily question his portrayal of the face of the other in face to face relations as a human face. To what degree does it make sense to interpret Levinas' writings about the face metaphorically, or do Levinasian ethics require that the call to ethics be issued literally in human speech? What is more important in the call of the other: that it expresses

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<sup>38</sup> This questioning is only a beginning questioning: I look forward to rereading Levinas (and Llewelyn after reading more Heidegger).



infinity, that it is given by a human face (by a human who can speak), that it teaches, or that it provokes oneself to ethics? Who are the others who can call oneself to responsibility?

### Face to Face

In the main body of his philosophical works, *Totality and Infinity* (1969), and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1998), Levinas presents ethics as exclusive to human relations. He suggests that because plants and animals lack language and do not have faces like human faces, we cannot enter into ethical relations with nonhuman others in what he calls "face to face" relations. On a first reading, it appears clear that for Levinas ethics are appropriate only to the interhuman. Ethics and the human emerge out of being, which Levinas identifies with nature and animality. He identifies the transcendence required for ethics as a transcendence of nature, a transcendence to the human out of being.

For Levinas, a face to face relation is a relation with another in which the other is met as absolutely other than oneself, above oneself, remote and exterior (Levinas 1969, 35). It is an irreversible relation between "the same" and the other, radically separated (Levinas 1969, 36). "The same" is the self *chez soi*, "being at home with oneself" (Levinas 1969, 39), the ego, or "I," locked within its own sphere of being.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I discuss Levinas' understanding of being at home with itself at length in chapter five.

In a face to face relation, the face of the other is exposed, naked. The face of the other calls "the same," the I, into question and creates ethics. The I then recognizes itself as guilty "where, qua I, I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer" (Levinas 1969, 84). The face of the other is an epiphany of infinity: it cannot be encompassed by the same but instead tears the same out of its concern for itself by calling it into question, obliging one in relation, electing one to a responsibility one cannot shirk, and in which one cannot be replaced (Levinas 1969, 245). This tearing of the self opens it into exteriority, beyond being, to ethics.

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* Levinas describes face to face relations in terms of proximity and substitution, as "the one-in-the-place-of-another," (Levinas 1998, 14) and the-one-for-the-other (Levinas 1998, passim). As Richard Cohen notes in his forward to *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas changes his focus from ethical alterity in *Totality and Infinity* to ethical subjectivity in *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas 1998, xii). In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas speaks of "oneself" or "the one" in responsibility as the one outside of itself, exteriority, no longer being at home with oneself. In the approach to the other, through saying, the self is turned inside out, expelled, turned back against oneself (Levinas 1998, 49). The relation to the other is non-reciprocal: one is called, not as a person in general, but as "me" (Levinas 1998, 84). It is also irreversible in the sense that one cannot return to oneself but remains in exile of oneself (Levinas 1998, 85). One is exposed to the "trauma of accusation," held hostage, expiating for the

other (Levinas 1998, 15). To be “oneself” is “otherwise than being,” always more responsible than the other (Levinas 1998, 117). The relation with the other remains asymmetrical, and is inherently an ethical relation.

The relation with the other in the-one-for-the-other is one of proximity, which Levinas understands as a relationship of responsibility for the other, as humanity (Levinas 1998, 46). Levinas uses the word “proximity” to indicate contact that is not fusion, preserving the separation of the one and the other in the relation (Levinas 1998, 86). To be in proximity is to have already been obligated toward the other. For Levinas, this is the character of ethical subjectivity. The obligation does not originate in being, but is anarchic: the neighbour orders one, and obligates one “before being recognized” (Levinas 1998, 87).

### **Other Faces**

According to Levinas, ethics arise in the face of the other (Levinas 1989, 82-83), by which he means a human other. How do ethics arise in the face of the other? Why does Levinas say that a face is required for ethics, and what does he mean by “face?” The face is that which expresses the vulnerability of the other, through the other’s eyes and nakedness. The face speaks: the face’s expression, whether given in words or other outward expression in the composition of the features, means something apart from what one conceives about it. The face of the other says of itself, gives out of itself, surpassing all one’s thematization

about the other. In addition, the uprightness of the face expresses height, or vertical transcendence. In Levinas' work, the other is in two senses beyond my grasp: the other transcends my idea of the other, and transcends being. The other transcends being at home with itself, beyond being conceptually and metaphysically. Is "the face" a metaphor or does the other need to be able to speak as a human, for Levinasian ethics? To what extent can these features of Levinas' understanding of "the face" be found in the "faces" of nonhuman entities?

Levinas says that "The eyes break through the mask -- the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks" (Levinas 1969, 66). This "language of the eyes" is a metaphor, but must it be forced back into literality when the suggestion is made that the leaves of a tree do not merely shine but speak? If an eye can speak why not a leaf? This leaves aside, of course, the fact that other animals have eyes even as do humans. Who can say the eyes of the animals featured in the campaigns of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) are not expressive?<sup>40</sup> A bit of quartz in a piece of granite also shines, and can also speak to me. Why is its expressivity different from the shine of the eye of a human that "speaks," if "speaks" is a metaphor?

According to Levinas, the expressivity of the other's face is not only in the voice of the other, but in the eyes and overall expressivity of the other's body.

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<sup>40</sup> That humans do find the eyes a most expressive feature is well illustrated in the images on the campaigns page on PETA's site. Chickens, a cow, rabbits, and an elephant, are featured (PETA no date). In citing this, I do not mean to imply that I endorse PETA's campaigns or tactics.

Expression is not merely verbal for Levinas, because the significance even of actual speech is not just words but meaning. The other means something in saying something. He writes: "To signify is not equivalent to presenting oneself as a sign, but to expressing oneself, that is, presenting oneself in person. The symbolism of the sign already presupposes the signification of expression, the face. In the face the existent par excellence presents itself. And the whole body -- a hand or a curve of the shoulder -- can express as the face" (Levinas 1969, 262).

A paw, a curving tree branch, or a naked rock face like the Eagle's Nest can also express as the face. Levinas, of course, would disagree. He distinguishes between things and persons who can speak. He writes:

The work of language is entirely different [from that of things]: it consists in entering into relationship with a nudity disengaged from every form, but having meaning by itself...signifying before we have projected light upon it... Such a nudity is the face. The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me -- and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system. (Levinas 1969, 74-75)

"Things" cannot speak the way humans do, Levinas says. Yet, it is not clear why his metaphorical understanding of speech in humans cannot be extended to understanding the expressivity of nonhumans. If "the face" describes the whole phenomenon of human expressivity, including body language, why would the body language and more subtle expressions of nonhumans be excluded? If it is the nakedness or nudity of the face of the other, understood metaphorically,

rather than the issuing of words out of a human mouth that matter in expressivity, why could a nonhuman other not oblige oneself in ethics?

The nakedness of the other and the nudity of the face have at least two related meanings for Levinas. The nakedness of the other is a metaphor not only for vulnerability, but for the difference Levinas sees between mere things, which we know through applying themes, and the faces of persons, who express of themselves beyond all thematization. The face is naked of thematization: the face of the other speaks to me before I apply themes to cognize the other. In this, the face of the other transcends my idea of it, and is thus expresses infinity. However, all other entities exceed our ideas about them. It is not possible to exhaust the details of a thing in description. I can describe a tree as a red maple thirty metres tall, brilliant red in the fall, contrasting beautifully with the surrounding white pines. These details do not fully describe everything that the tree is. The tree can be thematized, but as Buber explains, one can also come into relation with it, such that "it confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it -- only differently....What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself" (Buber 1970, 58-59). The nakedness of the other in terms of thematization should not restrict Levinas' understanding of the face to the human.

The convergence of the nakedness of the other in terms of being beyond themes and in terms of vulnerability is significant for Levinas, because the other does not only resist thematization in the nakedness of the face, but reveals the

vulnerability of “the nakedness of the body that is cold and that is ashamed of its nakedness” (Levinas 1969, 75). The other is above oneself, commanding oneself from beyond being, but also in need. Levinas emphasizes the vulnerability and exposedness of the face of the other. He refers to the eyes of the other as “without protection -- what is softest and most uncovered” (Levinas 1969, 262). The eyes are a metaphor for frailty, the vulnerability of “the widow, the orphan, the poor,” the other who commands oneself from a position of height, but who is also always owed a greater obligation than oneself.

Are nonhuman others naked in Levinas’ double sense? Other animals may not be ashamed of their nakedness, but they certainly are sometimes cold, and often in need. Other animals, plants and other nonhuman others are also vulnerable to human violence, directly as well as through pollution. Can they not also signify their need? Does the yelp of pain of a kicked dog say “I am hurt?” or is it merely an involuntary instinctual vocalization? If we compare this to a human who yelps in pain, is it still an involuntary instinctual vocalization? Why would this expression in either a dog or a human not be a call to ethical action?

For Levinas, the other human means something in her/his expression that the dog does not. The human face says of itself -- there is “somebody there,”<sup>41</sup> somebody there beyond oneself, beyond the themes one might apply to the other

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<sup>41</sup> This is a point debated between Rolston and Partridge, and in other terms, by other environmental philosophers. To what extent nonhuman others are subjects is a question I will explore further in the next chapter, “More than Human Others.”

as a thing. According to Levinas, expression differs from the presencing of objects in that it is "straightforward":

Signification or expression thus contrasts with every intuitive datum precisely because to signify is not to give. Signification is not an ideal essence or a relation open to intellectual intuition.... Discourse is not simply a modification of intuition (or of thought), but an original relation with exterior being....It is the production of meaning. Meaning is not produced as an ideal essence; it is said and taught by presence, and teaching is not reducible to sensible or intellectual intuition, which is the thought of the same. (Levinas 1969, 66)

The other teaches oneself in speaking, because the other is other than oneself.

The other can surprise oneself by teaching something new, something other than part of "the same." The words of the other express a meaning beyond oneself.

The other can interrupt oneself, challenging one's perceptions and interpretations of the world, teaching oneself to see more.

For Levinas, the ability of the other to talk about the world is essential to language, which is essential to ethics. "Signification," he says, "arises from the other stating or understanding the world" (Levinas 1969, 97). Furthermore, signification "is in the absolute surplus of the other with respect to the same...who welcomes the other across themes which the other proposes to him or receives from him, without absenting himself from the signs thus given" (Levinas 1969, 97). Only in language, Levinas suggests, is there an abundant enough source of surplus meaning to overcome the urge toward totality of being at home with itself. In Levinas' view, the words of the other, thematizing the world, are necessary for ethics, because it is those words which force oneself to



see the world beyond one's own restricted vision of it in being at home with oneself. The other gives a world in common through speaking, an ethical gesture. In his words, "Language does not exteriorize a representation preexisting in me: it puts in common a world hitherto mine" (Levinas 1969, 174).

According to Levinas, the other challenges one's view of the world in a way that nonhumans and mere things cannot. In his opinion, things appear as mere phenomena, in Kant's sense, whereas others who speak manifest themselves directly. Levinas makes a distinction between perception in seeing and language, in that seeing remains within phenomenal perception, mediated, not the straightforward relation of the face to face that requires language (Levinas 1969, 193-194). Language, conversely, as signification, breaks oneself out of one's preoccupation with oneself by offering another view of the world (Levinas 1969, 96). For Levinas, the difference between things, including living things, and others is that others can face oneself and signify the world, whereas a thing cannot. Others can thematize, while things, as objects, are only thematized.

Levinas explains:

The sign does not signify the signifier as it signifies the signified. The signified is never a complete presence; always a sign in its turn, it does not come in a straightforward frankness. The signifier, he who emits the sign, *faces*, despite the interposition of the sign, without proposing himself as a theme. He can, to be sure, speak of himself -- but then he would announce himself as signified and consequently as a sign in his turn. The Other, the signifier, manifests himself in speech by speaking of the world and not of himself; he manifests himself by proposing the world, by *thematizing* it. (Levinas 1969, 96)

Yet, I wonder, why should the ability to thematize, entailing a capacity to deny others as other and posit them as objects, be a marker of who can be said to have a face? The themes we apply to nonhuman others all too often reduce them to mere objects or things for human use. In ethical relations, the expression of the face of the other breaks through the masks imposed on it by thematization. In unethical relations, the other is masked to appear as an object for use. It is not only things that we mask in thematization; our preconceptions about others and the world are like a mask that orders our perception of other humans, and nonhuman others.

Our humanity is a mask that we wear over our faces, through which we perceive the world, and through which we express ourselves. We can learn to meet others face to face, if we learn to see their faces through not only their masks, but our own. The face is not essentially human, but naked, without a skin.<sup>42</sup> Just as it is not the words of the other that express the other's meaning, it is not the skin of the face of the other that communicates the other's need. The expressivity of the other is deeper than the skin. Nonhuman others may not express themselves exactly as humans, but they do communicate, and we can

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<sup>42</sup> The Dene note that grizzly bears look much like humans when the skin is removed. To put on the skin, or a mask of another species, in ritual is to become that other. The Dene tell a number of stories that present nonhuman others as living their lives in community like humans, but as "salmon people" or "bear people." In these stories, nonhuman others have a sense of themselves and their society as humans do -- not in the same way as humans do, but presenting it this way teaches that animals and plants have their own being, their own ways of living that proceed apart from human society and human understanding. One of the more well known of these stories is "The Woman Who Married A Bear." Catherine McClellan (1970) has recorded several versions of this story.

understand their meanings much as we understand human others' meanings in "the curve of a shoulder" or the "eyes that shine."

When we thematize nonhuman others, we mask their faces rather than catch their meaning. In ethical relations, one does not distinguish the other from oneself on the basis of properties of the other, or categories applied to the other, that is, on thematization. In Levinas' words, "These differences between the Other and me do not depend on different 'properties' that would be inherent in the 'I,' on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other... They are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being 'starting from oneself' toward 'the Other'" (Levinas 1969, 215). The properties of the face are irrelevant to the ethical relation. The other commands me before being thematized, and this includes the thematization of whether or not the other can be said to have an actual face.

Levinas says that "The neighbor concerns me before all assumption, all commitment consented to or refused....He orders me before being recognized" (Levinas 1998, 87).<sup>43</sup> Levinas explains that "This is a modality not of a knowing, but of an obsession, a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition....In an approach I am first a servant of a neighbor, already late and guilty for being late. I am as it were ordered from the outside, traumatically commanded, without interiorizing by representation and concepts the authority

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<sup>43</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I am not differentiating between the other and the neighbour. I do not mean to indicate that these categories are the same in Levinas' work, but the differences are not important to my project.

that commands me." (Levinas 1998, 87). A human face is recognized through thematization, through applying the theme of human/nonhuman. But ethics arise before this thematization, before asking oneself whether or not this other should be able to order me. If I hear a call outside my window in the night, I am obligated to get up and find out what is going on, to answer the call of the other, before I know whether it is a woman who is being attacked, or some other animal.

I do not have time to first apply themes to the other, and then decide whether or not I am obligated. As Levinas says, "The extreme urgency of the assignation jostles the 'presence of mind'.... Extreme urgency is the modality of obsession -- which is known but is not a knowing. I do not have time to face it" (Levinas 1998, 87-88). One does not have time to thematize the other before being obligated. It is irrelevant whether the other is human or otherwise than human, for "determining" who can call oneself to responsibility. Any other can call oneself to responsibility, if one hears the call before masking it with one's own categories of interpretation.

To approach the other ethically, for Levinas, requires recognizing a face rather than a mask that totalizes the other into an object. But, it is the face of the other that breaks through one's thematizations -- one does not cease to apply themes, but is instead interrupted by the other. According to Levinas, there is something about the human face that resists thematization that nonhuman others and things do not, interrupting oneself. But we are obligated to apply non-

reducing themes to nonhuman others. I see this is part of what it means to be “late and already guilty for being late.” We are obligated to seek to know our obligations to the other before we are aware of those obligations, to invite the other into relationship, in Weston’s sense of active invitation.<sup>44</sup>

Our obligations in this regard are perhaps greater with nonhuman others, because their faces do not appear so readily to us in Western culture. Our thematizing of nonhuman others reduces them, masks not only their properties and capacities with human prejudice, but masks their faces, their ability to interrupt our all too human discourses on the nature of things. Active invitation can help us to direct our thematization of others to help them reveal themselves as others who obligate us, to enable us to hear the call to ethics that sounds before thematization. Cultural conditioning too often drowns out the call of nonhuman others, so that their interruption goes unheard. We tell ourselves, surely I am only projecting a sense of need into that “thirsty” plant, ignoring its call even in satisfying its need.<sup>45</sup> Our culturally conditioned perceptions mask nonhuman others. As Weston argues, if we do not first approach the others ethically, we will not recognize them; humans in Western culture are prone to what he calls self-validating reduction.

Both of Weston’s concepts of reduction and invitation are self-validating, the former creating a vicious, the latter a virtuous, hermeneutic circle. In self-

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<sup>44</sup> Where Weston advocates active invitation in approaching the other ethically, Levinas advocates a passivity more passive than all passivity. Levinas’ and Weston’s terms reflect different aspects of what might be characterized as middle voiced interactions.

<sup>45</sup> The question of projection and anthropomorphism is explored in the next chapter.

validating reduction, the other is reduced to something less than an other deserving of moral consideration, a thing to be bought or sold, or an object to be studied: land becomes real estate,<sup>46</sup> a monkey becomes evidence of a non-social species. Weston compares the reductive methods of objective science with the active invitation of Jim Nollman in interaction with howler monkeys:

Visiting a rain-forest station at which howler monkeys were being studied, Jim Nollman was assured that the monkeys were fundamentally unsociable, retreating to the forest canopy whenever humans were around. They had demonstrably done so for years. Then Nollman learned that the zoologists studied the monkeys by attaching radio transmitters to their necks. To attach the transmitters they had to tranquilize the monkeys. To tranquilize the monkeys they shot them with tranquilizer guns, dropping them out of the canopy a hundred or more feet to the forest floor. The zoologists considered this technique unproblematic, 'objective,' purely scientific, and they treated Nollman, a musician who tried to use music to create a shared space between humans and animals, as just a sentimental and unscientific meddler.

Nollman, for his part, took out his flute and sat under a tree, playing for the monkeys and inviting them to join. Eventually they did. As Nollman puts it, 'The entire family howled in response to the deep resonant notes....Then slowly the mood shifted. One animal started to fill in the spaces between the staggered notes of the flute while the rest listened in silence. One howl and then one note; two notes and so two. This fundamental form of incipient conversation -- this dialogue -- lasted for about an hour until the approaching darkness forced me to leave.' The next day the monkeys climbed right down the tree and examined Nollman close up, even with a film crew also present. (Weston 1998, 283-284)

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<sup>46</sup> "One of the most striking but also least-noticed representations of nature is in the real estate listings. The message: land is something for possession, and comes in 'pieces.' That message is so familiar that students actually need help seeing it. Yet the very idea of a 'piece' of land helps to break down its wholeness, making it instead a series of checkers or counters in economic transactions, suggesting that what happens in one place is not essentially related to what happens anywhere else, on someone else's 'piece.' And consequently the land is broken into pieces; hence it *becomes* no more than 'pieces.' The economic view becomes self-validating." (Weston 1994, 103)

When the other is approached in active invitation, one's judgement of the capacities of the other is suspended, putting ethics before categorizing the other. While thematization, the applying of categories, cannot be completely suspended, since all our perceptions are culturally conditioned, apprehending the other through polythetic differentiation, applying additional themes of interpretation as discussed in chapter two, can help one encounter an other rather than an object. If we do not just inquire if monkeys can speak or not, or learn to use sign language or some other human means of communication, but become open to what we might learn in an unforced encounter with the monkeys, through trying different approaches to invite the other into relationship, such as music like Jim Nollman uses, we might find an other that calls us to ethical action. As Cheney and Weston argue, in parallel with Levinas, ethics must come first, before knowledge of the other(s). The ethical command arises before thematization, but in order to hear that command, we must invite others into relation with us, using additional themes of interpretation.

Nonhuman others can interrupt us, and teach us something new, if we invite them to do so. The teaching of the other depends not only on the other's expressivity, but on one's openness to it, one's welcoming of it. Levinas indicates that "To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught" (Levinas

1969, 51). Conversation with the other that is welcomed, as when one is open to learning from the other, is a teaching.

Humans can learn from nonhuman entities, if they are open to being taught by them. Jim Cheney, for example, speaks of learning from stones. Stones can teach us things, if we learn how to listen to them. As he says, "What rocks teach us is experientially bound up with (is the other face of) what we come to understand to be our ethical relationships to rocks. As these relationships deepen, so do the teachings" (Cheney 1998, 276). Cheney's understanding of the teaching of rocks resonates with the sentiments of Levinas' interhuman ethics: if one welcomes the other, the other's expression can become a teaching.

Perhaps you will think I stretch Levinas' meaning too far in saying that stones can teach. Yet, in other philosophical systems, stones and rocks are recognized as teachers (Cheney 1998, 273-274). Cheney cites examples from the Anishnabai, Lakota, and Sioux. Is this merely metaphorically a teaching? Do the rocks really teach us, or do we find only our own same ideas about rocks? This depends on oneself. For Cheney, and myself, these metaphors are not empty. As he says,

Rocks are ancient, enduring presences, the oldest of beings. They are, perhaps, 'watchful.' (Here I start using scare quotes. But the use of metaphor here and in what follows is not careless writing. Knowledge moves by metaphor. We must, of course, be careful, critical, and attentive in our use of metaphors -- that they may reach *insightfully* into mystery.) An important aspect of any learning situation is mindful presence. Rocks, in their enduring



presence, their watchfulness, may be our first and most profound teachers of the most fundamental aspect of moral presence in and to this world... (Cheney 1998, 274-275).

Rocks and other nonhuman entities can speak, and teach, if we are able to listen and learn.

### **Solicitation**

Nonhuman others can also call oneself to responsibility, soliciting oneself in ethics. In Levinas' terms, the other commands me before being recognized, saying "thou shalt not murder." The other commands me, creating an anarchic obligation, prior to any system, beyond reason. The other solicits oneself from "above and beyond" (Levinas 1969, 200). The other solicits ethics in oneself in a "gaze that supplicates and demands, that can supplicate only because it demands, deprived of everything because entitled to everything, and which one recognizes in giving" (Levinas 1969, 75).

The restriction of solicitation to human speech in Levinas' work presents a significant limitation in terms of the possibility of ethics beyond the interhuman. As David Clark remarks, human language is always the standard by which animals are judged insufficient (Clark 1997, 191). However, it is the "call" as solicitation that is important for ethics, not the ability to speak with one's mouth, or to thematize. The face of the other calls oneself into question. The other calls me into question, questioning my right to possession: "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the

world" (Levinas 1969, 75-76). Is it not our possession of the world in a very literal sense that is called into question by nonhuman others? Our possession, control, pollution, and usurpation of the whole planet is called into question by the expressions of nonhuman others, such as the dull eyes of whale carcasses classed as toxic waste.

It is not the capacities of the other that matters in ethics, but that the other can provoke oneself -- the others provoke feelings of obligation in me when I perceive their needs. What matters in ethics, is who or what can interrupt oneself and provoke a sense of obligation, not what criteria can be applied to the other, such as whether or not they literally have faces and eyes. As Levinas says, "The primordial essence of expression and discourse does not reside in the information they would supply concerning an interior and hidden world.... but a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height" (Levinas 1969, 200). What is significant about the nakedness of the others is their need of something from oneself, their solicitation of oneself. The eyes of the hungry ask oneself to feed them.

A wilting plant expresses its need of water quite as much as the eyes of a man might express his hunger. Nonhuman others not only call humans to responsibility, but such inter-species relations approach Levinas' ideas on substitution<sup>47</sup> more concretely than is often found in interhuman ethics. Consider Julia "Butterfly" Hill living in Luna, a threatened redwood tree, in

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<sup>47</sup> I further discuss Levinas' understanding of substitution in chapter five.

effect a hostage for the tree, for two years (Hill 2000). Other animals can provoke ethics in humans, which has led to the formation of groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The provocation of solicitation does not depend on a literal face or voice but on environmentalists and others amplifying or translating their voices, trying to provoke a broader sense of ethics in others.

Llewelyn suggests that poetic speech, whether in poetry or poetic prose, can help humans hear the call of nonhuman others. Solicitation can be amplified, because poetry can be evocative, can teach one to recognize more in others. To evoke is to call, to inspire. Poetic speech and writing can, Llewelyn says, inspire one to ethics as does the other. He finds that Levinas, in his later writings on aesthetics, says that a poem can actively engage a person. A poem can be a "handshake," that is, it can reach out and give of itself. Llewelyn characterizes the evocation of poetry as a human speaking for the others. However, I see it as a translation and amplification of others who express themselves directly, giving of themselves in expression. A dog can inspire me because another human has spoken on his behalf, but he also expresses himself.<sup>48</sup> We are obligated in justice to speak on behalf of others, but we are first obligated in ethics to meet them face to face.

Llewelyn argues that it is enough that we can recognize the needs of others for us to hear their calling of us to ethics, that they need not articulate their

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<sup>48</sup> I say "his" and "himself" because I am thinking of a specific dog, who happens to be male.

needs, or be aware of them. It is the need of the other that solicits oneself, rather than an expression of need. He asks,

why do we have to make the answer to the question of responsibility depend on the answers to this question about language? Whether or not this or that animal has language, we know that they have needs, and needs we can recognize without the animal that has them having to put them into words. Perhaps his need of words is one of the animal's most crucial needs. For if he or she had words, they would certainly include 'Help!', 'Spare me' or at least 'Let me be.' (Llewelyn 1991, 194)

Adapting Levinas' understanding of solicitation to a broader context, Llewelyn contends that nonhuman others obligate oneself as do human others, because they have needs. Their needs obligate us, regardless if those needs are "experienced, unexperienced or unexperiencable, articulated, unarticulated or unarticulable" (Llewelyn 1991, 195-196). Llewelyn does not follow Levinas' requirement that the other be capable of expression.

For Levinas, need is not enough for humans to be called to ethics, rather, it is only Desire that enables humans to be called to ethics.<sup>49</sup> Levinas distinguishes "animal needs" from "vegetable dependence" and human "Desire." He suggests that plants cannot be said to experience needs, while animals do experience their needs. However, animals' needs, he suggests, are "inseparable from struggle and fear" (Levinas 1969, 116). Humans experience needs differently from other animals, because we are subjects capable of satisfying our needs for shelter, food and drink (Levinas 1969, 116). Levinas distinguishes between material needs,

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<sup>49</sup> Levinas does not address (here) the question of whether or not hearing the need of another is enough to stimulate that Desire.

which we have as animals and can satisfy as subjects, and metaphysical Desire, the Desire for the Other, which is not something one can satisfy independently.

This is one of the few places where Levinas discusses animals rather than just the animality of humans, but even here his preoccupation is with human states, with the human as a higher form of vegetable and animal matter. Height here appears as a characteristic of humans in general, rather than of the other: “already human egoism leaves pure nature *by virtue of the human body raised upwards*, committed in the *direction of height*. This is not its empirical illusion but its ontological production and its ineffaceable testimony” (Levinas 1969, 117). Plants, animals, and humans are here placed in a hierarchical system. The plant, he says here, has no sense of itself, while the animal has a sense of itself but lacks a sense of (or Desire for) the other, that is, the animal lacks transcendence.

### **Transcendence and the Emergence of the Human**

For Levinas, the ethical command in face to face relations is not a call of ethical subjectivity into being, but transcends being. He conceives this in terms of emerging out of nature and animality, as human. According to Levinas, what Spinoza called the *conatus essendi*, the right to be, is called into question by the face of the other (Levinas 1986, 24). As Richard Cohen notes, for Levinas, “the human” first emerges in the face to face (Cohen 1994, 124). It emerges out of being and what Levinas feels is the natural *conatus essendi*. When questioned, Levinas explicitly says that the ethical command “Thou shalt not kill,” seen in the

face of the other “emerges as a limitation of the *conatus essendi*” (Wright et al. 1988, 175). He suggests that the work of Darwin and Heidegger indicates that being tries to look after itself (Wright et al. 1988, 172). It is only inasmuch as we are human, transcending our animal nature, that we act responsibly. Levinas holds that the human emerges out of animality as it emerges out of being and nature, taking Darwin’s theory of evolution to mean that animals “struggle for life without ethics” (Wright et al. 1988, 172) on the level of being. Humans transcend this level of being in face to face relations, Levinas indicates, through expression and responsibility.

Clark suggests Levinas restricts face to face relations to humans because of a fear that we will lose ethics altogether if humans and animals are the same (Clark 1997, 168). If we are all animals, then perhaps there is no transcendence of being, and it does not matter if people are treated like mere animals. However, Clark is wrong to say that Levinas maintains the distinction between humans and other animals in a conventional sense, seeing humanity as “free from the blind force of nature” (Clark 1997, 181). Levinas does not say that humanity is free of nature, but that we can exit being to the otherwise than being of ethical relation. Clark seems to suggest that when Levinas speaks of the emergence of the human he means simply out of animality, but it is primarily out of being at home with oneself, the self-enclosed ego.

As Llewelyn notes, discerning Levinas’ views on animals is complicated by the fact that when he is speaking of animality, it is usually the animality of

humans that he means (Llewelyn 1991, 50). It is the animal nature of humans, one's material needs and the instinct to satisfy them, that are transcended in Levinas' ethics; whether or not other animals can be met face to face is a question unheard within the main body of Levinas' philosophical work, in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. When such questions were put to him in an interview, recorded as "The Paradox of Morality" in *The Provocation of Levinas*, Levinas says that other animals do not have "faces" like humans do, and that animals' faces are understood "in accordance with *Dasein*" (Wright et al. 1988, 169). By this he means that animals' "faces" are on the level of being and nature, expressing a *conatus essendi* but not ethics.<sup>50</sup> Levinas suggests that animals do not have faces in the "purest form," which is the human (Wright et al. 1988, 169). Later in the same interview, he confesses that he does not know "if a snake has a face," but asserts that we still have obligations toward nonhuman animals because they can suffer (Wright et al. 1988, 172). He posits that humans are aware of ethical obligations because of interhuman face to face relations, but that we can transfer the idea of responsibility into our interactions with other animals.

Levinas' statements in that interview lead both Llewelyn and Benso to suggest that within Levinas' thought nonhuman others can be included in justice, rather than ethics. As I have said, in Levinas' later work, he distinguishes

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<sup>50</sup> Llewelyn disputes Levinas' interpretation of Heidegger's understanding of being in terms of *Dasein* as a living being that struggles for life (Llewelyn 1991, 67).

between ethics, which come to pass in face to face relations, and justice, which is the measuring out of obligations between multiple parties. For Levinas, ethics come to pass between two persons: oneself and the other. These ethical claims are absolute; one is obliged to the other to the point of being held hostage. If we were in relation with only one other at a time, the question of justice would not occur. However, with the appearance of a third party, justice is required, a system which compares and chooses between others (Levinas 1998, 157).

Llewelyn argues that in Levinas' view humans have responsibilities *for* animals, but not directly *to* them (Llewelyn 1991, 64), as a face to face relation would require, since the ethical command is heard directly solely in interhuman face to face relations. Following a similar line of reasoning supplementing Leviansian ethics with Heidegger's work, Benso also finds that Levinas' ethics take the human face to face as exemplary, relegating ethics beyond the interhuman as derivative. She draws attention to the dimension of height that Levinas argues is necessary for ethics. For Levinas, as Benso explains, transcendence is height, a vertical transcendence (Benso 1997, 11). The otherness of things, working from Levinas' position, lacks any dimension of height, but, she argues, can be characterized as depth (Benso 1996, 139).

Benso feels that Levinas needs to be supplemented with Heidegger in order to develop an ethic of things, because she finds that Levinas' ethics are partial in that they do not recognize "the Other of the Other," which she identifies as things (Benso 1996, 136). I see the other of the other as the third



party, the other beyond the face to face relation, who instigates the demand not for ethics but for justice. This might suggest that Levinas' position on ethics beyond the interhuman should be that humans have obligations to nonhuman others in justice, but not in ethics. If animals do not have "faces" like humans do, they cannot be met face to face, and can at best be given consideration in justice. However, Levinas is not completely clear in excluding nonhumans from face to face relations. The other who questions my right to be in a face to face relation or proximity, might be an other than human other. Including others beyond the interhuman is already a question of justice, but it is first a question of ethics.

Levinas' philosophy is unambiguous in saying that ethics require transcendence of being and nature, but he never fully developed a position on animals and ethics within his philosophical work. This leaves room for further questioning, especially since Levinas himself indicates that the question of animals is an open space in his work, saying that the question of transcendence in the animal "reminds us of the debt that is always open" (Levinas 1990, 152). In this passage, taken from his essay "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," Levinas' philosophy remains open to the other, even nonhuman others.

### **Doggone Others**

"The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" is published in *Difficult Freedom*, a "confessional" rather than philosophical text. As such it deals more explicitly with religious themes that are left implicit in his philosophical work, and

sometimes engages in commentary on biblical passages. In "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," Levinas comments on a verse from Exodus: "You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs" (Exodus 22:31). Levinas poses, and answers, the question, "So who is this dog at the end of the verse? Someone who disrupts society's games (or Society itself) and is consequently given a cold reception [*que l'on reçoit comme un chien dans un jeu de quills*]?" (Levinas 1990, 151). Upon noting the role of dogs in the freeing of Israel from Egypt on the night of the slaying of the first born (Exodus 11:7), Levinas exclaims, "There is a transcendence in the animal!" (Levinas 1990, 152). He says that the dogs have "neither ethics nor *logos*" but that "At the supreme hour of his institution...the dog will attest to the dignity of its person" (Levinas 1990, 152). Levinas then links the dogs from the biblical passages to a dog who appeared in the camp where he was held prisoner by the Nazis during World War II. This dog, Levinas says, "was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany," because he recognized the prisoners as people, in contrast to the Nazis.

Levinas' exclamation, "There is a transcendence in the animal!" does not harmonize with the rest of his writings on animals and ethics in his philosophy, nor with his statements in interviews. "The Name of a Dog" interrupts. Levinas allows an ethic beyond the interhuman to interrupt his thought, much as he finds ethics to interrupt philosophy in general. As Cohen explains, interruption is significant in Levinas' thought, and on occasion appears as a device in his

writing. In Levinas' work, the face of the other interrupts the monologue of the self as being at home with itself. In philosophical writing, ethics can similarly interrupt the totalizing narratives of philosophy. Cohen notes that Levinas' mention of his debt to Franz Rosenzweig interrupts his exposition of phenomenology, appearing halfway through the preface to *Totality and Infinity* (Cohen 1994, 227). As Michael Oppenheim explains, it is Rosenzweig's discussion of the Greek literary figure of the tragic hero that Levinas' work alludes to in describing being at home with itself (Oppenheim 1997, 13). The tragic hero, Rosenzweig says in *The Star of Redemption*, is deaf to the voice of the other, trapped in its own sphere of being. Its existence is a monologue, an uninterrupted narrative. "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" appears approximately halfway through *Difficult Freedom* (pages 151-153 of about 300), interrupting the text, and Levinas' philosophy as a whole, with an extraneous ethic.

The phrase in the title of the essay, "The Name of a Dog," is itself an exclamation, an interjection that is used to express surprise or irritation. In the original French, *nom d'un chien*, is a mild expletive, a polite version of *nom de Dieu*, "in the name of God" (Levinas 1990, 299), which is akin to the English "doggone." The interruption of doggone ethics into Levinas' philosophy is both a surprise, and an irritation to its coherence. Within the essay, the interruption is magnified in Levinas' remark that the dog in the verse from Exodus is "Someone who disrupts society's games (or Society itself) and is consequently given a cold

reception [*que l'on reçoit comme un chien dans un jeu de quills*]?" (Levinas 1990, 151). The other animal, the nonhuman animal, interrupts the thought of just (human) society, the "game" of society. The other domestic animal is the one who lives in society with us, but who we do not admit to society or acknowledge in relations of ethics and social justice. The game in the French expression Levinas uses, "*que l'on reçoit comme un chien dans un jeu de quills*," is skittles (a game similar to bowling). A dog interrupting the game to chase the ball would be thrown out. Similarly, if one tries to include other animals in the idea of society, of community, or of neighbourhood, the "dog" is thrown out, exiled, or at least marginalized, from philosophy proper. The nonhuman others are in exile, where ethics come to pass in Levinas' thought, outside being at home with itself.

In allowing the doggone others to interrupt his philosophizing about ethics, Levinas' work remains open to further questioning. Allowing the interruption prevents Levinas' philosophy from forming a completely coherent system that would be totalizing in its effects and hence contrary to the aims of his ethics. Levinas allows that the interruption of doggone others "reminds us of the debt that is always open" (Levinas 1990, 152).

The interruption of doggone others provides space to develop Levinas' ethics beyond the interhuman. The fact that his work is not completely consistent on the question of interspecies ethics provides room to suggest that it is not nature or animality, or even being, that must be transcended for humans to express ethics, but a particular way of being, being at home with itself. Other

animals need not be implicated in a need for transcendence of their being as animals due to human limitations in this regard, since being at home with itself is a mode of human being, not of other animals. It is the "animality" of humans that Levinas refers to in saying that ethics transcend nature and being, not the animality of other animals. The transcendence required for interspecies ethics is not a transcendence of animality or nature, but a transcendence of anthropocentrism. Ethics beyond the interhuman are not extraneous in a negative sense, but transcendent; doggone ethics are not beyond being, but beyond the merely human being of being at home with itself. Doggone ethics could be ethics for a more than human world.

## Chapter 4. More Than Human Others

Illustrating and understanding self-validating reduction is relatively unproblematic, but active invitation may be harder to understand, and more open to charges of anthropomorphism and projection. It might be supposed that perceiving nonhuman others as persons, as other than human persons or more than human others,<sup>51</sup> is only the result of projecting human traits onto those others. One might argue that if I say a rock can be met as a person, I am conflating things and humans. However, while I intend to problematize the boundary between things and persons, I do not suppose they are identical, or that there is no difference between a human person and a rock person. Things can be persons, when they are invited to manifest themselves as such. A person is not a person because s/he is human, or on the basis of some denotative characteristic like sentience, or being a subject in the Cartesian sense. Others become persons for us not on the basis of empirically measurable characteristics, but when we invite them to become persons. When we open a space for relation to occur, we do not need to teach the stones to talk so much as we need to learn to listen to them, to understand their expressions. It is not that a particular kind of face or capacity for language is required for ethics, but that we need to learn to understand the expressions of other than human persons.

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<sup>51</sup> When I use the phrase "more than human others," I mean that these others are more than our human perceptions of them, more than the themes we apply to them. A human other is "more than a cat," and a cat is more than human. I do not mean to indicate any categorical superiority through the use of such phrases.

This should not be dismissed as a romantic or anthropomorphic projection of personhood onto nonhuman others. Imagination applied through polythetic differentiation is an aid in active invitation, but this imagining is more of an imaging, trying out different themes to see what arises with them, than “all in one’s head.” Imagination is a necessary component in human perception, since applying themes requires imagination. Furthermore, the risk or venture of inviting the other into relation is a risk we are obligated to take, to put ethics before asking whether or not the theme of “person” is appropriate for a particular other.

### **Person as Category**

Why should the term “person” be restricted to humans alone? Western cultures mostly restrict personhood to humanity, but other cultures do not necessarily identify persons with humans to the exclusion of other entities. In Western cultures, “person” has come to mean one who is “conscious, independent, autonomous, free and responsible” (Mauss 1985, 18), and, tacitly, human. Marcel Mauss describes the history of the development of the Western notion of the person as a progression from a role (*personnage*), in ancient Greek drama, to the modern subject.

Mauss suggests that it was in Roman civilization that the Western notion of person developed into more than a role one assumed as a mask, and became an identity. “Person” (*personne*) then became a legal designation (Mauss 1985,

14). Initially, this designation was restricted to men with property, but was extended to their sons with the ending of the rights of fathers to kill their sons (Mauss 1985, 14). The sons were no longer regarded as being simply the fathers' property, but as being their own property (Mauss 1985, 16). The meaning of person thus became one's own self, a self who owns itself in Western tradition.<sup>52</sup> This notion of person identifies self with citizenship, selfhood conferred by the state, conferring the right to oneself as one's own property. It also establishes the meaning of person as identical with itself (see Mauss 1985, 18).

The right to be oneself became "synonymous with the true nature of the individual" excluding "[o]nly the slave" (Mauss 1985, 17). (Mauss does not mention women, who were excluded from personhood in Roman law.) The meaning of "person" came to be established as being one's own, as self-identical, owning oneself as property, having the right to be. It is a movement toward the rights of "men" away from responsibilities toward "others." I see this as a reduction of the understanding of personhood in that it is based on excluding women and slaves, among others, from being recognized as persons.

Mauss' essay demonstrates that other cultures have different understandings of what a person is. However, he assumes that all people follow a progression along a singular line of evolution coinciding with that of the evolution of categories in Western thought. Cross culturally, "person" does not

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<sup>52</sup> The meaning of "person" in Western tradition has thus long been associated with the right to preserve one's own life, the right to be. This is the notion of self as being *chez soi* that Levinas has so harshly criticized. I examine this further in the next chapter.



necessarily mean autonomous being, moral agent, rational being, or being as one's own. There are other forms of subjectivity, notably Levinas' ethical subjectivity, to which I shall return in the next chapter, but also nonhuman subjectivities, other than human persons.

Westerners tend to find it difficult to think outside the notion of person as human, making the idea of "other than human persons" appear as nonsensical, or a result of anthropomorphism. A. Irving Hallowell introduced the phrase "other than human persons" to aid in understanding the Ojibwa people's notion of person, which is broader than the Western concept of person. Hallowell found that the Ojibwa people he studied did not automatically attribute personhood or animation to all things, but that they had a predisposition to remain open to the possibility that any given thing might be a person. For the Ojibwa Hallowell studied, it was not that all stones are alive, but that *some* are (Hallowell 1969, 55), and any stone *might* be. The Ojibwa developed a sense of person in a quite different context from European ideas, until relatively recent contact. Contemporary Anishnabai (a name some prefer to Ojibwa) continue to identify other than human persons in rocks, such as Chee-skong-abikong, a tower of rock near Obabika Lake in the Temagami region. The Anishnabai understanding of entities like this transcends the identification of person with human, a more than human understanding of what it means to be a person.

Human persons do differ from other than human persons. It is not that humans are not different from other animals, plants and others. Rather, these

differences do not automatically or categorically prevent the others from also being persons -- rather, culturally biased thematization prevents it. We need to use differently thematic perception, polythetic differentiation, to meet nonhuman others as persons and live in a more than human world. As Hallowell points out, despite common assumptions, "person" is not actually restricted to human beings even in Western culture. It has also always been appropriate to deities or "supernatural" entities (Hallowell 1969, 51).<sup>53</sup> All persons, as others, are more than the categories applied to them. Other than human persons are persons understood in terms of the more than human world.

### **Thematization and Bracketing**

The Ojibwa notion of other than human persons that Hallowell identified seems to be less totalizing than the categories of Euro-Canadian and -American cultural systems. Hallowell notes that the Ojibwa category of other than human persons is a covert category, not one articulated by the Ojibwa themselves, but identified in linguistic analysis (Hallowell 1969, 53). The grammatical structure of the language organizes entities into "animate" and "inanimate" categories that are not consciously applied. Hallowell hypothesizes that "the allocation of stones to an animate grammatical category is part of a culturally constituted cognitive 'set.' It does not involve a consciously formulated theory about the nature of stones. It leaves the door open that our orientation on dogmatic

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<sup>53</sup> This "supernatural" might be more accurately rendered as "more than human." What is called "supernatural" is not necessarily unnatural or necessarily nonhuman, but it is beyond the usual Western categories applied in understanding.

grounds keeps shut tight" (Hallowell 1969, 55). This seems to indicate a perception that does not reductively thematize to the same degree as one that labels humans as persons but not other animals or any other entities as persons.

Thomas Berry suggests that while those of us living in modern Western culture cannot simply adopt such an approach in perceiving nonhuman others, we can adopt a "postcritical naiveté" (Berry 1988, 4) that focuses on others less in terms of scientific categories than as others in the earth community. Something like a postcritical naiveté can be accomplished through the phenomenological method of "transcendental reduction," which is intended to encourage less thematizing perception. The "reduction" refers to the reduction and bracketing of themes or categories of interpretation, to perceive the things simply as they appear, as noema. To perceive things in this way, as noema, is to understand things as the things themselves, rather than as objects of thought.<sup>54</sup> In phenomenology, things are not necessarily objects.

The idea of bracketing seems to imply that non-thematic perception is possible, and preferable, to thematizing. However, the possibility of nonthematic perception is controversial; the linguistic turn in postmodern criticism dictates that non-thematic perception is not possible, that "it's language all the way down." The argument is that we cannot perceive at all without categories of thought, without thematizing. According to such postmodern

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<sup>54</sup> This understanding of transcendental reduction is indebted to Robert Sokolowski's *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000), especially pp. 48-49.

arguments, "There are no immediate or indubitable features of mental life. Sense data, ideas, intentions, or perceptions are already preconstituted. Such experiences occur in and reflect a variety of linguistically and socially predetermined practices" (Flax 1990, 35). However, thematizing need not proceed only through familiar Western binary categories, and need not focus only on correlative difference. The themes of one's culture do not completely control one's perception.

Language and the constructs of consciousness do play a role in perception. They guide perception, but perception is not determined by cultural constructs. Admittedly, culture can restrict what is perceptible to the conscious mind. In saying that something cannot be known we limit our ability to perceive it. If we think something does not exist we will not likely perceive it, because it will be an illegitimate category for us, making it so that "we" cannot perceive other than human persons and converse with other animals. Similarly, "we" cannot see ghosts because these are not categorized as "real" entities by "our" knowledge.

However, while culture influences perception, it does not determine it. The limits of cultural guidance are not total: how else would I come to know spirits,<sup>55</sup> and to hear a stone call me to responsibility? Abram explains:

As we grow into a particular culture or language, we implicitly begin to structure our sensory contact with the earth around us in a

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<sup>55</sup> A number of anthropologists discuss such changes in perception in *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (Young and Goulet 1994).

particular manner, paying attention to certain phenomena while ignoring others, differentiating textures, tastes, and tones in accordance with the verbal contrasts contained in the language. We simply cannot take our place within any community of human speakers without ordering our sensations in a common manner, and without thereby limiting our spontaneous access to the wild world that surrounds us. Any particular language or way of speaking thus holds us within a particular community of human speakers only by invoking an ephemeral border, or boundary, between our sensing bodies and the sensuous earth.

Nevertheless, the perceptual boundary constituted by any language may be exceedingly porous and permeable. Indeed, for many oral, indigenous people, the boundaries enacted by their languages are more like permeable membranes binding the peoples to their particular terrains, rather than barriers walling them off from the land. (Abram 1996, 255-256)

If all perception were controlled by culturally determined themes, we would never learn anything new about the world. We do learn new things about the world, because others interrupt our thematization. Thematization is necessarily part of human perception, but totalization is not. Totalization reduces the other to an object of one's thought, finding not the other over against oneself, but only one's idea of the other, "the same" in Levinas' terms. For Levinas, the problem in ethics is not so much thematization as the human tendency to totalization. In thematization, one's themes of interpretation tend to reduce the other to a correlate of one's own being, often using binary correlative categories. Thematization can proceed to totalization, if one does not let the other break through one's themes. Bracketing strives to halt the totalization of the other in thematization. It is not necessarily a suspension of thematization, but a conscious reflection on what themes one is applying in perception, so as

not to prejudge what or who one is perceiving, to let the other be, in Heidegger's terms.

Adrian Ivakhiv describes this process in perceiving and interpreting sacred places. The "act of suspending one's judgment in the *nonagency* of a place or landscape," he says, "can open one up to experiences or interpretations which might otherwise have been inaccessible" (Ivakhiv 2001, 215-216). Ivakhiv cites Paul Devereux's experience of Silbury Hill as an example. Devereux perceived the hill as "a living, sentient, teacher....Whether or not the idea is taken literally....It opened me up to the complex; it put me in receptive mode" (quoted in Ivakhiv 2001, 215). Devereux discovered that from Silbury Hill, on the festivals of Beltane on May first, and Lammas on August first, it is possible to watch the sun rise twice, once from the top of the hill, and once from a lower ledge (Devereux 1992, 225). When an other, or a place, is welcomed, actively invited to manifest itself through bracketing reductive themes, different perceptions become possible. As Ivakhiv says, if one's "objectivist" assumptions are "put into question, other related interpretive assumptions may also begin to dislodge themselves from their accustomed places within a person's interpretive and cognitive tool kit" (Ivakhiv 2001, 216).

If ethics are to come first, we are obligated to bracket reductive themes of interpretation in interacting with others. Applying Anthony Weston's notion of active invitation, and my understanding of polythetic differentiation in giving universal consideration, we are obligated not to apply only reductive themes to

nonhuman others. We are obligated to suspend our judgement about whether or not nonhuman others can be persons. Weston, I suspect, would not go so far as to say that nonhuman others can be persons, but his ideas of self-validating reduction and invitation elucidate how nonhuman others appear differently depending on our expectations and methods. Weston's work indicates that nonhuman others can be invited into relation and met as others, or reduced to mere objects, depending on how we approach them. Our expectations are self-fulfilling, so that we can reduce others to objects or invite them to meet us in relation.

Ivakhiv describes what he calls an "ecospiritual" perception of place that sounds akin to Weston's understanding of active invitation and an environmentalist adaptation of Levinas' welcoming of the other. "An ecospiritual opening up to the Other," he says, "recognizes that this Other has something to teach us. When approached with an interpretive humility, a weakened or minimized impulse to interpretively encompass that Other, this openness can be kept in fluid play....This would require self-consciously seeking a balance between *interpreting* the world and *recognizing the limits* of any such interpretations" (Ivakhiv 2001, 237).

Thematization of others is problematic, because any theme can reduce the other. By highlighting one aspect, other facets go unnoticed, but since thematization is inherent to human perception, we are obligated to strive to apply themes that are not simply correlative to ourselves -- to go beyond the

human, to the more than human. It may be true that the other is like *p'u*, the uncarved block in Taoist thought, limited and reduced as soon as the first cut is made, or the first theme or category applied.<sup>56</sup> But this is why I have always preferred to sculpt in clay rather than wood or stone -- when sculpting in clay, one can add as well as remove in shaping the piece. Clay is a more forgiving method of rendering. Similarly, polythetic differentiation is also more forgiving of human failings in perception and understanding than non-thematic perception or binary understanding. We may make mistakes in applying categories, but if we experiment with using multiple themes, and look for similarities, overlaps, and relations when we are differentiating one from another, we will understand the others with more depth and accuracy.

Like the addition of clay in sculpting, imagination plays an important role in perception and understanding. As David Abram says, imagination is necessary to human perception: "imagination is not a separate mental faculty...but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly" (Abram 1996, 58). In order to perceive more deeply, we need to risk being wrong, applying inappropriate themes, rather than just the expected categories.

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<sup>56</sup> Metaphysically, *p'u* is undifferentiated "the state of simplicity (uncarved wood). / When the uncarved wood is broken up, it is turned into concrete things." (*The Way of Lao Tzu* (*Tao-te ching*) ch. 28)



This metaphor of sculpting in clay presents perception and interpretation very much as constructive, as constructing the other in the act of perception, active creation rather than passive reception. However, we do not completely construct the other in language, but construct our awareness of them, based on what themes we apply or do not apply, and how they respond to our thematizing. We do construct the others in thematization, but not without their input. Interpretation is interactive between interpreter and interpreted. It is intersubjective: each shapes the encounter. Meaning arises in the middle voice, through the interaction of participants. Agency "is not the exclusive property of people or of transpersonal or environmental forces; rather, it is distributed throughout the network of circulation, a network which encompasses several nodes" (Ivakhiv 2001, 214).

As is all too clear in looking at the environmental crises, humans often have a greater power than do nonhumans to shape encounters between them, to reduce and dominate the others. As Ivakhiv puts it, "The language we use to describe the world ... projects an epistemic *grasp* over that world, encompassing it into a particular formation of power/knowledge" which seems to rule out the perception of sacredness "except as a quirk of cultural perception" (Ivakhiv 2001, 60). In Western culture, it is difficult to imagine that nonhuman others might be met as persons. "Our imagination of these 'others' has become constrained and restricted" (Ivakhiv 2001, 239). Berry suggests that "Our difficulty is that we are just emerging from a technological entrancement. During this period the human

mind has been placed within the narrowest confines it has experienced since consciousness emerged from its Paleolithic phase" (Berry 1988, 37).

### Projection

Berry advocates a turn to mythic perception of the land. You might ask, but are mythic views of reality not simply projections? Is not the belief in nonhuman agency a return to "primitive" animism? Ivakhiv points out that whether land

is perceived as an *object* of human desires or actions, [or] it is understood to be an active *subject* and agent in its own right [... it] is important to note that none of these positions necessarily involves any more 'projection' of values, ideas, or ideologies than the others. Land perceived as commodity can be as much a projection of capitalist values and an abstract-mechanistic ontology as land perceived as numinous Other can be a projection of romantic and animist ideals and antimodern sentiments. (Ivakhiv 2001, 223)

Both views involve thematization and imagination, but on what basis does one choose between such views?

What is acceptable often depends on the context in which one is making claims about another. Themes acceptable to Western science, for example, are rather different from Pueblo culture in the Amerindian Southwest. Leslie Marmon Silko, for example, says "Nobody wants to ask the embarrassing question about how I happen to know that rocks have a spiritual presence, or who taught me and how *they* knew. Still, I can feel different individual rocks and pebbles. Certain rocks, perhaps not all, have something of a life to them" (Leslie

Marmon Silko quoted in Cheney 1998, 274). Perhaps most of what we see in others is projection, but not all of it. The trick is to learn the difference.<sup>57</sup> I continue to doubt myself in my perceptions of other than human persons. Possibly I am wrong, and have never heard a rock speak, or met another animal as a person. The idea of other than human persons remains a radical view in the context of Western thought. But I am obligated to take the risk of being wrong.

Taking the risk of inviting others to appear as persons does not require a return to animism, at least not as it was originally defined by E. B. Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1958). According to Tylor, "primitive" cultures project the idea of souls onto nonhuman entities. I do not propose finding souls or spirits in everything, although this may be an accurate supposition, but starting with the possibility that any other might be a person. I specifically do not mean this as a human person or some idea of the soul. As Rosemary Radford Ruether, alluding to Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou relations (Buber 1970), puts it, "This is not a romanticism or an anthropomorphic animism....The spirit in plants or animals is not anthropomorphic but biomorphic to its own forms of life. We respond...to the spirit, the life energy that lies in every being in its own form of existence" (Ruether 1989, 146). Far from being anthropomorphic projection, to perceive others as others rather than objects is to meet them in a participatory encounter. Nonhuman others are not imbued with human characteristics in meeting them as persons, but are perceived in their otherness. To relate with a cat, I do not need

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<sup>57</sup> This I learned from Marie-Françoise Guédon.

to see a human face on the cat. The cat and I can intersubjectively meet as cat and human persons.

### **Inviting Others to Manifest as Persons**

It is not just that others can merely “appear” to be persons while in reality being “mere” animals, or “mere” stones. In phenomenological terms, other humans also “appear” and “manifest” themselves as persons. Building on Weston’s understanding of active invitation, the other encountered really is encountered as a person. The point is that the invitation is self-validating: when invited to be a person, the other becomes a person, in reality. As Buber teaches, one comes to be through the call of another. This need not be a literal call, but can be a metaphorical call, an invitation extended to the other through one’s silence and waiting, or through active seeking or appeal.

Weston would probably not go so far as to say nonhuman others can be persons, but his ideas of self-validating reduction and invitation elucidate how nonhuman others appear differently depending on our expectations and methods. It is not empirically measurable characteristics that make another a person rather than an object of thought, but how one approaches the other. The difference between persons and things is not what matters in meeting others, but the difference between persons and objects of thought. Humans can be made objects of thought just as any thing can be reduced to an object of thought, but things can also be invited to manifest themselves as other than human persons.

For those who follow Heidegger, a thing is not just an object, but “the thing itself.” Heidegger developed a phenomenological understanding of the presencing of things as distinct from the division between subjects and objects. His understanding of things is differently thematic from the usual categories of subjects and objects. For him, the thing is what it is, “‘a thing does only what it is’ and every thing, including every human being, ‘is’ only according to the ‘way’ nature, the holy, which draws its essence from itself, remains present in it’ (GA 65)” (Heidegger quoted in Llewelyn 1991, 120). As Llewelyn explains, Heidegger’s concern “is not properties that are possessed by objects and define their nature, but the belonging of a thing within the fourfold of nature or being as a whole in relation to which identification and classification into natural or artificial kinds are of ontologically secondary concern” (Llewelyn 1991, 120).

In the phenomenology of Heidegger, things presence as things, but persons are absent. For Heidegger, things are beings, including but not restricted to human beings. Things are “what exists,” “what stands forth,” (Heidegger 1971, 168) what gathers the fourfold (mortals or humans, earth, sky, and the divinities) in a way unique each to itself (Heidegger 1971, 174). Etymologically, to exist means to stand out, to stand forth. For Heidegger, all beings stand out, each thing unique in its gathering of the world. Levinas sees this gathering of things as an appropriation of the world in the sense of taking for one’s own, being *chez soi*. However, for Heidegger the things gather -- it is not just humans that gather things, but things gather the world, each in a unique conjunction. In

addition, in his understanding of “gathering” Heidegger also includes balanced relations within the fourfold, and caring or concern.<sup>58</sup>

Silvia Benso (Benso 1996, 132-132) recommends supplementing Heidegger and Levinas with one another to develop an ethic of things, rather than advocating the possibility of meeting other than human “things” as persons, as I am suggesting. Benso maintains an opposition between things and persons that I find open to question. Supplementing Heidegger and Levinas, she finds the alterity of things in their depth, in contrast to the alterity of other persons in their height (Benso 1996, 139). Things have “the open circularity of differing” (Benso 1996, 139), she says, while persons have the height of transcendence.

I wonder if things and persons might have both depth and transcendence. Persons are not only transcendent of being (if they are), but are also very much in the world. It is more important to transcend the limits of predetermined categories than it is to transcend being.<sup>59</sup> It is not things that are incapable of transcendence in this sense, but that our minds are too closed to the otherness of things. We are not only confined in monologues within our selves, as Franz Rosenzweig imaged with the figure of the tragic hero, but closed in the exclusive

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<sup>58</sup> Debates about what sort of ethics can be developed out of Heidegger’s sense of care and concern are too complex to discuss in depth here. Michael Zimmerman’s interpretation creates a positive ethic of dwelling with others out of Heidegger’s understanding of dwelling (Zimmerman 1985).

<sup>59</sup> I do not follow Levinas in positing any transcendence of being. I find it unnecessary and undesirable for ethics. It is unnecessary because, contrary to Levinas’ supposition, the natural world is not without ethics, as Franz de Waal’s observations about primates (1996), for example, demonstrate. I find the idea of transcendence of being undesirable for ethics, because I fear that the belief in transcendence of this world too easily leads to its devaluation.

human world of Western tradition, in which other animals, plants, and other things simply cannot appear as persons. More of us need to find our way into the more than human world where other than human persons do express themselves and transcend our expectations. Things might be other than they are if the force of our expectation was not so great, if we were more open to the possibility of surprise, of wonder.

Buber makes a distinction similar in spirit to the phenomenological distinction between perceiving noema and conceiving of things as objects of thought, developed by Heidegger in terms of letting things be, in his discussions of I-Thou and I-It relations. In an I-Thou relation, the other is met as a person, while in an I-It relation, the other is reduced to an object of thought. The two types of relation are not completely exclusive, in Buber's thought. He notes that in his encounter with a tree, he did not cease knowing things about the tree in meeting it in an I-Thou relation, but recognized that there is more to the tree than its empirically measurable characteristics (Buber 1970, 58). Thus, Buber's I-Thou relation is not necessarily non-thematic, but is less totalizing in its effects than a binary distinction between humans as persons and things as objects.

For most Westerners, Buber's accounts of I-Thou relations with things strain our credulity. According to the usual categories, persons are supposed to be alive and things inanimate. Persons, according to Western tradition, are supposed to be humans; things are not human. Persons are "us;" things are not-us. The construction of these types of binary distinctions homogenizes the

contents within categories while maintaining the difference between the categories. Buber's concept of I-Thou relations presents a differently thematic understanding of oneself and others in relation.

For Buber, things can be met as Thou, as well as humans. In *I and Thou*, Buber describes three spheres in which I-Thou relations occur: relations with nature, the interhuman, and relations with "spiritual beings"<sup>60</sup> (Buber 1970, 56-57). In *Between Man and Man* Buber describes the three spheres slightly differently, as the world and things, the interhuman, and relation to God (Buber 1947, 215). Buber explains that I-Thou relations occur in each sphere somewhat differently, but they are possible not only with humans, but also with plants and animals, as well as things like stones. Buber specifically describes I-Thou encounters with a tree (Buber 1970, 57-58), a cat (Buber 1970, 145), a horse (Buber 1947, 42), and a piece of mica (Buber 1970, 146-147). He says that although nonhuman others may not "reply," our contact with them is not without reciprocity when we address them, and that we should be open to whatever response appears, and "do justice" to it, "from the stones to the stars" (Buber 1970, 173).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This third sphere is often seen as the realm of art. Although it includes art in Buber's work, I do not think it is restricted to art. In I-Thou relations in this realm, the other inspires oneself to create, as oneself concurrently brings the other into being (Buber 1970, 66). In a way, this parallels Weston's understanding of invitation, in a more spiritual sense.

<sup>61</sup> Oddly, at the end of *Between Man and Man*, Buber indicates that, while a gorilla is an individual, I and Thou "exist only in our world" (Buber 1947, 246). This seems to contradict what he says about the three spheres in the other essays of *Between Man and Man*, and in *I and Thou*.



A stone might be a person, and is certainly more likely to be perceived as a person if it is invited to manifest itself as a person in interaction with oneself. Buber recognized this possibility in his writings about I-Thou encounters with nonhuman others. For Buber, it is not just a possibility, but is a primary way of relating with the world. Humans first encounter all others as other persons, as "Thou," and only later learn to treat others as lifeless things (Buber 1970, 78). He speaks of the way a child learns to distinguish a toy bear from the wall behind it, indicating that the child's first awareness of the bear is as a person, as Thou, rather than as an object. He suggests that although the child may supply the bear with its personhood out of her/his imagination, this should not lead one to suppose that the child did not meet the bear as Thou (Buber 1970, 77).

For Levinas, an ethic of things is out of the question. He criticized Buber for including things in I-Thou relations, because he found that this inclusion indicated that ethics were not inherent to I-Thou relations (Levinas 1989, 70). However, Buber felt that we can have ethical relationships with what Levinas calls "things" in the sense of nonhuman others. For Buber, I-Thou relations are inherently ethical, but we encounter more than just other humans in such relations. For Levinas, others (meaning other humans) express themselves -- they differ from things, because things just exist. Things might stand out from other things, but not out of being. In Levinas' view, things and others in the natural world cannot transcend themselves or being the way humans can. According to Berry, in contrast, all things seek self-transcendence (Berry 1988,

132), beginning with the "Big Bang," the creations of galaxies, and the elements. In Berry's view, there is an inherent tendency in all things, living or not, to transcend their current state, and develop more complex interrelations.

Any other can be a person, if we learn to perceive their expressions. "To express" is not only to speak, but is to manifest oneself, as all "things" do. It is a basic premise of phenomenology that things manifest themselves as things, and not only objects of thought. All that exists expresses itself, but we do not always notice the expressions of others. Humans tend to notice things through difference -- something catches our attention because it moved, or changed -- so we tend to see things like rocks and stones as inert. They do not appear to move, so we tend to think they do not express themselves. But consider the weight of the expression of a granite rock face, twenty stories tall, like the Eagles Nest in Bancroft, where I grew up. "To all appearances," that is, in human recollection, it has not moved, but it did about 10 000 years ago when the ice sheet receded. This particular bit of rock is quite noticeable without moving, hence it is named. It stands out from the pine-covered hills, a shear cliff of red granite, looking out over the York River winding through the valley that holds the villages of Bancroft and Bird's Creek.

Levinas, as discussed in the previous chapter, finds that expression requires having a face and thus a capacity for speech, as well as giving of oneself, in contrast to the standing out of things as beings in manifestation. However, "things" like the Eagles Nest are bedrock. Without the gift of bedrock we would

not have a place to be. The earth holds us in the gifting embrace of gravity that enables life on this planet.

### **Hearing Rocks into Speech**

I picked up a small piece of rock from an area of old growth forest in northern Ontario. This triangular shaped stone is less than a few centimetres long. One side is black and green, divided by a neat line, the other blends in exactly with the colour and pattern of the bark of the white pines of the Three Sisters, a group of mature pines that also live in the old growth forest where I found the stone. Its face sparkles faintly, rusting a bit on one of its rough edges, the iron bleeding out. Much of the rock in the area is of this sort of granite. There appears to be nothing special about this stone to make it stand out and cause me to bring it home with me, yet it spoke to me. It still does. It reminds me that I belong to this land. It is not merely a symbol of a relation that I have with the land, but speaks to me of our relation and my responsibilities.

Try considering a stone yourself, while bracketing the impulse to thematize in terms of things and persons, or living and animate. Begin by supposing the stone might be a person, and wait. Talk to it, but also listen. Imagine what it might say to you. Try this with actual others, rather than just thinking about it. Ignore that voice inside your head that tells you this is nonsense, that sensible people do not try to converse with stones or their pets. Talk to your houseplants. Go ahead, hug a tree. You might be surprised at what

you hear, and find yourself living in a neighbourhood of the more than human world.

## Part Two. Oneself

### Chapter 5. One's Own Domain

In part one, I have discussed alterity, the being of others, at length. In part two, in this chapter and the next, I discuss subjectivity in two broad forms, the being of oneself as the human subject in general,<sup>62</sup> and alternatively, oneself called to responsibility, otherwise than being in Levinas' terms. Levinas envisions human being, the human subject in general, as being *chez soi*, usually translated as "being at home with itself" or sometimes as "being at home with oneself." *Chez soi* might also be translated as "one's own." It is this way of being in the world, as if the world is one's own property, that prevents humans from recognizing others face to face, and prevents us from recognizing other than human persons.

Levinas criticizes being at home with itself for being deaf to others, wrapped up in itself, naturally egoistic, totalizing others into its own concerns. He identifies this with human subjectivity in general, but also links it to the philosophic notion of the subject. The Cartesian subject has been much criticized in contemporary thought, leading some to reject the idea of the self as inadequate, positing a fragmented understanding of subjectivity. However, others delineate a range of alternative subjectivities as cyborg, ecological, responsible, and multidimensional selves. In chapter six I discuss my

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<sup>62</sup> There is an enormous literature on the self in Western philosophy. Addressing the diversity within this literature is outside the purview of my current task. As indicated in chapter one, I restrict the scope of this work to examining and responding to select themes in Levinas work, relating them to a few concepts in environmental thought.

understanding of ethical subjectivity as being with/in. In this chapter, I examine Levinas' idea of being at home with itself, and his response of ethical subjectivity as the one for the other.

### **Being at Home with Itself**

Being at home with itself is Levinas' term for unethical subjectivity. It describes the self as a unitary self-enclosed ego, separate from others, enjoying and using objects, totalizing them into one's own world. Being at home with itself is the self, or human subject, understood as one's own domain, the self as sovereign. According to Levinas, being at home with itself is the self as naturally concerned with itself, but also corresponds to the philosophic understanding of the self,<sup>63</sup> culminating in the Cartesian subject. Being at home with itself is subjectivity as identical with itself, identified with itself, "the same," the unified "I think" (Levinas 1989, 173).

In being at home with itself, the self does not extend beyond itself to encounter the other. The self in this state sees others only in terms of I-It relations,<sup>64</sup> or as he and she in the third person, never meeting the other face to face (Levinas 1989, 63). As Levinas puts it, "The I experiences these; but only

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<sup>63</sup> The idea that there is a single "philosophic understanding of the self" is, of course, an overgeneralization that could be easily deconstructed to find a much greater diversity of understandings of the self in Western thought, many of them much more concerned with ethics than Levinas' writings about being at home with itself indicate. Rather than reading Western philosophy with a hermeneutic of retrieval, as Charles Taylor (1989), for example, Levinas, and perhaps most environmentalists, feel it is more important to put the Western tradition in question. I have elected to follow Levinas' train of thought here, leaving a broader inquiry into Western writings on the self for another project.

<sup>64</sup> As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Martin Buber develops the idea of I-It relations in contrast to I-Thou relations in *I and Thou* (Buber 1970).

explores their surface without committing its whole being ... and its experiences do not extend beyond itself" (Levinas 1989, 63). The self as being at home with itself knows the world by bringing things to mind, by drawing otherness into itself, totalizing. The self "*appropriates and grasps* the otherness of the known," (Levinas 1989, 76) rather than meets the other face to face.

Being at home with itself is self-enclosed. It recognizes only itself, experiencing everything in its own light, through a totalizing reason. It cannot hear, or otherwise perceive, others face to face. The self cannot truly encounter others in this state (Levinas 1989, 39). In this understanding of human subjectivity, Levinas is influenced by Franz Rosenzweig's understanding of the monologic nature of the tragic hero. Michael Oppenheim explains that in *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig uses the figure of the tragic hero of ancient Greek drama to illustrate the deficiencies of the philosophic notion of the self (Oppenheim 1997, 13). The tragic hero thinks of itself as a solitary being, and is unaware of the possibility of connection with other people. Because it thinks itself alone, it does not attempt to communicate with others. Rosenzweig explains:

The tragic hero has only one language which completely corresponds to him: precisely keeping silent....By keeping silent, the hero breaks down the bridges which connect him with God and the world, and elevates himself out of the fields of personality, delimiting itself and individualizing itself from others in speech, into the icy solitude of self. The self, after all, knows nothing outside itself: it is inherently solitary. (Rosenzweig 1985, 77)

Neil Evernden presents a parallel image of the subject: "He who says 'It'.... [denies] the subjective existence of everything in nature, he assures himself of safety within his stockade. With relationship denied, there is no reciprocity, and no other to threaten him. Deafness is a requirement, for any hint of subjectivity emanating from the world would be evidence of relatedness" (Evernden 1985, 99).

The self in narratives like these is closed to the world of others. In Rosenzweig's words, "It lives altogether inwardly....The self remained without a view beyond its walls; all that was world remained without. If it possessed the world within itself, it did so as personal property, not as world" (Rosenzweig 1985, 82). The self here sees itself as the only subject in a world populated by objects for its use, and attempts to totalize everything seen as other than itself into itself. As Oppenheim explains, "Both Rosenzweig and Levinas portray the individual as seeking to incorporate all that is different from the self, all alterity, into a single total system of thought and life that is coterminous with himself or herself" (Oppenheim 1997, 13). Being at home with itself is the self as sovereign, living as though the world is one's own domain. It is, however, an "imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison, ... at home with itself. Its power for illusion -- if illusion there was -- constituted its separation" (Levinas 1969, 55).



## **Ipeity and Being at Home with Itself as Separate**

Levinas envisions being at home with itself in terms of the subject alone, isolated, and separated (Levinas 1989, 38-39). For Levinas, being at home with itself is separate from others, but not separate from the world. The self, as being at home with itself, has a world, but does not meet others. Being at home with itself does not encounter others in the intersubjective world, but instead conceives of others and things in the idealist sense of phenomena, objects of thought. This self never encounters the actual others, but brings them to mind, to one's own world. In being at home with itself, the self has a world as *lebenswelt* or life world, the phenomenological sense of one's 'world,' a life world understood as the perceptual structure in which one is at home in the world, one's world-picture. Levinas interprets Heidegger's understanding of "being in the world" as being in one's own world, being at home with itself.

Being at home with itself is distinct from others in a binary, mutually exclusive sense, one's own domain separate from others. Some environmentalists, particularly deep ecologists and ecofeminists, have criticized the dominant model of the self as separate in this sense. Joanna Macy, for example, citing Gregory Bateson, says that the "abstraction of a separate 'I,'" is the "epistemological fallacy of Occidental civilization" (Macy 1989, 205). "The crises of our planet-time," Macy asserts

whether viewed in military or ecological or social terms, result from a dysfunctional and pathogenic concept of self. It is a mistake about our place in the order of things. It is the delusion that the self

is so separate and fragile that we must delineate and defend its boundaries, that it is so small and needy that we must endlessly acquire and endlessly consume, that it is so aloof that we can -- as individuals, corporations, nation-states or as a species -- be immune to what we do to other beings. (Macy 1989, 202-3)

Separation of oneself from the world is necessary for having a sense of "I," for ipseity, in Levinas' work. Having a sense of oneself as separate, rather than being a stumbling block for ethics as Macy finds, is, in Levinas' view, a necessary precursor to ethical relations. While Rosenzweig and Levinas criticize the tendency of the subject to merge the world and all others into it's own self, Macy pictures the self as attempting to hold itself separate from the world. The self acts as though others and the natural world are objects, seeing itself as sovereign of the All, to use Rosenzweig's term, but can only manage this by conceptually removing itself from the world. It is the sovereign of an imaginary realm, an image of the world collapsed into the narrow parameters of the self as one's own, insensate to the actual world of others. This self is being without, without the world and without others. Macy presents this as a problem of the perception of the self as separate, while Levinas and Rosenzweig view it as a problem of the self attempting to cognize everything as part of itself.

Levinas is concerned to maintain the separation between self and other in order to privilege the other, as a corrective to the privileging of the Cartesian subject. Macy seeks to solve the problem by breaking down the separation and binary opposition of self and other, while Rosenzweig and Levinas instead speak of a breaking of the self. I find both views necessary to challenge unethical

subjectivity. One's obligation for the other must come before oneself in ethics, privileging the other, but the binary opposition of self and other must also be challenged. The other is separate from oneself, is necessarily different from oneself, but not in a merely correlative sense. Levinas depicts this as the other wholly different from oneself, wholly otherwise, but it is possible to meet others ethically through polythetic differentiation.

The self-enclosure of being at home with itself is unethical, because it is deaf to the cries of others, ignoring the suffering of nonhuman others in the world, but it is also to some degree necessary in contemporary Western culture. One must learn to mediate the multitudes of voices, or be overwhelmed. We learn to pretend that we are not addressed by the world in defence. The volume (in degree and quantity, as well as sound) of advertising in late industrial capitalism is deafening. It creates a vicious circle of deadening of senses due to over-stimulation, and increasing attention-grabbing tactics of the media and advertisers. For psychological health, we need to be able to create a boundary between ourselves and the world. A separate self is necessary, but not a self-enclosed self.

Considering environmental issues in ethics, separation of the self from the world is not exactly the problem; cognitive separation with actual embeddedness and exploitation of the world perpetuates environmental destruction. Even if one's sense of oneself is as separate from the world and others, one remains physically within it. Ascetic withdrawal from the world would not cause as

many problems as do conspicuous consumption and the exploitative control exhibited by the self enacted as sovereign, perceiving and treating the world as one's own domain.

### **Nature and Being at Home with Itself**

Levinas presents being at home with itself as a natural state for humans. A "concern or obsession of the self with itself," both Rosenzweig and Levinas felt, is inauthentic, but natural (Oppenheim 1997, 13). While "the traditional philosophic endeavor constitutes its clearest expression," for Rosenzweig and Levinas "the self [is] the originator of this idea" of totalizing all into one's own (Oppenheim 1997, 14). For Levinas, the self, being at home with itself, exists as a natural being, without ethics. He asks, "What is an individual, a solitary individual, if not a tree that grows without regard for everything it suppresses and breaks, grabbing all the nourishment, air and sun, a being that is fully justified in its nature and its being? What is an individual, if not a usurper?" (Levinas 1990, 100).

What is a tree if not itself, an individual, an other in relation? The elm tree behind my house is a living being in community, cooperating with other beings in sharing the ground, exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide, providing shade for trout lilies, periwinkle, and a bleeding heart, all of whom would perish were it not for the shade of the elm tree. Perhaps it is only humans who require conscience, due to our greater capacity for wrongdoing. Being at home with

itself is a human mode of being, and, more specifically, a Western mode of being. Who is it but humans that most exploit others, usurping the habitats of other species? This is not natural behaviour, if "natural" is understood to be what is normal (commonly found to be the case) in the natural world of living ecosystems.

Admittedly, creatures eat each other to survive, and nature can be characterized as a "struggle for life," as Levinas sees it (Wright et al. 1988, 172). However, the role of competition in nature has been overemphasized in evolutionary theory. Mary Midgley explains that "the competition relevant to natural selection is mainly that within a species, rather than that without. It is within each species that the selection of different lines produces changes" (Midgley 1983, 24). Furthermore, competition "goes on, both within species and between them, without the consciousness of those involved in it, and does not at all require what we think of on our tiny scale as deliberate competitive behaviour. (Indeed, it is often best tackled by friendliness and co-operation)" (Midgley 1983, 24). This does not wholly counter Levinas' point, because he would probably agree that the natural competition (which he identifies with disregard for others) is not conscious. For Levinas, consciousness is created only in conscience; ethics create reason. However, at least for social species, such as humans and other primates, as well as wolves, whales, and dolphins, ethical

behaviour, putting another before oneself, is natural.<sup>65</sup> The line between ethical and unethical subjectivity cannot be drawn along the lines of nature and transcendence of being as nature. Despite the simple eloquence of the idea that ethics transcend being by replacing "is" with "ought," it is the situation in "the now," that is transcended, not being. Being remains inherent to the (complete) phrase "what ought to be."

### **Cultural Origins of Being at Home with Itself**

I see being at home with itself as not so much a natural as a cultural condition. The sovereign self is a Western phenomenon, an historical condition, developed within a group of cultures, and perpetuated through social conditioning. While the sovereign self is accepted as psychologically normal in contemporary Euro-Canadian culture, it is not "natural" to regard others as objects. It is a learned behaviour. In order to treat others as objects, children have to be taught to regard themselves as autonomous rather than interdependent. Children do not "naturally" regard themselves as anything; they learn to conceive of themselves, and this can be as independent or interdependent, or somewhere in between.

Evernden posits the Renaissance as the point of origin of the egoistic self. "Around the time of the Renaissance," he says, "man became an individual. C. S. Lewis concludes that the medieval model of space provided the feeling of

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<sup>65</sup> Weston cites a number of anecdotal examples of ethical behaviour in members of other species in *Back to Earth* (1994). Franz de Waal has done extensive research demonstrating ethical behaviour in primates (de Waal 1996).

looking in on the world, whereas modern man feels that he is 'like one looking out from the saloon entrance on to the dark Atlantic, or from the lighted porch upon the dark and lonely moors'" (Evernden 1985, 85). Evernden suggests that in the Renaissance the natural world was divested of meaning, placing all value into the ego alone, resulting in "an aggrandizement of the individual human being and the creation of a bare and bleached environment" (Evernden 1985, 50).

I would hesitate to specify any single origin of the idea of the self or subject as sovereign. Probably a genealogy of the subject, such as the genealogy of sexuality pursued by Michel Foucault (1978; 1986; 1988), or a series of genealogies, would be more appropriate. Certainly Descartes does not deserve all the blame, as Evernden's suggests he does, saying "In convincing us that the world is composed of distinct subjects and objects [Descartes] insulated us from concern with the world and made it next to impossible for us to regard the world as anything but a storehouse of material" (Evernden 1985, 54).

As Evernden acknowledges, "Descartes's failings have been amply discussed in the philosophical literature. Yet public faith has never been shaken, for his ideas have achieved a separate existence" (Evernden 1985, 54). Evernden is correct in saying that (Western) public faith in what it means to be a human self has not been sufficiently challenged yet. The way that faith is reflected and represented by governments and corporations in their economic renderings of the world continues. Economics, and some applications of science in public policy, still tend to regard the world as an object for the use of human subjects.

Oppenheim suggests that the philosophical notion of the self, the idea of the person as essentially a rationally self-interested entity, "has its foundation in René Descartes's 'cogito,' the famous dictum that, 'I think, therefore I am'" (Oppenheim 1997, 11). This Cartesian self emphasizes the rational and autonomous capacities of the self, the ability to think, to reason, and to act in one's own interest (Oppenheim 1997, 11). This understanding of the self as the subject originates with Descartes, but Levinas' idea of being at home with itself is more of an historical culmination than a phenomenon with an identifiable specific origin.

Rosenzweig's work suggests that this problematic understanding of the self as subject can be traced back to Greek tragedy. As Oppenheim says,

Rosenzweig and Levinas are highly critical of what they hold to be a single philosophic tradition emerging in ancient Greece and continuing through nineteenth-century German lands, or, in their terms, from 'Iona to Jena' and beyond. This tradition took the Cartesian self as its true content. They criticize it, not just in the vein that this philosophic endeavor misses something -- that is, that it does not see what lies beyond or beneath the panorama of the philosophic vision. They contend that philosophy has ignored -- or, better, has not heard -- a cry that has its origin outside of the insular totality of the self's world. The nature of this cry, and its ramifications for giving orientation to a person, are central foci for Rosenzweig and Levinas. They speak of how encountering other persons saves the self from the dead end, or the violence, of self-enclosed totality. (Oppenheim 1997, 13)

Mauss' essay on the category of the person (Mauss 1985) also details the development of the idea of the person beginning with Greek drama, albeit in a different context. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mauss describes the



development of the idea of the person from a role in Greek drama, to a legal designation in Roman civilization, of the self as one's own property, to the modern idea of the self as self-identical, free, and, he says, responsible.

Levinas views being at home with itself as a natural tendency, but evolving toward ethical subjectivity, as ethics emerges out of being, and out of philosophy, particularly out of the works of Hegel and Heidegger. John Llewelyn finds that "it is Hegel who is the author most in question in *Totality and Infinity*" (Llewelyn 1991, 281), since it was Hegel who said "Philosophy is being at home with self, just like the homeliness of the Greek; it is man's being at home in his mind, at home with himself. If we are at home with the Greeks, we must be at home more particularly with philosophy" (Hegel, quoted in Llewelyn 1991, 282). Levinas argues that this being at home with itself is unethical, and solicits us to transcend being into ethical subjectivity. Levinas does not debate the philosophic description of subjectivity as accurate to how humans are, but calls us into question for being this way. I find that the Cartesian understanding of subjectivity is inadequate both in terms of describing human subjectivity, and ethical sufficiency -- ethical subjectivity is "better" in both senses. Before describing Levinas' and my understanding of ethical subjectivity in greater detail, I will look at a trend in postmodern thought following the rejection of the Cartesian subject in Western philosophy.

## **Fragmentation: Postmodern Subjectivities**

Postmodernists, according to Jane Flax, tend to reject the concept of the self altogether (Flax 1990, 30). Flax explains that, following the psychology of Lacan and the philosophy of Derrida, the self is understood to be decentred, a fiction, merely a position in language. The attempts of the self "to impose a fictive or narrative order or structure on experience or events are constantly preconstituted and undermined by desire, language, the unconscious, and the unintended effects of the violence required to impose such an order" (Flax 1990, 32).

Such postmodern responses to the Cartesian notion of the self suggest that the notion of self should be rejected because this metanarrative of the Enlightenment is dysfunctional. Flax argues that postmodern discourse generally fails to recognize a difference between the subject in the Cartesian sense and the possibility of, or necessity for, a "core" self. "From a psychoanalytic viewpoint," she says, "postmodernist discourses on subjectivity are naive and self-deceptive. Postmodernists seem unaware of the possible differences between a core self and a unitary one" (Flax 1990, 210).

Following psychologist D. W. Winnicott's object relations theory, Flax distinguishes between a core or deep self, and the self as criticized in postmodern thought. Winnicott, she says, "distinguishes between a 'false' self that *is* overly rigid, intellectualized, and controlling and an alternate, 'true' one that has many of the characteristics of the postmodernist 'decentered' one but fewer of the

deficiencies" (Flax 1990, 110). She adds that object relations theory also supports "the suspicions of feminist (and other) theorists about the postmodernist project of abandoning all language of or desire for a self" (Flax 1990, 110).

Flax suggests that although postmodern theorists appear to reject the idea of the self, "certain elements of each writer's theory in fact presuppose it. The capacity for aesthetic or mystical experience (Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault), the ability to utter new and interesting sentences (Rorty), and the will to resist totalizing discourses (Foucault) all require a 'deep' subjectivity" (Flax 1990, 210). It appears as though at least some postmodern discourses on the subject do not dispense with subjectivity in favour of fragmentation, but suggest forms of alternative subjectivities, often presented as more authentic than the Cartesian subject. Derrida, for example, does demonstrate awareness of the difference between a necessary core, and necessarily critiqued unity or totality. He says, in a related context, that while heterogeneity, difference, and disassociation are necessary for ethics, "singularity" is also necessary:

we do not have to choose between unity and multiplicity. Of course, deconstruction -- that has been its strategy up to now -- insisted not on multiplicity for itself but on the heterogeneity, the difference, the disassociation, which is absolutely necessary for the relation to the other. What disrupts the totality is the condition for the relation to the other. The privilege granted to unity, to totality, to organic ensembles, to community as a homogenized whole -- this is a danger for responsibility, for decision, for ethics, for politics. That is why I insisted on what prevents unity from closing upon itself, from being closed up. This is not a matter of description, of saying this is the way it is. It is a matter of accounting for the possibility of responsibility, of a decision, of ethical commitments. To understand this, you have to pay

attention to what I would call singularity. Singularity is not simply unity or multiplicity. Now, this does not mean that we have to destroy all forms of unity wherever they occur.... Of course, we need unity, some gathering, some configuration. You see, pure unity or pure multiplicity -- when there is only totality or unity and when there is only multiplicity or dissociation -- is a synonym of death. (Derrida 1997, 13)

The tendency of the self, as being at home with itself, toward totalization, requires some sort of disruption, but not complete dissociation or fragmentation. The two polarities are not the only options.

Derrida's views on totalization, disruption, and ethics are, of course, inspired by Levinas' work. The other interrupts being at home with itself, tearing one out of one's own concern for itself. Levinas suggests an alternative form of subjectivity, an ethical subjectivity that is not fragmented, but torn open, exposed to the other. This self is in exile from being at home with itself, denucleated. For Levinas, in ethics the self is not fragmented into incoherence, but interrupted, and reoriented, by the other. Levinas' understanding of subjectivity "grounds" itself in ethics, oriented toward the other, whereas fragmented models have not found any new centre or organizing principle.

While Levinas rejects the language of ontology (of subjects, and of being) he still accepts the possibility of authentic selves, or at least the possibility of authentic relations with others. He suggests that we need to replace ontology, not that we need to redefine being, but that we should reject "being" as an authentic category. As Oppenheim says, "Levinas holds that philosophy, as ontology, expresses a fundamental feature of humans -- namely, the urge toward

totality. By this, he means that philosophy, through the exposition of that which exists or Being, incorporates all that is different from the self -- that is, alterity, into a single universal system" (Oppenheim 1997, 14). Levinas closely identifies ontology with the Cartesian notion of the self.

When asked about "the disappearance, or the demise, of the subject" discussed in postmodern philosophy, Levinas replies that he rejects the model of the self of ontology, in favour of a "meontological version of subjectivity.... Ethical subjectivity" (Levinas 1986, 27). In *Speaking/Writing of God*, Oppenheim suggests that Levinas (and Rosenzweig) "do not represent a purely modern nor postmodern position," at least in terms of their understandings of the self, because for them the self is not fragmented, and does not find meaning in itself alienated from the world, but in encountering the other (Oppenheim 1997, 24).

Levinas does not reject subjectivity in his critique of ontology, even when he rejects the language of the subject. "Having" a self is not ethical, yet a self is necessary for ethics. Levinas critiques "having a self" as "one's own," but subjectivity, he agrees, remains necessary. As Levinas says, oneself is called upon as "me" in face to face relations. Who is responsible if not oneself? Some form of subjectivity is necessary for taking responsibility.

Levinas demonstrates that ethical subjectivity is a possible, and necessary, alternative to being at home with itself. He offers an ethical alternative to some nihilistic tendencies in poststructuralist discussions of the death of the subject. Where Derrida, Levinas says, sees "the deconstruction of the Western

metaphysics of presence as an irredeemable crisis," Levinas sees "it as a golden opportunity for Western philosophy to open itself to the dimension of otherness and transcendence beyond being" (Levinas 1986, 28). Rather than simply rejecting the Cartesian subject, Levinas recommends the "heteronomous responsibility" of ethical subjectivity instead of the "autonomous freedom" of ontology, and the Western philosophic notion of the self (Levinas 1986, 27).

Subjectivity remains necessary also for mental health and the capacity to interact with others in community. Flax raises an important point about the necessity of having a sense of what she calls a "core self," for one's mental health, and for participating in meaningful relationships, both in terms of parenting, and participation in political movements. From her work with people suffering from borderline syndrome she concludes that without a sense of core self the experience of the self as fragmented or decentred is felt as "a terrifying slide into psychosis," where common sensations of pleasure and interactions with the world "are simply not possible" (Flax 1990, 218-219).

As Levinas, Rosenzweig, Macy, Flax, and others agree, the notion of subjectivity is still a useful, and necessary. Although the Cartesian notion of the self and being at home with itself are problematic forms of subjectivity, the notion of selfhood has value. The self is other than and more than the Cartesian notion of it, not simply an Enlightenment fiction to be discarded. While the self is not the discrete unitary entity Descartes imagined it to be, this does not prevent the self from being a meaningful structure. Alternative subjectivities are

possible, and ethical subjectivities can help humans recognize more than human persons.

### **The One for the Other**

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas develops an ethical alternative to being at home with itself, as “the one for the other,” oneself responsible to, and for, the other. This form of subjectivity is not constituted as a Cartesian subject, but is oneself, “me,” responsible to the other. “The one for the other” is the one who says “*me voici*,” or “here I am,” rather than conceiving of itself as the “I think” (Levinas 1989, 182, 184). Levinas speaks of this form of ethical subjectivity in terms of substitution, proximity, exteriority, and hospitality in relation to the other.

Levinas’ idea of substitution expresses an alternative to the philosophic idea of subjectivity as the “for itself.” Rather than being a being who exists for itself, in ethical subjectivity oneself becomes “the one for the other” (Levinas 1998, 102). Rather than being identified with oneself, the one for the other substitutes oneself: “a substitution of me for the others” (Levinas 1998, 114).

Levinas explains:

This self is out of phase with itself, forgetful of itself, forgetful in biting in upon itself, in the reference to itself which is the gnawing away at oneself of remorse. These are not events that happen to an empirical ego, that is, to an ego already posited and fully identified, as a trial that would lead it to being more conscious of itself, and make it more apt to put itself in the place of others. What we are here calling oneself, or the other in the same, where inspiration arouses respiration, the very pneuma of the psyche, precedes this

empirical order, which is a part of being, of the universe, of the State, and is already conditioned in a system. (Levinas 1998, 115-116)

The one for the other does not simply put itself in place of the suffering of others, although this is part of ethical relations, but is inspired by the other in a metaphysical sense.

I find Levinas' work on substitution hard to follow. Earlier in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, he says that the one for the other is an alienation:

In the subject it is precisely not an assembling, but an incessant alienation of the ego (isolated as inwardness) by the guest entrusted to it. Hospitality, the-one-for-the-other in the ego, delivers it more passively than any passivity from links in a causal chain. Being torn from oneself for another in giving to the other the bread from one's mouth is being able to give up one's soul for another. The animation of a body by a soul only articulates the-one-for-the-other in subjectivity. (Levinas 1998, 79)

However, later he says that the one for the other is not an alienation: "What can it be but a substitution of me for the others? It is, however, not an alienation, because the other in the same is my substitution for the other through responsibility, for which, I am summoned as someone irreplaceable. I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired" (Levinas 1998, 114). Levinas denies that ethical relations can be reciprocal, so it cannot be that the other is in oneself by inspiring oneself reciprocally to the substitution of oneself as the one for the other. One does not take the place of the other but welcomes the other in hospitality. The other inspires oneself, the other in the same, while one substitutes oneself for the other,



as in "the one for the other." Perhaps the other replaces one's concern for one's own (the substitution of the other in the same), while one replaces being at home with itself in substituting the one for the other.

Proximity, in Levinas' one for the other, is an approach to, or contact with, the other that is not fusion, that does not reduce the other to a theme of one's own discourse. It is not exactly nearness, but alludes to the ethical imperative of the nearness of the neighbour as "the nighest one." It does not describe a spatial relation, but is an ethical relation with the other (Levinas 1998, 83). To be in proximity is to be already obligated to the other, obsessed by the other.

"Proximity," Levinas says,

is not a state, a repose, but, a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest. It overwhelms the calm of the non-ubiquity of a being which becomes at rest in a site. No site then, is ever sufficiently a proximity, like an embrace. Never close enough, proximity does not congeal into a structure, save when represented in the demand for justice as reversible, and reverts into a simple relation. (Levinas 1998, 82)

Proximity is a paradoxical closeness that preserves the distance of the other -- in proximity oneself is intimately close to the other, yet the other remains remote, above oneself.

Exteriority is another spatial metaphor that Levinas uses in discussing ethical subjectivity. Ethics come to pass outside, beyond, or exterior to being. In discussing the face to face, Levinas focuses on the other, on ethical alterity, the exposure of the other, the defencelessness of the other (e.g., Levinas 1989, 82-83). Later, in *Otherwise than Being*, he focuses on ethical subjectivity and the exposure

of oneself, in terms of lack of shelter, and the expression of oneself. In both cases, ethics are exterior, beyond being, outside of being. In ethics the other is above oneself, and oneself transcends being.

Levinas' language of transcendence of being in describing exteriority does not fully resonate with my work. Exteriority as turned inside out, held open, torn, and especially as interrupted, are closer to how I see ethical subjectivity. I take "being" to mean something different from how Levinas regards it. He means "being" as essentially understood, generally as being at home with itself. For me, being is a transitory, ephemeral process (not phenomenon) by nature. I see exteriority as being turned inside out, but not beyond being. We need to transcend being at home with itself, but not being as nature.

The one for the other is oneself not being at home with itself, in exile of one's own, torn open, welcoming the other in hospitality. Oneself in ethics, torn open by the interruption of the other, welcomes the other into one's own ego (Levinas 1998, 79). One is then no longer being at home with itself, but host to the other. Rather than reducing the other to the same in thematization, one welcomes the face of the other (Levinas 1969, 299). One gives of oneself, even to the point of "giving to the other the bread from one's mouth" and "being able to give up one's soul for another" (Levinas 1998, 79).

Welcoming implies an opening of the self to the other, but also implies ownership of what the other is invited into. This is appropriate for Levinas,

because he finds that a natural egoism in a sense precedes ethical subjectivity.<sup>66</sup> Weston's understanding of invitation has similar connotations, but does not imply that oneself is first at home before inviting another into relation, or to express themselves as persons in my understanding of invitation. Rather than providing hospitality, I prefer a metaphor of meeting on the trail, and inviting others to meet oneself as persons, and to share the land, waters, and sky together. In the more than human world, we need places to meet others that do not diminish either of us, that allow each to go our separate ways while enabling invitation. This sort of invitation requires spaces for ethical interactions to unfold, in terms of time as well as providing physical space.

In the next chapter, I develop an understanding of ethical subjectivity as being with/in through two metaphors: as building a canoe, and as a nexus (that is an interrupted conjunction). This form of subjectivity is torn, interrupted, and held open to others, like Levinas' understanding of the one for the other, but is not a host to others. In being with/in, I explore possibilities in ranging through territories of the more than human world without trying to own a place as one's own domain.

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<sup>66</sup> Egoism is natural to being at home with itself, which both precedes and does not precede ethical subjectivity, in Levinas' view. This is not exactly clear in his work, because he writes of the command of ethics as anarchic, both prior to, and beyond, being.

## Chapter 6. Being With/in

Building on Levinas' ethical alternative to being at home with itself, "the one for the other," as oneself responsible to the other human, in this chapter I develop a form of ethical subjectivity responsible not only to human others, but to all others in the more than human world. I call this form of ethical subjectivity "being with/in." Like Levinas' "the one for the other," being with/in provides an alternative to Cartesian subjectivity and the fragmented subjectivities of postmodern thought. Being with/in addresses the questions of "what does it mean to be a human self in a more than human world?" and "who is this 'our' in 'what are our obligations to others?'" It explores what it means to be a person in relation, to be with/in the more than human world, and what it means to be a person considering postmodern and environmentalist thought. Like Levinas, my answers to these questions are given in the first person: I am obligated, "me." I discuss this understanding of ethical subjectivity as being with/in relation to sovereign, ecological, relational, and cyborg models of the self.

For Levinas' understanding of ethical subjectivity, the experience of being at home with itself is formative. In my life, the fragmentation resultant from the collapse of faith in the subject and in God has shaped my understanding of ethical subjectivity. For a long time, I could not see how it might be possible to hold oneself together ethically, or how to regain a sense of orientation. Cartesian subjectivity was inadequate, but I could not find a more satisfactory language of subjectivity, or way of narrating my life in a meaningful way. Levinas' work

gives a different means of orienting myself, and suggests an alternative means of describing my relations with others in a way that ethically makes sense after postmodern fragmentation.

### **Being Lost**

As Nietzsche has said, "Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind ...One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence" (Nietzsche 1967, 35). Like the death of God, the demise of the subject has been felt in philosophy as a decentring and disorienting experience of nihilism. Levinas recognizes this as a nostalgia for totality, saying that in "the whole trend of Western philosophy culminating in the philosophy of Hegel...One can see this nostalgia for totality ....It is as if the totality had been lost, and that this loss were the sin of the mind" (Levinas 1985, 76).

Nietzsche described the nihilism of the early stages of postmodern thought in terms of dissolution and disillusion: "Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?...God is dead" (Nietzsche 1974, 181). To fragment and fall

apart is a first response to the loss of the totalizing vision of being at home with itself.

But Nietzsche also provides a clue to a way out: "We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us. Now little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean" (Nietzsche 1974, 180-181). Nietzsche has a boat, but how does he navigate? How is one to plot a course without a foundation or overarching structure, without a God transcendent of the natural world, without reference to a suprasensory realm? Nietzsche's little ship is blown around by the wind, rather than propelling himself in a chosen direction. In losing his foundation, he loses a foundation for ethics, as does Western philosophy in general. Levinas, however, does not lose his sense of God or transcendence, but nor does he continue to base his ethics in a foundational philosophy. Levinas' understanding of oneself as ethical subjectivity is decentred, but not without orientation. I am sympathetic to Nietzsche's sense of being lost without the secure foundations of religious faith, but the orientation on the other Levinas that develops does not require this foundation.<sup>67</sup>

### **Restructuring Oneself**

One still needs a sense of self after postmodern critiques of the subject, and a fragmented self will not suffice. After experiencing fragmentation, one can

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<sup>67</sup> Within Levinas' work, God is necessary for ethics to come to pass. However, God is not a foundation for these ethics; ethics are anarchic, without *arche* or foundation, for Levinas. Developing ethics out of Levinas' work does not then require God as a foundation, and may or may not refer to God. For Levinas, God is the only exit out of being, while for me, exiting being is not necessary for ethics.

tack together the fragments, and build oneself anew in ethical subjectivity. We need some structure to build a self (we need a "core," as Jane Flax says), but it need not be a "house," as implied in being at home with itself. One needs a place to be, but it need not be exclusively one's own. One can range about a territory and be at home, without owning one's home as a domain. Perhaps, then, instead of trying to avoid rebuilding the master's house by using the master's tools, we should try making something else, looking not to build a new house but another sort of structure, something mobile, manoeuvrable, suited to the terrain in which we find ourselves. For me this is a canoe.

A canoe is a small watercraft, usually about twice as long as an adult human is tall, tapered at both ends, and propelled by paddle. Canoes do not have closed decks, but are instead open on top, held open by thwarts. This structure is not a shelter, or at least not a good one. In the rain, I can crawl under my canoe, but it does little to shelter me, and this is not what it is designed for. A canoe is a means of transport, more like a verb than a noun.

While a ship has a home port, a canoe has a home territory: not a place to call one's own, but where one belongs (belongs to the land instead of vice versa). Canoes do not need safe harbours, but can be pulled up on almost any shore. Unlike a ship, one does not pilot a canoe. To paddle a canoe, if paddling solo, one sits not in the centre, but in the stern, a bit off to one side so the canoe is angled in the water. (Canoes can hold more than one person, like I hope to, in having children. Also, I share my canoe with my spouse, but it is still my canoe.)

A canoe does not drown out the sounds of others like a motorboat, nor does it pollute the water with gas and oil. In a canoe, one travels through the land.

Kneeling at water level, one can be with/in the land, not the centre of a totalizing gaze of the world as one's own. Travelling by canoe, my ability to appropriate things for myself (as in being at home with itself) is restricted, because I need to be able to portage: I am limited by how much I can carry, including gear and the canoe. The canoe is designed not only to carry me, but for me to be able to carry it.

A canoe does not need to be elaborate. It can be built with the materials one finds locally, in areas in which canoes are an appropriate means of travel. My great uncle built his first canoe with a handsaw. (He said it looked like "a sick horse with its ribs sticking out," but it was functional.) A canoe can be made as a dugout, or it can be built using birch bark and black spruce roots, or skins and driftwood. I am building a cedar strip canoe, following the techniques developed through trial and error by my great uncle. I am using lumber and tools that my great uncle left to my father when he passed on, and I am doing this with the help of my father's knowledge of his canoe building techniques.

First we cut and shaped ribs out white ash, to give the canoe strength. The gunwales are also white ash, strong enough to give the canoe structure, and, when boiled, flexible enough to be shaped. The keel, also white ash, will lend the canoe stability and manoeuvrability in the water. The strips of white cedar are glued over the ribs, to give the canoe its flexible outer form. Over this goes the



waterproofing skin of the hull. This gives the canoe protection, but is the most vulnerable to damage of all parts of the canoe, like healthy ego boundaries.

A canoe is a well-suited craft for the land in which I grew up, the Canadian Shield. The waters of this land are not necessarily symbolic of the dissolution and the disillusion of Nietzsche's little ship tossed on the sea. Water is not only a symbol, and although the oceans have their appeal, I would prefer to stick to the interlacing rivers, lakes, and streams of the land with which I am most familiar, within the Ottawa Valley. James Raffan suggests that, "By virtue of having three oceans fed by rivers and lakes throughout the country, Canada is also a land of canoes.....And for each river, each waterway, there is a people or layers of people through time who are bound to the land and to the water by a canoe" (Raffan 1999, 2). Raffan is correct insofar as saying that this is true of "the wilderness fantasy that is Canada" (Raffan 1999, ix); it expresses a prominent myth of Canadian identity, but it is not true to all regions or peoples of Canada. While a canoe may be "the most appropriate vehicle for travelling the greater part of this boreal country" (Raffan and Horwood 1988, 1), not all of Canada is boreal. Kayaks are better suited to the waters of the Arctic Ocean, and neither a canoe nor a kayak is much use in the midst of the prairies. I draw attention to this because I do not intend that this canoe narrative of subjectivity be totalizing, or all encompassing. As William C. James cautions, "Perhaps as Canadians we are never more nostalgic, never more atavistic, than when we get into a canoe. But it is well to be cautious before uncritically rhapsodizing about the

transformative possibilities inherent in canoe trips seen as mythic quests. The canoe has no magical properties..." (James 1998, 99).

Canoes can take advantage of variable winds to move across streams, changing tacks, but can also paddle against the wind or current when necessary, like when ethics require going against the mainstream. But perhaps I am getting carried away with myself in developing this canoe metaphor. Are we all in the same boat? In the sense conveyed by Haida artist Bill Reid's *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, we are all in the same boat when it comes to "the environment" in general. We are all in the same boat in the sense that we all, different groups of humans and other species, share this planet. All waters flow into the sea, and all are connected, but they are not the same, and the crafts we use to navigate the waters are not all the same, nor should they be. Navigation and crafts need to be appropriate to the lands and waters in which one finds oneself. (I mean finding oneself in a place also literally, as one's sense of self develops in response to all the others of the place.) Others might find coracles, umiaks, or kayaks better than canoes, or maybe rafts, sailboats, even a *quaffa*, or curagh.<sup>68</sup> We do not all need to live in the same way, but all need to live in ways that are appropriate to where we live, and that will not spoil the waters and atmosphere that form the larger part of our shared context and global environment.

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<sup>68</sup> A *quaffa* is an Iraqi ferry woven out of withes (like wicker furniture) and caulked with bitument. A curragh or *curach* is a large Irish coracle, able to carry about twenty people (Arima 1999, 45). Other people might have a more collective notion of self, and consequently find a larger boat more suitable.

Perhaps we are not all in the same boat, so much as in the same (hot) water. Then again, the rich do not feel environmental impacts to the same degree as the poor, and research into environmental justice, and environmental racism indicates that class privilege is often also race privilege. Some people have ocean liners that dump tonnes of raw sewage in the seas. This is quite different from the small craft I am building, but even having the possibility of building a recreational boat locates me in a position of privilege.

My canoe narrative of ethical subjectivity as being with/in is situated, and embedded, not only in the more than human world, but also culturally. It is provisional, contingent, responsive, and creative. It applies to my cultural situation as I perceive it. It is necessarily respondent to other narratives of subjectivity, specifically, the Cartesian notion of the self as subject, and criticisms of this, including responses from modern Jewish philosophers and postmodernists, as well as ecofeminists and other environmentalists. There is not much that can be said about being, subjectivity, or the self, or what it is to be human, that is universal -- perhaps only that it is contingent, partial, provisional, never finished, never fully thematized. What I say here about subjectivity is offered as a particular narrative of being with/in, which I hope is ethical. It is intended to be a form of ethical subjectivity, one that is more inclusive than models which focus on the thinking self, the self as a subject, or even self as described by the boundary limits of one's body. It is a form of subjectivity as "my life," described through a narrative that includes others, a story told from

my perspective, without denying that others can also tell stories from their perspectives.

The subjectivity of being with/in describes being as a verb, tacking oneself together as an ongoing process. It is also being through a range, mobile subjectivity, belonging to a place without owning it. Being with/in is being in relation, not sovereign. It describes belonging without ownership of oneself, being without the right to be, as provisional (never finished or whole), as constructed (not an essential or universal, unchanging entity), as individual (called as oneself, "me," answering the call to ethics), and as interrupted (with/in -- interrupted by the others one finds oneself with, in context, in situation). The subjectivity of being with/in an interrupted conjunction, always in context, implicated in the world, always already obligated to others in ethics and justice.

### **Range and Permeability of Oneself as Being With/in**

The move from the subject-object relations of Cartesian subjectivity, to the interpersonal relations of ethical subjectivity, can be understood as a change of perception in terms of domain to range. Subjectivity does not have to be a discrete entity, as Descartes imagined it to be, for it to be a meaningful concept. One's sense of oneself does not need to be as a static subject, but should be fluidly stable for mental health. Meaning can be perceived without ordering continuous phenomena into discrete packages with arbitrarily placed, stratified,

solidified, or rigid boundaries. The lack of rigid boundaries does not indicate the loss of the concept or thing that was rigidly defined.

The sovereign self, being at home with itself, perceives itself as the sovereign of a domain, fixed with clearly demarcated boundaries. In being with/in I perceive myself as the nexus of a variable range, a flexible area with permeable boundaries, connected to various others in a variety of relations, belonging to various groups, such as neighbourhoods, voluntary associations, ecosystems, and bioregions. This nexus is not stationary, but moves as my body moves, changes as my body changes, regenerating, growing, aging, processing matter and experience. Being with/in is a dynamic nexus with a variable range, a conjunction that is always interrupted by others.

Neil Evernden develops an understanding of subjectivity as a field that is in some respects similar to my understanding of subjectivity as range, building on William Barrett's interpretation of Heidegger's notion of Dasein as a field of care or concern. Barrett says that "My Being is not something that takes place inside my skin...my Being, rather, is spread over a field or region which is the world of its care and concern" (quoted in Evernden 1985, 43). Evernden is intrigued by the idea of the self "not necessarily defined by the body surface....that there is some kind of involvement with the realm beyond the skin, and that the self is more a sense of self-potency throughout a region than a purely physical presence" (Evernden 1985, 43). Barrett demonstrates the awareness of oneself as a field by describing how a young child recognizes

himself, who can answer to his name, but when asked to point to whom the name belongs will point to his mother and father as well as himself. Barrett explains that

before he has reached that stage, he has heard his name as naming a field or region of Being with which he is concerned, and to which he responds, whether the call is to come to food, to mother, or whatever. And the child is right. His name is not the name of an existence that takes place within the envelope of his skin: that is merely the awfully abstract social convention that has imposed itself not only on his parents but on the history of philosophy. The basic meaning the child's name has for him does not disappear as he grows older; it only becomes covered over by the more abstract social convention. He secretly hears his own name called whenever he hears any region of Being named with which he is vitally involved. (Barrett quoted in Evernden 1985, 64)

Evernden uses this understanding of subjectivity to explain the behaviour of people who feel compelled to defend nonhuman nature: "Whether it is the housewife who defies the chainsaws to rescue a tree that is beyond her property yet part of her abode...[or] the naturalist who fears the extinction of a creature he has never seen, the phenomenon is similar: each has heard his own name called, and reacts to the spectre of impending non-being" (Evernden 1985, 64). In Evernden's interpretation, such environmental defenders sense of themselves is not contained by their physical bodies, but extends into a field of concern. According to Evernden, one identifies with the other in hearing one's name called in this way.

To a Levinasian, the idea of extending oneself into the world as identification might appear to be a totalizing endeavour of being at home with

itself. It seems to me more ethical to defend places as others, rather than as part of oneself, as Evernden and some other deep ecologists interpret such environmentalist responses. While Evernden's understanding of oneself as a field of concern does have some similarities with my idea of being with/in in terms of range, in situations where "each has heard his own name called" in defence of places and nonhuman others, I find a more Levinasian approach preferable. Perhaps each hears her/his name called not in identification with the place or other, but hears her/himself called to responsibility, as Levinas describes in the ethics of face to face relations. Extending one's identity into groups with which one identifies can shade into being at home with itself, since having an identity is somewhat tied to being "one's own," but groups do overlap, and one's identity does shade into others.

In being with/in, I exist in a continuum of beings, travelling trails shared with others. Perhaps this can be conceived as though I have a number of beginnings, but no specific or final endings. When I meet another, we interface, rather than confront each other as being mutually exclusive. I begin again at every meeting, moving through a range of being. I begin at a spring, where it seeps out of granite, through a thin layer of humus amidst tall pines and maples, in a hollow in the hills near my parents' house. I walked there almost daily growing up, where the ground slopes up on all sides except for the south, creating a nestled place. To be there feels like being held in the palm of

creation's hand. It is a place of rest, but also renewal. The spring is irrepressible, a small source of infinity.

The water of the spring trickles down the incline to the south, growing stronger as it collects and then rushes as the slope becomes steeper. It circulates underground and joins the swamp that sits in the flat that extends behind most of the length of the road where my parents live. This swamp holds all but a narrow stream of water no more than a few feet across that runs behind the land in which my parents live, and feeds into a shallow pond my great uncle dug for testing the cedar strip canoes he built. Now it is home to countless frogs and breeds multitudes of mosquitoes. The pond drains through a narrow culvert under the dam built by my father's uncle, and twists its way along the trees around below the edge of the garden. This creek winds a short way down, disappears underground again, and flows under the road into the York River.

And so I begin at the river without having ended. Starting in June, my brother Chris and I went swimming in the river every day. This continued for years, as we paddled up the river with our friends, to see the goats, and share lunch across from a clay bank. We explored every bend, nook, and depth of the river within an afternoon's leisurely travel. We learned that swans are rather fierce when you meet them eye to eye in a canoe, and we grew strong in carrying our canoe up the steep sand bank of the river, where our road begins.

One day there was a sign posted in the park when we went for our regular swim. The river is now too polluted for safe swimming. And so this became



another beginning, of myself as an environmentalist. I learned another aspect of being connected: that the lack of adequate sewers up river, and on Baptiste Lake, another of the river's sources, fouls the water in the village of Bancroft, and beyond.

I grew older and for a time lived outside the watershed of my origin. I became lost in learning the ways of city living and university methods. I learned big words and the thoughts of famous people. My mind expanded, yet I seemed to become smaller in leaving my family, the spring, the multitudinous connections of home. I did not know that place, except to know that it was not home: limestone not granite. The water tasted wrong.

A few years ago, I found myself again within this watershed, on another branch that feeds the Ottawa River. I begin again on the Rideau River, in the heart of the city of Ottawa, in the neighbourhood called Sandy Hill. Here, I have begun a garden. I am rooting. I rent this bit of earth, rather than "own" it (as if such a thing were possible), but I do not grow only annuals. I am not merely a transient resident. Each year I add more perennials, and we have planted trees. Trees, like rivers and creeks and streams, show the branching interconnections, the meetings that sustain and renew us, the multiple beginnings that constitute one's life.

In being with/in, I understand myself in terms of overlapping ranges of various types. I understand myself as being not only, or even primarily, here speaking/writing. I am also where I live, with/in the land I live, with the others

with whom I share that place. The boundaries between myself and others, myself and the world are not static. For one thing, I am distributed; I am both here and there. Also, my boundaries shift depending on with whom I am interacting. In speaking professionally, my boundary is not very permeable: I like to have a fair bit of personal space, and I mostly show only one aspect of myself in public venues.

When I am at home, the boundary between myself and others is more obviously multidimensional. I can see a visible map of some of my relations in my back yard in winter, when there is snow on the ground. My cat Milo's trail follows the path I make to the composter, and continues on past it under the fence into our neighbour's yard. The squirrels' paths meet and overlap with mine for only about ten feet, between the place I leave seeds for them, and the platform for the bird seeds. The birds leave footprints all over the yard within about a two-metre radius of the bird feeder.

### **Relationality**

My thinking about the relationality of ethical subjectivity as being with/in has been influenced by ecofeminist and deep ecologist's models of the self that emphasize the deconstruction of the boundary between self and other as subject and object. The ecological self, as developed in deep ecology, tends to speak of the self as coming to identify with the world, developing an expanded understanding of self. Joanna Macy and Freya Mathews, for example, each

advocate a sense of self that includes the natural world not in oppositional terms, but as part of an interdependent whole, not separated from nature but continuous with it.

Macy presents a model of the self as "coextensive with all life on this planet" (Macy 1989, 201). She describes this self as inseparable and continuous with the web of life, "interconnected as cells in a larger body" (Macy 1989, 204). Following deep ecologist Arne Naess, she argues that recognizing oneself as being in identity with the rest of the world means ethics are unnecessary. "[T]he world *is* our body" (Macy 1989 210), so the urge to self preservation protects the larger self.

Mathews also builds on Naess' work. In particular, she develops Naess' concept of ecological self-realization, in which the self achieves identification with "the whole, the 'world,'" sees "the same" everywhere, and is "not alienated from anything" (from quote in Mathews 1995, 142). To a Levinasian, this sounds too much like being at home with itself, totalizing all into one's own world. The concern of these deep ecologists is to overcome alienation from the natural world. Perhaps it would help to describe alienation as a state of not understanding or being aware of one's relations with others. To overcome this one must recognize the relation, not merge with the other. For Mathews, and apparently Naess, "identification" indicates merging. In Mathews' and Macy's models of the ecological self, the self is extended into the world to overcome

alienation from it, so that there is no longer the split of "in here" and "out there" -- all become one.

Ecofeminist Marti Kheel criticizes this sort of deep ecology model of the "expanded Self" on the basis that it is not gender neutral. The ecological self, in her opinion, evidences an expansion of a masculine type of self into the world. She argues that the self is constructed differently in men and women, due to socialization (Kheel 1990, 129), but also suggests that there is an "original self" prior to the ego self (Kheel 1990, 131) which is preserved in women's socialization. Kheel argues that a wider identification with nature does not necessarily lead to ethical interaction, since there is a tradition of men using hunting as a vehicle for self-actualization (Kheel 1990, 131-134). She also criticizes the deep ecological expansion of self for subsuming individual concerns (Kheel 1990, 136).

I doubt men have any monopoly on egoism, but agree with Kheel that socialization is a key to the formation of self. If the self is expanded as a domination of ego, it seems unlikely this will solve any of our environmental problems. Furthermore, as Kheel notes, in ecological models of the self following Naess, individual needs do seem to be subsumed in the expanded self. If we are all "cells in a larger body," who speaks for the larger body? What happens to the otherness of others, and their points of view in this expansion of self? Whose selves are we talking about here? What measures are there to ensure that this expansion of self is not accomplished as an act of totalization where others are

simply subsumed? Even if the expansion of self, as Mathews indicates, is achieved as a spiritual process of self-actualization, rather than through monopolization and domination of an egoistic self, it does not seem to recognize actual differences or possible differences in point of view. Whose vision of the world is to be realized in the process of self-actualization? This model of self does not account for the possibility that a Euro-American vision of how the world should be, and actions in defence of that vision may not correspond to other visions of the world, and that there are ethical problems with trying to force a Euro-American vision on people in other cultures.

Ecopsychologist Sarah Conn also builds on Naess' model of the ecological self, but incorporates Arthur Koestler's idea of "holon," the self as a whole in itself but also part of a larger whole. She recognizes possible problems with individual needs being "swept away by the larger whole" (Conn 1995, 164), and recognizes a need for semi-permeable boundaries of the self, that are neither too rigid nor too diffuse.

Feminist Wendy Donner, however, cautions against advocating diffuse boundaries in relational models of the self. "Distinct selves," she says, "are necessary in situations of care for others, particularly the parent-child relationship" (Donner 1997, 381). Furthermore, she argues, emphasizing relatedness and diffuse boundaries in the self does not recognize how these qualities contribute to and sustain abusive situations. "What seems too often overlooked in the overvaluing and glorification of connectedness, community,

and relation," she says, "is just how many of our relations could use a healthy dose of autonomous scrutiny. Abusive relations are horrifyingly sustainable and horrifying in their power to construct, define, and maintain a self's identity and undermine the well-being of that self through the power of the defining and abusive relations" (Donner 1997, 384). Donner thus suggests that "autonomy and strongly bounded selves are crucially valuable.... it is axiomatic among those who work on [recovery] processes that boundary issues are central to the recovery process, and yet many feminist theories overlook this when they devalue strong boundaries and autonomy" (Donner 1997, 385).

Donner focuses her criticisms on Val Plumwoods' model of the self-in-relation, because she finds it to be the most promising (Donner 1997, 379). "Plumwood," Donner says, "fully understands the importance of avoiding the 'identification' approach of deep ecology," and "argues for a 'nonholistic but relational account of the self' which does not deny the 'independence or distinguishability of the other,' whether the other is another human, the community, or nature (Plumwood 1991, 14)" (Donner 1997, 381).

In Donner's interpretation, Plumwood's self-in-relation model is nonholistic. Such selves "are distinct selves, so they are not fused with or merged with the other -- the individual other, the community, the cosmic whole, and so on. These selves have solid, though not impermeable, boundaries. These selves are not shattered or fragmented selves. They have a core unity which holds their parts together .... They are autonomous selves, and so they have the

ability to rationally scrutinize their different aspects as well as their relations and connections" (Donner 1997, 382-383). As Donner notes, "On this view, a self-in-relation cannot, logically, become fused with another thing, because in order for their to be a relation there must be at least two things which are related, and if two things become fused then there are not two things but one" (Donner 1997, 383).

Donner argues that "the self in the self-in-relation is logically, axiologically, and metaphysically prior to its relations, those properties of itself that connect it to others" but clarifies that she does not deny "that selves are fundamentally affected by and shaped by their relational properties" (Donner 1997, 383). It makes sense to think that to be in relation, or to be shaped by anything, the self must first exist, but I see no reason to think that the self must first be independent or autonomous. Donner's concerns about abusive situations are valid, but arguing for firmer boundaries does not necessarily solve the problem. The problem is not in the self of the one who is abused, but in the abuser. The point of those who advocate relational models of the self is that if everyone enacted a sense of relatedness, these abusive relations would not exist. Of course, changing only one self will not fix the system, but neither will maintaining a rigid boundary between self and other repair it.

I do not think Donner and myself are in substantial disagreement. We disagree about the formation of self, and to what degree the self is "independent" of its relations. To me, it is fairly obvious that in physical and

psychological terms, the self begins in relation, that being in relation is a condition of being, and that the self becomes an individual by differentiating itself in relation with a variety of others. However, we agree that the self has properties of relation and individuality. I think Donner is mistaken to think that recognizing the relational aspects of the self need impact on the ability of a self to act in its own interest, or maintain a healthy self identity. That the self is in relation, and builds an ongoing identity in the context of its relations, indicates that to remedy an abusive situation, the self must come into a healthy environment, relating with others who will not abuse the self. Someone who closes herself off from relations in general does not thereby heal herself. Healing is facilitated by recognizing that our boundaries can be differentially permeable, so that one can set firmer boundaries in relations with certain others when necessary.

Anita Barrows' work in ecopsychology suggests some useful ways of developing a model of the self that is neither too porous, nor too rigid for health. Barrows' description of her variation on the ecological self is as permeable, interconnected, and entwined with others. The self requires, she says, "enough of a membrane to function," but the membrane must be permeable to interact. Barrows associates the area between self and world with D. W. Winnicott's idea of transitional space, as a membrane that "delineates but does not divide us from the medium in which we exist" (Barrows 1995, 107). She notes that the process of separation in object relations theory might also be seen as coming into a wider



context of relations beyond the interhuman. Barrows also associates this with intersubjectivity and Thich Nhat Hanh's understanding of "interbeing," which suggests a rich area for further investigation (Barrows 1995, 107). However, while she gives a sense of embeddedness in the natural world, her sense of being within does not lay any stress on the "with" part, the relation with specific others as different from oneself.

My model of the self as being with/in recognizes the need for a sense of oneself as both a unique individual, and as being in relation with others, embedded within the more than human world. Like Barrow's ecopsychological model of the self, I model the self as having a differentially permeable membrane, and being more or less distinct from its environs, depending on the needs of the self. However, in my understanding of ethical subjectivity as being with/in, I recognize that the individual is always both *with* and *in*, already implicated in the world and with others.

### **Being Embedded in the World, Being Implicated**

Being with/in as a range of being is not being as one's own, but being with/in where one belongs. In the embeddedness of being with/in, the self neither loses its individuality nor encompasses the world. The self is not simply embedded in being embodied and being with/in the Earth, Nature, or "the environment," but in a specific place. As bioregional thinkers such as Gary Snyder (1990) and Alan Thein Durning (1996) argue, to be healthy as individuals

and as a species within this world, we need a sense of place, not Gaia consciousness, but a sense of belonging to “the land” of a specific place. “The land” conjures up specific images, a place within which one is situated. It is a place where one can find oneself, being with/in. For me, the land is part of the Canadian Shield in the Ottawa Valley: a hilly land of small lakes laced together with swamps and rivers, interspersed with granite rock faces, enormous pine trees, and the smell of high bush cranberries where partridge live. I do not identify with the whole world, expanding my sense of self to contain all the Earth, but find myself embedded within a specific place, the Ottawa valley.

To be embedded is to participate intimately in the world: to eat, to interact with others, to grow, and to die. In being with/in I am already implicated in the world, already guilty. I eat. In being with/in, I live through consuming others. In being with/in I am implicated, and already obligated with/in the more than human world, embodied and embedded in relations with others within the natural world.

In being with/in, I am a unique nexus, but also always an interdependent constituent of larger wholes. This can be imaged similarly to philosopher J. Baird Callicott’s understanding of nested communities, developed out of Mary Midgley’s “mixed community” and Aldo Leopold’s “biotic community” (Callicott 1989, 54-56). In being with/in I belong to my family, communities of people and domestic plants and animals, the wider biotic community, and the ecosphere. The range of myself extends into the groups with/in which I

participate, being with/in multiple and frequently overlapping groups, and in relation with the other participants in these groups.

In being with/in, I cannot identify with the groups in which I participate. I do not acquire a sense of wholeness in being with/in. Although in being with/in I belong as an interdependent constituent of larger, overlapping wholes, I cannot ethically allow myself to become identified with a group to the extent that I feel compelled to defend other members because of injury felt to myself. I can speak on behalf of other members when I am called upon to do so, not because we are the same, but because of our differences. I can ethically speak on behalf of others only for them, not for myself. Being with/in must not become a claim for "my place in the sun," or my place in the world, but instead must be interrupted.

### **Being With/in: An Interrupted Conjunction**

Being with/in is not the self as a locus, but oneself as a nexus. A locus would be one's own place, being *chez soi*. Being with/in, as Levinas says of the one for the other, is in exile, denucleated. Oneself in ethical subjectivity must remain torn open by the others' questioning of oneself. While this nexus does not require a Cartesian subject, it does require a core, a point, the moment of oneself tacked together.

The moment of oneself tacked together bears some similarity to Lacan's understanding of subjectivity in terms of the *point de caption*. Catriona

Sandilands, a critical ecofeminist theorist, explains that for Lacan the subject emerges as self aware with a fundamental lack of anything to identify with. She writes:

The subject per se (and not just the ego) emerges with the insertion of the individual into the Symbolic order, the gaze of the Other, the totality of signifiers. What is important to note in Lacan is that the Symbolic order is also marked by a fundamental lack, a core of representational impossibility; the production of meaning is, as a result, permanently contingent, as there is no fixed anchoring point to the signifier. The signifier cannot perfectly correspond to the signified; instead, meaning is partially and momentarily fixed through a retroactive process in which a *point de caption* (literally, 'upholstery button') temporarily halts the sliding of meaning of signifiers and signifieds. Thus, the agent is involved in a process of trying to compensate for the fundamental lack marking it through the construction of a self spoken through these sliding meanings; she or he can never completely do so, however, as 'the subject of the signifier is precisely...this impossibility of finding a signifier which would be 'its own.' (Sandilands 1999, 83-84)

In being with/in, oneself as a nexus is a temporary tacking together that is interrupted so that it cannot simply identify with itself as "one's own," or being at home with itself. Oneself is continuously tacked together, but always only temporarily so. In being with/in one remains oneself although the groups to which one belongs, and alliances which one seeks change. There is always something tacked together, although the elements change from time to time, from moment to moment.<sup>69</sup> In being with/in I am tacked together as my range overlaps with others and changes over time, but I cannot simply identify with

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<sup>69</sup> I mean this in a double sense of moment. In physics, a moment is a play of forces around a pivot, a nexus of energy. Oneself as being with/in is a nexus that is temporarily tacked together in time, and in relation with others through a variety of alliances and movements.

myself. Being with/in is like a canoe, tacked together, oriented to others rather than centred on itself, an open vessel that is steered. In being with/in, oneself is a nexus point, is meaningful, and is oriented toward others rather than self-centred.

A nexus is a bond, a connection, from *nectere nex*, meaning "bind." In ethical subjectivity, one is bound, already obligated, already interrupted by the others, an interrupted conjunction (with/in). Levinas describes something like this in saying that "Subjectivity is a node and a denouement -- of essence and essences's other" (Levinas 1998, 10). "Denouement" means both resolution and unravelling, the resolution or unravelling of the plot of story or play. "Node" means intersection, as a vertex, a connecting point, but is from the same Latin root as "denouement," *nodus*, which means "knot." Thus, Levinas is saying that subjectivity is like a knot and it's untying, but "denouement" is an ending, a closure. The "plot" in the denouement of subjectivity is the plot of the other in the same, the question and response pattern of thought to which Plato refers:

The silent coming and going from question to response, with which Plato characterized thought, already refers to a plot in which is tied up the node of subjectivity, by the other commanding the same. The reference is there even when, turned toward being in its manifestation, thought knows itself. Asking oneself and questioning oneself does not undo the torsion of the same and the other in subjectivity; it refers to it. There is an intrigue of the other in the same which does not amount to an openness of the other to the same. The other to whom the petition of the question is addressed does not belong to the intelligible sphere to be explored. He stands in proximity. (Levinas 1998, 25)

In the knot and unravelling of ethical subjectivity, the other is in oneself as psyche, inspiration, rather than a closed object of thought. The other unravels being at home with itself while tying oneself to others in relation.

In saying "Subjectivity is a node and a denouement" Levinas is also alluding to his idea of the self folded back on itself, "the torsion of the same and the other in subjectivity" (Levinas 1998, 25). The self turning back on itself in reflection does not undo the knot of subjectivity, knowing as unravelling oneself, as understanding. Rather, the self turning back on itself is the other commanding oneself. One is not unravelled in a conclusive sense that would smooth out the knot, but is at once undone and bound.

### **Interfaces**

A visiting friend interrupts the writing of this work, and reminds me that there are things more important than finishing my thesis by a particular date, things more important than philosophy. This chapter, like myself, remains unfinished -- I could edit it indefinitely, but I need to give it out to others rather than keeping it for myself. The more I become involved in this work, the more I resent interruptions in the writing, but the interruptions are necessary, and not just one interruption to break me out of my concern for myself and my work, but again and again, to remind me of my obligations to others, to live as well as write.

In the ethical subjectivity of being with/in, I am torn open in being interrupted, enabling interfaces with multiple others. Interfaces are meetings of oneself in ethical subjectivity with others. In an interface, two meet face to face, and each calls a response in the other. As Levinas has argued, it is problematic to describe such relations from the perspective of an outside observer. In ethics, the relation does not come to pass in reciprocal terms, because ethics are what the other inspires in me. What I might inspire in the other is unknown, and irrelevant to my ethical obligations for and to the other. When I meet another face to face, and interface with that other, I can speak only for myself. In interfacing, I respond to the specific other before me. That other calls up a response in me, never the same as what is called up in me by another.

My uniqueness is enhanced the greater the number of interfaces of which I become aware. In being with/in I am separated from others, but without mutual exclusion. The boundaries of the range of myself are fluid and differentially permeable. I have a sense of myself as separate, but not exclusively so. Self and other are not essentially different, but are relationally different. Differences between oneself and others are found in relating with others. The more others with whom I am in relation, the more differences I find. Relating with a variety of others, human and otherwise, allows me to find more dimensions of myself, and become a more unique person. Thus I do not lose my individual uniqueness in being embedded in a context of relations, as implied in a binary

understanding of the world.<sup>70</sup> Rather, in being with/in I increase in complexity through polythetic differentiation in multiple interfaces with others.

An interface allows two entities of different types to communicate, as a point of connection enabling modulation and translation of information across a boundary. Donna Haraway (1991) uses the idea of interfaces in her understanding of cyborg subjectivities, to demonstrate the connections between humans and machines. Cyborgs are ambiguous, and transgressive entities, both organic creatures and technological machines. In Haraway's usage, cyborgs are also not necessarily one gender or the other. Haraway invokes the image of the cyborg as an ironic tactic to disturb gender essentialism in mainstream Western and feminist discourses. The image of the cyborg demonstrates and signifies the intertwining of technology and organic bodies in humans, and undermines the grand narratives of biology, evolution, and technology as it problematizes the boundaries between living and technological systems (Haraway 1991, 2). The cyborg has the potential to stimulate social change, Haraway argues, as an ironic image that suggests a model of the person as being connected, responsible, and heterogeneous rather than a unitary self-enclosed ego. I might be a cyborg, if my technological aspect is my canoe.

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<sup>70</sup> as found, for example in Lévy-Bruhl's understanding of "participation" as a loss of individuality in identification, in *How Natives Think* (1966).



## Tacking Together

Haraway also discusses ethical possibilities of bonding with others through making strategic alliances and coalitions, based on affinities rather than identification. Affinity is a relation of temporary choice rather than unchanging essence. Affinity groups come together as strategic alliances in pursuit of specific goals. Within feminism, affinity groups enable different women to work together without requiring all to accept a unitary identity, even as women or being female. As Haraway explains, "gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices" (Haraway 1991, 155).

Forming strategic alliances allows women to work together on feminist issues despite their differences. Such coalitions also bring together people working on environmental, social, and anti-globalization issues. Strategic alliances built on affinity allow a temporary tacking together, so groups of people are not fragmented but move together with others. A strategic alliance is based on a moment, the temporary working together of play of forces around an axis, and builds a momentum of alliance through people helping each other. Strategic alliances provide a means of preserving ethical relations with others in seeking justice more broadly. Justice is the theme of part three of this work.

### Part Three. Third Parties

#### Chapter 7. Just Society

According to the main threads of Levinas' ethical theory, ethics arise in the face to face relations of oneself and a single other, while justice is a system for mediating claims of multiple others. Although he acknowledges that all face to face relations are already relations of justice (Levinas 1998, 158), it is the ethics of the face to face, oneself and the other, which are his focus in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Levinas' ideas on justice are not as fully developed as his writings on ethical alterity, ethical subjectivity, and his critique of being at home with itself. Justice is loosely sketched rather than totally defined in his work.

It is appropriate for Levinas to decline to completely define justice, since he rejects totalizing enterprises. Justice, like ethics, remains open in his work. However, although the question of balancing ethical claims is in principle undecidable, competing claims demand reconciliation. Justice tries to answer questions that are unreasonable in terms of ethics: supposing you meet a homeless person on your way to work, and as you reach into your pocket to give your last dollar, you hear the cry of another person in need, who should you choose? Environmental ethics pose similarly difficult questions: should I fight clear cut logging in Temagami, Clayoquot Sound, or the Amazon? Although competing and conflicting claims cannot be completely resolved in applying Levinasian ethics, since each claim is by definition infinite, they demand some

sort of resolution in justice. The incomparable must be compared; justice requires taking action despite ethical dilemmas.

Mediating justice between the conflicting claims made on behalf of humans and other species may be more complicated than within the interhuman, but not impossible. It is a difference of degree rather than kind. The criticism against environmental ethics, that it is impossibly complicated to mediate the conflicting claims of other animals and plants as well as humans, applies with just as much force in the realm of the interhuman. It is always unethical to apply a standard of justice in competing claims, but this is the nature of justice. Questions of competing claims may be unreasonable in ethics, but they are not insoluble in justice.

In this chapter I begin extending Levinasian justice beyond the interhuman. In order better to assess the liveability of Levinasian ethics and justice extending into environmental ethics, in the next chapter I give a more specific analysis, applying Levinasian ethics and justice to a conflict between government bodies, First Nations groups, loggers, environmentalists, old growth forest, and endangered species in northern Ontario.

### **Levinasian Justice: Justice of the Third Party**

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas describes justice as ethics beyond the face to face, the justice of the third party. References to the third party in his earlier work *Totality and Infinity* are generally negative, as a

totalizing vision that thematizes, rather than meets, the other face to face.

Levinas does not consistently distinguish ethics and justice in *Totality and Infinity*, and he there tends to use the word "justice" where in *Otherwise than Being* he uses "ethics."<sup>71</sup> The third party in *Otherwise than Being* is the other of the other. In this usage, which will be my focus in this chapter, the third party interrupts the face to face relation of oneself and the other, calling for justice.

Levinas says that ethics are prior to consciousness, and that it is the necessity of justice that creates consciousness. In the ethics of the face to face, the other is not susceptible to the "light of reason," the grasping of the ego that takes otherness into itself (Levinas 1989, 43). Ethics exert an infinite demand on oneself, which is unproblematic until another, the third party to oneself and the other, enters the situation. In Levinas' words, "If proximity ordered to me only the other alone, there would have not been any problem, in even the most general sense of the term. A question would not have been born, nor

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<sup>71</sup> Except in this passage, where Levinas associates justice with the appearance of the third party: "Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient 'I-Thou' forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love, where it loses its frankness and meaning and turns into laughter or cooing. The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other -- language is justice. It is not that there first would be the face, and then the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity. The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face. The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal. His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the *third party*, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves. He comes to *join* me. But he joins me to himself for service; he commands me as a Master. This command can concern me only inasmuch as I am master myself; consequently this command commands me to command. The *thou* is posited in front of a *we*. To be *we* is not to 'jostle' one another or get together around a common task. The presence of the face, the infinity of the other, is a destituteness, a presence of the third party (that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us), and a command that commands commanding" (Levinas 1969, 213).

consciousness, nor self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters" (Levinas 1998, 157). With the introduction of the third party, justice forces oneself to ask "Who is my neighbor?" and compare the incomparable (Levinas 1985, 90).

### **Knowledge in Justice**

The justice of the third party limits the responsibility of oneself for the other and creates consciousness, the ability to reason, by forcing oneself to consider more than one other, to compare the claims on oneself made by more than one other. In Levinas' view, reason is not the foundation of ethics, but is created by the necessity of justice: "The essence of reason consists not in securing for man a foundation and powers, but in calling him in question and in inviting him to justice" (Levinas 1969, 88). Justice requires thematic knowledge, even quantifying the claims of others to judge between them. Justice requires "comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice" (Levinas 1998, 157). Thematic knowledge does not fulfil the infinite demands of ethics, because it is necessarily reductive, but it becomes necessary in pursuing justice.

Levinas' understanding of the role of knowledge in justice suggests a way of allowing the knowledge claims of science about environmental problems some validity in mediating justice, without claiming that they are absolutely true, or necessarily meaningful outside the systems in which such knowledge is constructed. This offers a partial solution to postmodern challenges of relativity and social construction that ask, if all knowledge is constructed, how can scientific knowledge be used to argue in favour of environmentalist action? As James Proctor says, "environmentalist discourse generally justifies its 'oughts' based on scientifically founded assertions of truth concerning the imperiled state of nature. The social construction of nature argument, then, strikes to the epistemological core of environmentalism's moral and political campaign" (Proctor 1998, 353). In postmodern criticism, scientific knowledge is deconstructed to reveal that it is "a *representation* of nature...a socially constructed interpretation with an already socially constructed natural-technical object of inquiry" which reflects "the culture and politics of scientific knowledge" (Proctor 1998, 353) rather than simply mirroring the world of nature. In view of this, evidence of environmental damage and its causes is biased not only in what is offered as knowledge, but in how that knowledge is gathered.

All knowledge is contingent and partial, but it can still be used in balancing claims in justice. In postmodern thought, knowledge does not provide a foundation for ethics, but, in Levinas' view, ethics does not require such a foundation. Justice, for Levinas, does require thematic knowledge of others,

which could include the sort of scientific knowledge used in support of environmental action, but justice does not require that thematic knowledge of others be taken as complete or inarguable. In justice, thematic knowledge of others can be used to judge between claims, without supposing that such knowledge is absolute. Knowledge functions within a system. Ecological knowledge can be used to argue for environmentalist action, weighing claims on the basis of scientific information.

However, this does not fully solve the problem of how to mediate conflicting claims. It only works for those who are willing to accept science as an adjudicator, or scientific knowledge as the system in which to judge conflicting claims between humans and other than human persons. Science is not the only available knowledge system to judge claims; economic, indigenous, and spiritual, as well as ecological and biological knowledge systems within science, can be used to judge between claims. Whose knowledge can provide a legitimate basis of comparison in judging claims? Because all views are partial, we can create a more accurate representation of reality the more perspectives we have of it. Biological knowledge can be used to mediate claims about whether or not a forest is an old growth forest, whether or not there are endangered species living there, and whether or not clear cutting can emulate natural forest fires. However, this does not tell us what to do with that knowledge, or how to compare it with other sorts of knowledge. In comparing ethical claims, as well as

knowledge claims, power cannot be ignored: whose knowledge is granted legitimacy in negotiating claims is important.

Proctor, in a more recent paper, reports that people who support environmentalism are more likely to believe in the legitimacy of scientific knowledge than those who do not support environmentalist views (Proctor 2002). Scientific knowledge tends to play a significant role in what people think should be done about environmental problems, but a lesser role in putting that knowledge to use. In North America, although most people accept the legitimacy of scientific knowledge in theoretically proposing what would be the best course of action, economic knowledge is often used to decide whose claims are given priority in practice.

Ideally, democratic systems should be able to mediate justice within the interhuman realm. Conflicting human claims can be reconciled through the practice of "good conversations," as developed by Frederick Bird (1996a; 1996b). Minimally, such negotiations "are constructive. They help to clarify and do not obscure issues. They elicit and foster ongoing participation, helping people to overcome their shyness and reticence to speak and to attend to the concerns of others. They occasion and do not stifle interactions" (Bird 1996a, 205). Bird recognizes that the moral communications involved in negotiating include not only ideally transparent statements, but a range of styles of communication including "making arguments, praising and blaming, rewarding and punishing, identifying ends, setting forth rules" (Bird 1996b, 115), as well as the invocation



of beliefs (religious and otherwise), and carping and insulting (Bird 1996a, 205). Bird develops a number of useful strategies for avoiding and solving problems in moral negotiations in the interhuman (see especially Bird 1996a). However, nonhumans are not given a voice in such moral communications unless we speak for them. For justice in environmental ethics, other animals must be allowed to interrupt the discourses of just (human) society, as Levinas allowed this interruption in his work, saying "So who is this dog at the end of the verse? Someone who disrupts society's games (or Society itself) and is consequently given a cold reception [*que l'on reçoit comme un chien dans un jeu de quills*]?" (Levinas 1990, 151). Doggone others are part of our mixed communities and our ecosystems despite our omissions of them in relations of social justice. Nonhuman others' voices need to be amplified in our human pursuits of justice through advocacy, to let the other of the other interrupt interhuman discourses about ethics, to demand justice.

According to Levinas, one does not have the right to speak on one's own behalf, because one does not have the right to be, to claim anything for oneself as one's own, in ethical subjectivity. However, this has nothing to do with the others' right to speak on their own behalf -- the point is that "I" do not have the right to be, "me." Once another calls me to responsibility, I am obligated to the other rather than in possession of the right to be (Levinas 1985, 98-99). Justice, however, as Levinas says, requires that I speak on behalf of the other: "...I am responsible for the persecutions that I undergo. But only me! My 'close

relations' or 'my people' are already the others and, for them, I demand justice" (Levinas 1985, 99). Applying Levinasian ethics and justice to the more than human world, I must demand justice for not only human others, but more than human others.

### **Systems and Justice**

In order to try to hear all the different ethical claims in the more than human world, justice systems should recognize different forms of knowledge, without privileging a single type of knowledge. But this still does not suggest what sort of a system can mediate justice. Levinas does not appear to say anything concrete about the process of negotiating conflicting claims. Most of what he says about the role of systems in justice is negative, such as his refusal to delimit a set of principles for mediating claims, saying his ethics are anarchic rather than rule-based, and his frequent reminder that the ethics of the face to face must not be replaced with justice.

Levinas does not indicate that rules and law have no role to play in justice, but says that he does not intend to give a program of action or codify rules to follow. He writes: "My task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning. In fact I do not believe that all philosophy should be programmatic" (Levinas 1985, 90). Levinas does not try to construct a system, but solicit an ethical response.

For Levinas, justice may use systems, but is not equivalent with law or legal systems. He explains that “justice is not a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn, harmonizing antagonistic forces. That would be a justification of the State delivered over to its own necessities” (Levinas 1998, 159). “Justice,” he continues, “is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity....This means that nothing is outside the control of the responsibility of the one for the other” (Levinas 1998, 159). Ethics remain primary in Levinasian justice.

Levinas is insistent that “Justice, exercised through institutions, which are inevitable, must always be held in check by the initial interpersonal relation” (Levinas 1985, 90). This continued priority of ethics in justice suggests that a Levinasian environmental ethic cannot ignore the ethical command of the other human in pursuit of justice, and thus Levinasian environmental ethics demand what is already called environmental justice in existing discourses of environmental thought.

Levinasian environmental ethics demand environmental justice, because the claims of specific human others must not be ignored in reconciling conflicting claims between human populations and their natural environments. This is one of two aspects to environmental justice as the term is usually employed in existing environmentalist discourses. Environmental justice draws attention to equity problems in abstractly putting needs of imperilled “nature” before “humanity,” ignoring local social injustices in the process. The second aspect of

environmental justice draws attention to the greater impact of environmental degradation felt by dispossessed humans. Burdens of pollution are displaced from privileged populations onto racial and ethnic minorities, and the poor.

As has been demonstrated in environmental justice work, too often presenting environmental problems in terms of the abstract categories of “humanity” and “nature” has led to social injustice, placing greater burdens on poor and disadvantaged humans in attempts initiated by non-local populations to remedy environmental ills. John Cort gives the example of reforestation projects in India, where the government, upper-caste people, and affluent Jains of the diaspora have tried to reforest Mûrtipûjaka, a sacred mountain, but ignored local lower-caste people’s needs for grazing lands (Cort 2002, 78-79). Levinasian environmental justice cannot ignore the ethical obligations of such face to face relations, since justice does not lessen the ethical command of the other. Applying Levinasian justice beyond the interhuman, to include nonhuman others in an environmental ethic necessarily becomes the pursuit of environmental justice.

However, environmental justice cannot be allowed to become anthropocentric in practice, categorically putting the needs of humans before nonhumans. Levinasian environmental justice can be neither anthropocentric, nor biocentric. Oneself in justice, due to the priority of ethics, must be decentred. Anthropocentrism can be seen as a form of being at home with itself, categorically elevating oneself and one’s own above all others. To preserve

ethical subjectivity in justice, I must still put the other before myself. Yet environmental justice demands that human needs not be marginalized or ignored in extending moral consideration to nonhuman others.

Human and other than human claims in ethics cannot be categorically given equal weight in justice, as some biocentric arguments demand. Levinas' solution to being at home with itself is not a levelling of all obligations. The call of each other is equal only in the sense that each claim is infinite. In negotiating what weight is granted to a given claim we do not all become equal, as suggested Paul Taylor's biocentric argument, which puts life at the centre of ethics, relativizing the claims of all as equal. Taylor argues that his "life-centered theory of environmental ethics" (Taylor 1992, 96) requires a "doctrine of species impartiality," explaining that "One who accepts that doctrine regards all living things as possessing inherent worth -- the *same* inherent worth, since no one species has been shown to be either 'higher' or 'lower' than any other" (Taylor 1992, 117-118).

J. Baird Callicott's programme of organizing obligations to others through nested communities proposes an alternative to Taylor's biocentrism, but appears in danger of re-instituting anthropocentrism. Callicott developed his understanding of nested communities out of a combination of Mary Midgely's notion of "mixed community" and Aldo Leopold's "biotic community," in order to reconcile animal welfare and environmental ethics theory (Callicott 1989, 54-56). He envisions levels of community nested like traditional Russian dolls, with

corresponding levels of obligation. Callicott suggests that humans have different obligations to human and nonhuman others depending on which community we share with them, so that we have specific obligations to other humans, and to domestic animals as part of our mixed community, but lesser obligations to wild animals in the wider biotic community. Callicott explains:

At the center is the immediate family. I have a duty not only to feed, clothe, and shelter my own children, I also have a duty to bestow affection on them. But to bestow a similar affection on the neighbor's kids is not only not my duty, it would be considered anything from odd to criminal were I to behave so. Similarly, I have obligations to my neighbors which I do not have to my less proximate fellow citizens -- to watch their houses while they are on vacation, for example, or to go to the grocery for them when they are sick or disabled. I have obligations to my fellow citizens which I do not have toward human beings in general *and* I have obligations to human beings in general which I do not have toward animals in general. (Callicott 1989, 55-56)

In Callicott's system of nested communities, farm animals are part of the mixed community, and we have an implicit social contract with them through our shared history and evolution. According to this contract, he feels, we can use these animals, for work and for food (Callicott 1989, 56). Wild animals, in contrast, are not part of the mixed community, in Callicott's view. As such, we are obligated to them through what Leopold called the "land ethic" (Callicott 1989, 57), having obligations to them as species more than as individuals.

Levinas perhaps suggests that there may be reason to think that humans owe different obligations to domesticated animals than other animals. In an interview he remarks that a "dog is like a wolf that doesn't bite" (Wright et al.

1988, 172), seemingly in contrast to the snake whom he is unsure has a face or not (Wright et al. 1988, 171). Could this mean that in Levinasian justice humans have different obligations to domestic animals such as dogs than to wild animals such as wolves and snakes? It would be premature to draw such a conclusion within Levinas' thought. As he says, "I don't know if a snake has a face. I can't answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed" (Wright et al. 1988, 172).

Callicott's description of nested obligations based on a system of nested communities judges between claims on the basis of assigning categories rather than knowledge of specific others in situation. A more specific analysis is necessary for Levinasian justice. While Callicott's understanding of nested communities may appear to be universally applicable to mixed communities, it is culturally specific. "We" may have greater obligations to domestic than wild species, but indigenous people who depend on wild species for their food will perceive the nesting of their communities differently. The idea of assigning places to others based on what species to which they belong clashes with the spirit of Levinas' work. Callicott's vision of nested communities in effect assigns places to all the others, human and otherwise, based on one's own place, taking the human community and one's family as the core and centre of the nested communities. It seems unlikely that Levinas would allow justice to reassign a place for one's own at the centre of a system of justice, since ethics cannot be forgotten or ignored in justice.

But does Levinasian justice allow one to demand concern for one's fellow humans before nonhuman others? Levinas says nonhuman others' faces are completely different from human faces, that we see their faces only after meeting humans face to face (Wright et al. 1988, 171-172). In this view, ethics with others are derivative of interhuman ethics, as Sylvia Benso interprets Levinas' work (Benso 1996, 138).<sup>72</sup> Levinas' focus is interhuman ethics and justice, but applying his work to environmental ethics and environmental justice does not give an unequivocal answer to questions about the relative weight of human and other than human claims. In Levinasian justice, one is obligated to demand concern for one's fellows in justice. This is his very definition of justice. But sometimes, one's fellows are not all human. While Levinasian justice, applied to environmental ethics, requires environmental justice, the rights of humans cannot negate the claims of other than humans.

Callicott's argument for nested obligations presents another problem for Levinasian environmental justice. Part of the reason Callicott adopts this view is to defend against the idea that humans are somehow obligated to protect members of other species from predation. "Among the most disturbing

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<sup>72</sup> Benso finds that Levinas suggests that ethics beyond the interhuman are necessarily derivative of the human face to face, but argues that "The exemplarity Levinas advocates, then, should not entail ontological primacy, or primacy of perfection, or transcendental primacy, in comparison to which every other instance of a similar case is derivative -- human ethics as the *arche*. Exemplarity should not be genealogical. It should rather be a case where something surfaces in the clearest manner: a model, a paradigm, an illustration, but also a loud-speaker, a magnifier through which other Othernesses may reverberate and voice their existence. The exemplarity of human ethics lies not in its being the prescriptive origin, but the descriptive model of ethics" (Benso 1996, 138).



implications drawn from conventional indiscriminate animal liberation/rights theory," he says, "is that, were it possible for us to do so, we ought to protect innocent vegetarian animals from their carnivorous predators" (Callicott 1989, 57). For Levinasian ethics this is irrelevant, because what matters in ethics is what "I" do, how "I" am obligated. But what about in justice? Could the other of the other, a snowshoe hare perhaps, call upon me in justice to prevent a lynx from eating her/him? In justice I demand justice for the others, but of whom do I demand justice? I intend to address myself to humans in this work, but I do call on my cat to be more ethical in his predation, to kill quickly, and to only kill what he will eat. Some humans do try to teach domestic animals ethics. In justice the others of the other should not require us to prevent predation, but do demand that we abstain from wanton destruction,<sup>73</sup> which, as far as I am aware, is only characteristic of humans.

This issue raises a further problem for Levinasian environmental justice. Carried to its logical conclusion in applying Levinasian ethics and justice to the more than human world, does eating become inherently unjustifiable? Are Jain renunciants the only ethical people?<sup>74</sup> Levinas does, at least one point, put a limit on the pursuit of ethics, saying "In no way do I want to teach that suicide

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<sup>73</sup> Wanton destruction, *bal taschit*, is prohibited by Rabbinic teaching. This thought is developed in Jewish environmental ethics by several contributors to *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader* (Yaffe 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Jain monks practice a strict version of *ahimsa*, non-violence, harming other beings only to sustain their lives at a minimal level. Renunciants try to avoid harming all beings, even beings of earth, water, and air that Westerners would feel are not alive. For more on Jainism and environmentalism, see Christopher Key Chapple's anthology *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (2002).

follows from the love of the neighbor and the truly human life. I mean to say that a truly human life cannot remain life *satis*-fied in its equality to being, a life of quietude, that it is awakened by the other, that is to say, it is always getting sobered up..." (Levinas 1985, 121-122). This suggests that in Levinasian environmental ethics and justice, I am not required to forego eating, but to recognize, and respond to, the other's challenging of my right to be.

When the other interrupts one's own thinking, one's preoccupation with one's own right to be, the other disturbs one's sense of ever being self-satisfied. Levinasian ethics allow no bounds on the responsibility of oneself for others. If I accept Levinasian ethics, I cannot re-establish any such bounds. To do so is a rationalization, a justification of oneself -- being at home with itself. Levinasian ethics de-stablize any impulse to system building, or to protecting and sheltering oneself against the claims of others. Levinasian ethics problematize any attempt to justify superseding the claims of others in ethics, or prioritizing the claims of one over another. Consequently, I hesitate to suggest any system for prioritizing ethical claims in justice. Levinas does allow that ethical claims must be balanced and negotiated in justice: one must choose between conflicting claims. But these choices must be made on an individual basis, and cannot be universalized.

I offer as an example, the reasoning I use to justify my eating of others. It is not ethical in the Levinasian sense, and I continue to be troubled by the ethical claims of those I thematize into the category of "food." I grow tomatoes in my garden each summer. I grow these plants specifically for food. They would not

exist if I did not plant them and cultivate them. Harvesting the fruit does not kill the plant, which is an annual, and must be planted again each year, but eating a tomato does destroy the tomato. However, I might justify eating the tomato by saying that I have a relationship with the tomatoes such that they are my food. I do not need to schematize our conflicting rights to be into a hierarchy, because the tomatoes are food. This is similar to an argument Jim Cheney uses to justify the eating of a carrot.

Cheney finds that he is justified in eating a carrot not because it lacks moral standing, or has a lesser right to be, but because his relationship with the carrot is such that it is not wrong to eat the carrot. It is not a relationship of moral conflict, and, to frame it as such, he says, is misleading (Cheney 1987, 140-141). The relationship is not one of hierarchy but of interconnection. Cheney explains that if all have an equal right to be, when rights come into conflict, a solution necessarily organizes rights bearers into a hierarchy (Cheney 1987, 117-118). Thinking about ethics in terms of one's own obligation rather than the rights of others allows a different way of thinking about this. Hierarchy is not then an inevitable means of prioritizing claims. Claims are balanced in ongoing negotiations, rooted in pre-existing relationships.

In Cheney's view, what is essential for moral theory is not "developing a protocol for balancing the claims of atomistically defined moral agents" (Cheney 1987, 129) but the conditions of care. He explains that "The basis of responsibility is not the right of another (for example, to fair treatment) but our

*particular* connectedness to that other" (Cheney 1987, 136). As in Levinasian ethics, ethics are about my obligations toward the other, rather than about their rights (and especially not about one's own rights), and this sense of obligation is voiced in the first person.

Cheney instructs that in this sort of ethics, differential treatment of others is based not on a comparison of their rights, or comparing their rights to one's own, but results from one's limited ability to act ethically. In Cheney's words:

It is the contextual nature of ethical decisions, the fact that they occur in the context of web-like relations of care and responsibility -- together with the fact that we cannot care effectively in *all* cases -- that makes for differential moral regard. It is *not* (or at least not fundamentally) a difference in value, worth, or rights of the objects of our moral concern that calls for differential moral regard. The limits of ethical considerability are the limits of one's (or a people's) ability to care and show concern. Differences among the entities point to differences in the ways in which we *care*, not to differences in *worth*." (Cheney 1987, 138)

It is the context of relations in which one finds oneself that justify differential treatment. The ethical claims of another are not less important than the others, but one treats various others differently because one's capacity to respond to the obligation the other inspires in oneself is constrained by the situation. To return to the first example of this chapter, if two homeless people ask me for money, and I only have one coin, I have to make a choice that does not satisfy Levinasian ethics, not because one of the people is more worthy than the other, but because I only have one coin. In actuality, this is not the solution I prefer in terms of justice. I rarely give money to homeless people in the street, because I find it is a

better to give money to shelters that provide them with a variety of services. My choice in this is governed by an assessment of the larger social situation beyond the face to face encounter with a homeless person. As Cheney says "To understand what our obligations are, to understand what is required of us, it is necessary to understand the individuals involved (or the nature of the kinds of individuals involved), their relationships to one another, and their place in a complex community or ecosystem" (Cheney 1987, 141).

Cheney envisions the larger context of such systems of relations in terms of a "gift community" in which the "the gift must be consumed; it cannot be allowed to pile up like capital in the hands of the recipient. And it must be passed on -- it increases and confers its benefits on the community and its individuals *only* by being passed on. In the case of food, literally, and in the case of much else metaphorically, we die into one another's lives and live one another's deaths" (Cheney 1987, 141). In effect, Cheney can eat the carrot because he is accepting the gift of food offered by the carrot.

To thematize the carrot as "food," or even as "gift," is questionable from the perspective of a Levinasian environment ethic, but Cheney's reasoning fits into my basic justification for eating: as a general religious stance, I find the Earth is good. In ethical subjectivity, I do not have the right to be, but living is preferable to suicide because even if all beings have at least one sense, and can thus feel pain, they can also feel pleasure, and that is just as important. In life there is the joy of creation, as well as the pain of violence. Life is sustained not

only through the interdependence of eating and thus causing pain, but also the mutual upholding of creation. Death is part of how life continues. It may sound trite, but I find it is sufficient to ask others for permission to eat them. When harvesting plants in my garden, I ask permission for which leaves and roots I may take, which fruit I may eat. I ask them if they would like to become part of me. When they say yes, I am justified in eating them.<sup>75</sup> The other part of this justification is that I will also one day be food for others. I find it interesting that I might become part of a bear. It is less interesting, but no less sacred, that I will more likely be worm food.

If each of us is a gift, each of us is food for another, is it less problematic to thematize a tomato or carrot as a gift? Why is a carrot a gift to be consumed, rather than a person to be met as other? If I can accept that I am food for another, I might be justified in accepting the gift of others as food. However, this is presumes reciprocity, which may be acceptable in justice, but, in terms of Levinasian ethics, one is always still troubled by the face of the other. I cannot be self-satisfied in Levinasian ethics, or the ethics of being with/in, but am always implicated in the world. Cheney suggests that "To contextualize ethical deliberation is, in some sense, to provide a narrative, or story, from which the solution to the ethical dilemma emerges as the fitting conclusion" (Cheney 1987, 144). For Levinas, and myself, there can be no self-satisfying conclusion -- the

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<sup>75</sup> When I buy food I prefer that it is also harvested in this manner. However, not all the food I eat is taken in such a respectful manner. I do not mean to suggest that my eating practices always live up to my ideals and justifications. On the contrary, as I have said from the beginning, I am guilty.

question of who can I eat cannot be silenced. This is implicitly recognized, I think, by the widespread practices of blessing food, saying grace, giving thanks, or otherwise ritualizing the process of preparing and eating food.

The “them or me” nature of the question of eating is extreme. It differs from the question of prioritizing the claims between others. Our inevitable guilt at eating and taking up space interferes with our ability to really consider others in ethics. If we are responsible to all others, how can we justify our existence? This is a challenge to Levinasian ethics, but to refuse to consider the challenge, dismissing it as an unreasonable demand, is to sidestep or ignore the provocation of his work. One may ask if Levinasian ethics are reasonable, but I might also ask, is reason, or the reasoning of such a question, ethical? Is it ethical to suppose that eating can be ethical, rather than merely justifiable? We are always already implicated in the world, “late and already guilty for being late.”

The question of what to eat is a challenging theoretical problem, but is perhaps less important than other questions of justice in the larger scheme of things. I cannot recommend a system or list of principles to apply universally for prioritizing conflicting claims. I cannot, for example, say unequivocally that if a dog and a human are trapped in a burning house, it should always be preferred to save the human. Reason might prompt one to choose a human stranger, while emotion might prompt one to choose the dog as one’s beloved pet. However, if it is a human infant, the claim of the infant would lead me to override that of the dog, because it is utterly helpless to escape on its own, and the dog may be able

to escape without my help. This is a hypothetical example, in which the details of the situation will change the choice I prefer. I cannot draw a universal principle out of this example beyond, perhaps, that I give preference or priority to those who I think need my help most.

In addition, such examples focus on individual responsibility, which can obscure larger factors in maintaining unjust relations, such as the role of government institutions and international corporations. In justice I am obligated to remedy this through demanding justice for the others, through advocacy. Justice requires me to inquire about vested interests in complex and changing situations of interactions. Justice takes into account the larger context of a situation, other players outside the face to face. The ethics of the face to face are not mitigated by these concerns; my felt obligations are not reduced by the larger context of relations, although my individual capacity to rectify situations is limited by this context.

## **Conclusion**

Levinasian environmental justice cannot be articulated adequately in general terms. As Levinas says, "A more specific analysis is needed" (Wright et al. 1988, 172). In each situation, the others, human and other than human, must be encountered and considered, with regard to local and global contexts. In ethics there is no resolution. In ethical subjectivity, oneself is a knot and denouement. Levinas does not present any resolution to this in his writings on



justice. Justice is not a resolution, but a dynamic going back and forth of conversation and negotiation, a balancing of claims without putting oneself first, without expectation of reciprocity. Justice gives reciprocity, but without any guarantees for oneself. In justice, I demand justice for the others, as I do in the next chapter, justice for all in *Daki Menan*. I offer this as an extended example of how I find Levinasian environmental ethics and justice can be applied in an existing real life situation.

## Chapter 8. Ethics and Justice in *Daki Menan*

Levinas' radical declaration of ethics, "...I am responsible for the Other without waiting for his reciprocity, were I to die for it" (Levinas 1985, 98) prompts one to ask if his ethics can be lived in justice. This question is compounded when one adds responsibility for everything on earth, as in Levinas' paraphrasing of Dostoevsky's original words. Levinas renders Dostoevsky's words as "'We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others,'" (Levinas 1985, 98). However, Levinas' paraphrase conflates multiple statements from *The Brothers Karamazov*, omitting the concluding phrase that includes responsibility not only for humans, but "for everything on earth."<sup>76</sup> Is this broader ethic voiced in Dostoevsky's novel liveable? Can Levinasian ethics be lived in justice in the more than human world? This chapter attempts the "more specific analysis" necessary to assess the liveability of Levinasian environmental ethics and justice, applying the environmental ethics I have developed out of Levinas' work to the situation in *Daki Menan*.

*Daki Menan*, land of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai in northern Ontario, is contested terrain. Amongst the bears, the old growth forests, wilderness enthusiasts, sport users, industry lobbyists, and the Anishnabai and other

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<sup>76</sup> Llewelyn suggests that Levinas' "paraphrase conflates two statements that Dostoevsky has Markel make in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and [that] he is prone to omit the three words at the end of the second of these. What Markel says is, first, 'every one of us has sinned against all men, and I more than any', and then 'everyone is responsible to all men and for everything'. Markel believes that he has sinned against 'birds, trees, meadows, sky'" (Llewelyn 1991, 112). This theme comes up repeatedly in *The Brothers Karamazov*, voiced by multiple characters. The monk Zosima, for example, says "every one of us is responsible for all men and for everything on the earth, not only responsible through the universal responsibility of mankind, but responsible personally" (Dostoevsky 1970, 196).

residents, interests in the land are not easily reconcilable. Justice requires mediation of these conflicting, and sometimes incompatible, claims. I cannot examine this situation as a disinterested observer, because applying Levinas' understandings of ethics and justice to the situation in *Daki Menan* places me under accusation, and requires a response of academic activism. I am obligated to respond to the call I hear from the land, and from a family of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai who live in their traditional family lands, not in an abstract sense, but as "me." I am obligated by the bears, the trees, the rock, the waters of Obabika Lake, by the unseen lynx in the forest and the otters in the river, as well as the people of the town of Temagami. Each makes an infinite claim that demands a hearing in justice.

*Daki Menan* is in the region of Temagami, a bit north of North Bay and Sudbury, near Ontario's border with Québec. It describes an area of about 10 000 square kilometres (or 4 000 square miles), encompassing Lake Temagami, Obabika River Waterway Park, and Lady Evelyn Smoothwater Wilderness Park. It contains at least three sites of religious significance: Cheebayjin, "the place where the spirit goes" (also known as Maple Mountain), which contains a burial ground; Chee-skon-abikong, a natural tower of rock (also known as Conjurers' or Spirit Rock), a place to seek answers; as well as the Three Sisters, a grouping of old growth pines.

The Teme-Augama Anishnabai (meaning "Deep Water People") have lived in this area for about five thousand years, as long as the land has existed in

its current form, since the end of subarctic conditions in the area following the last ice age (Hodgins 1989, 8-9). They call the land *Daki Menan*, Anishnabe<sup>77</sup> for “our land.” The Teme-Augama Anishnabai have claimed Aboriginal title for *Daki Menan*, meaning that the land is unceded to the government. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1991 that this area is covered by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850, despite their recognition that no Teme-Augama Anishnabai participated in those treaty talks (SCR 1991, 575). The Supreme Court followed the Ontario courts, upholding the 1984 decision that the Teme-Augama Anishnabai “acquiesced” to the treaty in accepting a treaty payment of \$25 (SCR 1991, 575). This is despite the fact that the band received this money at the same time and place that they had been receiving “gifts” from the government as part of trade agreements for many years (Hodgins 1989, 34).

### **Being at Home with itself in *Daki Menan***

The Ontario government, in accordance with Canadian law, controls most of *Daki Menan* as Crown land. Contrary to popular perception, Crown land is not federally controlled in Canada. The provinces have gained control of the land, and the governmental bodies directing use of the land have no mission to protect it for future generations. The Ontario government, through its Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), has designated some of the Crown land in *Daki*

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<sup>77</sup> “Anishnabe” is the spelling for the language, while “Anishnabai” indicates the people. Spelling conventions are flexible for this, as well as “*Daki Menan*,” sometimes rendered as “N’*Daki Menan*.”

*Menan* as conservation areas, provincial parks of various classes, and what they call "enhanced management areas." The Ministry of Natural Resources has leased blocks of land in one of these enhanced management areas to a company called Liskeard Lumber, which plans to clear cut one of them.

The land Liskeard Lumber plans to clear cut, coded "Block 30," by the MNR, is situated between Lake Temagami and Obabika Lake. It is adjacent to Bob's Lake Conservation Reserve and Obabika River Waterway Park. In the north eastern portion of Obabika River Waterway Park, about 650 metres from the eastern boundary of the park, is an old growth pine forest of a type that is globally endangered (Quimby 1993), and Chee-skong-abikong, the Spirit Rock that is sacred to the Anishnabai.

The Teme-Augama Anishnabai and the Temagami First Nation are currently negotiating a land claim settlement, based on the terms of the Robinson-Huron treaty of 1850. (The Temagami First Nation is the registered band; the Teme-Augama Anishnabai are a broader group of the descendents of the original population of *Daki Menan*, including non-Status and Métis.) If included in the Robinson Huron Treaty, the Temagami band should have received a reserve under the terms of the treaty, but they did not get an official reserve until 1971, after prolonged lobbying (Hodgins 1989, 255). The area of the reserve is undersized compared to the area given to other bands under the treaty, and much smaller than the 100 square miles the federal government promised them in 1885. The Ontario government has, reluctantly, given the Temagami

First Nation an area of only a few hundred acres on Bear Island (Hodgins 1989, 217).

“Justice” has been used to deny the Teme-Augama Anishnabai their rights to their land; the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that they (and other Native Peoples’) rights to the land were relinquished in the French colonization, and that sovereignty of the land was transferred to the British with their conquest of the French. The courts and governments involved in this dispute have consistently employed language congruent with Levinas’ notion of being at home with itself, seeing the land as property that can be owned as “my place,” or “one’s own.” Being at home with itself is subjectivity envisioned, and enacted, as domain -- having one’s own domain, owning oneself and one’s things as property in an exclusive sense. Property belongs to oneself and none other. This is the sort of right of ownership of land that the courts have set as a requirement in the conditions for valid Aboriginal title, through the 1980 case of *Baker Lake v. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*. To claim Aboriginal title, a group must be able to demonstrate that “that they and their ancestors lived within, and were members of, organized societies; these societies occupied the specific territory over which they were claiming Aboriginal title; their occupation was exclusive; and this occupation was in effect when England claimed sovereignty over the region” (Dickason 1997, 329).

The Teme-Augama Anishnabai do not relate to the land in terms of being at home with itself. The land is not “one’s own” but “*Daki Menan*,” meaning

“our land.” As Olive Patricia Dickason says, the Anishnabai do not conceive of the land as something to be owned, but rather something that is necessarily shared by its inhabitants, including past and future generations of humans, as well as other animals and plant life, and in some cases rocks (Dickason 1997, 328). According to the Anishnabai, land rights are rights to use land rather than to own it. The Anishnabai see themselves as “keepers of the land” (Katt and Mckenzie 2000) or stewards (Mathias 2001). They do not seek ownership of the land, but protection for it, to preserve it. For the Anishnabai, the land cannot be “my place” as Levinas describes being with at home with itself, but remains “our land,” to be shared in justice.

Justice requires acknowledging others beyond face to face relations, and mediation of the conflicting claims of multiple others. Thus far, the justice system has failed to mediate the conflicting claims in *Daki Menan*. The courts and government bodies have not made any pretence of considering anything but human concerns in *Daki Menan*. The interests of industrial users of the land have been well heard in negotiating land use rights, but in the Ontario and Canadian justice systems the Anishnabai’s calls for ethics have been ignored.

The legal system is concerned only with what is legal, not with what is ethical or just in Levinas’ sense of justice. This was explicitly stated in the first ruling on the Bear Island case between the Teme-Augama Anishnabai and the Government of Ontario. In the Bear Island Decision, Judge Steele remarks

I am of the opinion that there is no legal trust relationship between the Crown and Indians. There may well be a high moral trust but this is not one that is recognized at law. In considering evidence of facts as opposed to interpreting contracts or treaties, all factors must be determined in accordance with the standard of proof in civil cases, that is, the balance of probabilities rather than with any particular slant or bias in favour of Indians. (OR 1984, 368)

In this statement he echoes the attitude of Oliver Mowat, who was the Ontario Premier involved in the 1885-9 St. Catherine's Milling case, the first ruling on Aboriginal title in Canada, who said "We say there is no Indian title in law or in equity. The claim of the Indians is simply moral and no more" (quoted in Dickason 1997, 316).

The case law system employed in Ontario and in the federal system relies on precedents, unlike Québec law, allowing past injustices to be perpetuated. The St. Catherine's Milling case (also known as the Indian Title Case, and the Ontario Lands Case) set precedents for Aboriginal and provincial rights (Dickason 1997, 315). In the St. Catherine's Milling case the courts ruled that Aboriginal rights to the land were conferred by the colonial sovereign, not a pre-existing right (Dickason 1997, 315-319). The dispute was about Rupert's Land, part of the land designated in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as "lands reserved for Indians." This case set a precedent of denying Native peoples rights to the land. The upholding of the precedent perpetuates the injustice instead of re-examining the question of Aboriginal rights in ethics.

Judge Steele upheld this precedent in the Bear Island Decision, arguing that the British Crown acquired sovereignty of the land by right of conquest



against the French, and Pontiac in 1763. As Dickason notes, he “made no mention of the Amerindian allies who had fought for the British on those occasions,” stating that their “primitive” social organization “meant that ‘the Indian occupation could not be considered true and legal, and that the Europeans were lawfully entitled to take possession of the land and settle it with colonies’” (Dickason 1997, 326). Justice Allan McEachern has also upheld the precedent set by the St. Catherine’s Milling case, rejecting the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en claim to Aboriginal title in northern British Columbia (Dickason 1997, 329). McEachern’s decision denied Aboriginal rights in terms of ownership and control of the land, granting only a right to sustenance (Dickason 1997, 329). In his decision, McEachern said “it is part of the law of nations, which has become part of common law, that the discovery and occupation of lands of this continent by European nations, or occupation and settlement, gave rise to the right of sovereignty” (quoted in Dickason 1997, 330). These findings effectively curtailed the possibly more favourable trend set by the Baker Lake case.

Dickason presents the adoption of the requirements for valid Aboriginal title as part of a positive trend, since groups that meet the requirements were recognized to hold Aboriginal title (Dickason 1997, 329). In the ruling that set the conditions for Aboriginal title, Baker Lake won their case against Indian Affairs and Northern Development in 1980. The pre-existence of Aboriginal rights before, and subsequent to, colonization was also recognized in the 1984 case of *Guerin v. The Queen*, and Aboriginal land use rights were upheld in the 1987 case

of *Sparrow v. R.*, and the 1996 case of *R. v Adams* (Dickason 1997, 329). However, in the later decisions, the courts recognize Aboriginal rights to land use, not Aboriginal title, which would have included rights to negotiate use of land by others.

Canadian justice systems maintain unjust situations regarding Native rights to their land, totalizing their ethical claims into a system that does not recognize any validity of moral obligations. The fact that Native sovereignty was ignored in the beginning, setting a precedent, is not a good reason for continuing to ignore their continuing calls for ethics. In justice we should recognize that the land, and its inhabitants, are to be shared in justice, not possessed and exploited. The land is *Daki Menan*, "our land" spoken in the Anishnabe language, not "my place."

The difference between designations like "*Daki Menan*," and expressions of being at home with itself, such as "Crown land," and the apparently objective designation of "Block 30," matters. The government has applied a variety of thematic categories to express reductive knowledge of the land in claiming it as "our" own in the name of Canada. The designation "Crown land" was created ostensibly to protect Native land from trespass by settlers. Dickason explains:

In an attempt to correct this situation, the Crown lands Protection Act was passed in 1839, declaring Indian lands to be Crown lands. Because Indians held their land in common (apart from some individuals who had accepted the non-Native way), making the Crown the guardian of their lands in effect excluded most Amerindians from political rights based on individual property qualifications. This endorsed the popular belief that Amerindians

were to be regarded as children, in need of paternal protection.  
(Dickason 1997, 220)

The protected areas in *Daki Menan* have official names given by the MNR, (for example, Obabika River Waterway Park, and Bob's Lake Conservation reserve), while the land to be cut is designated "Block 30." The old growth forest adjacent to what the MNR calls "Block 30" is supposed to be protected under "Ontario's Living Legacy," as part of Obabika River Waterway Park. (This protection was granted due to Anishnabai and environmentalist protests in the late 1980s.) However, the Ontario government, as part of the Living Legacy program, has classed Block 30 as an "enhanced management area" designated for "general use" (MNR 2002a). According to the official *Land Use Strategy* of the Living Legacy, buffering of parklands and conservation reserves is not necessary, because it is mandated that "ecologically sustainable management ... will occur on adjacent lands" (MNR 2002a, 7.2.4). A clear cut adjacent to old growth forest and a conservation reserve does not appear to be "ecologically sustainable management."

In its own words, the *Land Use Strategy* "places Crown lands in a range of Land Use Designations (LUDs) and Enhanced Management Areas (EMAs). Although these designations and areas do not themselves affect Aboriginal or treaty rights, some Aboriginal activities which are carried out under such rights on some lands may be affected by new land use policies. Most of the Crown lands in the planning area remain under a general use designation and are not

significantly affected by the new land use policies" (MNR 2002a, 1.4). However, in *Daki Menan*, the area of land slated to be clear cut, designated "Block 30" and classed by the MNR as an "enhanced management area," is part of the land claimed by the Teme-Augama Anishnabai. The land claim settlement process following the Supreme Court ruling of 1991 is still under negotiation. Some land was officially designated as "set aside lands" pending the settlement, but "Block 30" is in the traditional Misabi family land of Alex Mathias, who resides therein. The question of family lands in the settlement remains outstanding. Other parts of Mathias' land have already be clear cut against his will, and without compensation. The MNR regards him as a squatter.

Ontario's Living Legacy is explicitly designed to encourage hunting and fishing in all "land use designations and enhanced management areas," and to promote camps by giving them longer term leases (MNR 2002a). The *Land Use Strategy* promotes recreational uses of the land, to make it more accessible to people who will spend more money in their use of the land, such as hunters and anglers, rather than ecotourists. In classing Obabika River Waterway park as a waterway class park, the government intends to promote recreation and educational uses, but without contributing any facilities. They provide no funding for maintaining campsites, although people are encouraged to camp, fish, and hunt in the area. Privies are not maintained by the government, and

sites are not monitored for garbage.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the number of “problem” or “rogue” bears is likely to increase, and the water is likely to become contaminated with sewage.

While arranging to buy land adjacent to parks and conservation areas for habitat protection and increased recreation, the plan also provides for selling new cottage lots and lots for camps from Crown land where previously only leases were available, especially on waterfronts (MNR 2002a, 6.1.8). In addition, sport hunting is permitted in all parks except nature reserves (MNR 2002a, 7.2.1), and is also permitted in conservation areas (MNR 2002a, 7.2.2). The designations applied by the government control the use of the land, totalizing it into the programmatic system of their *Land Use Strategy*. The government enacts being at home with itself, claiming the land as its own, for its own use.

### **The Others, Ethical Alterity in *Daki Menan***

Multiple others interrupt the government’s narrative of being at home with itself enacted through the Living Legacy programme, and my analysis of it. The others interrupt and call me to responsibility, to give universal consideration. *Daki Menan* is inhabited by diverse interpenetrating communities of Anishnabai and other humans, other animals and plants, and visited by a number of transient residents, campers, and wilderness enthusiasts, each of whom potentially obligates me.

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<sup>78</sup> Alex Mathias, who resides on Obabika Lake, maintains the privies on the lake. A number of camps in the area also conduct annual clean up programs.

The call of another interrupts one being at home with itself. I experienced something like this in my first contact with the Temagami region, even before a canoe trip I planned with friends began. The day before we were to leave we found out that there was a bear warning around Diamond Lake, near Temagami, in the path of our planned route. We were advised to avoid the lake, and heard discussion about killing a "rogue" bear, who had allegedly attacked two groups of campers. I had some doubt that the small area we saw indicated on the map truly represented the range of a bear, and this led me to question what "right" we had to be going into the bear's territory, and if going into it is ever ethical. I asked myself if my living in this land can be ethical at all, given that my people are not managing to coexist with the bears.

We were intending to camp on Crown land. I knew, from reading Hugh Brody's work (Brody 1988), that Native people often regard Crown land as their land, that reserves were initially presented as locations for settled communities, with the surrounding land to be shared, and sometimes divided into family territories to facilitate rotation of land use patterns (such as trap lines and hunting grounds) for sustainable living. I wondered if we should be asking permission of the local Native people to travel through the land. At the time I had only a vague idea of who they might be. I recognized my culture's use of the land as an enactment of being at home with itself. On the canoe trip I learned much more, directly from the land and its people.

Levinas speaks of the interruption of oneself by the other in terms of a being put into question that tears one out of one's concern for one's own. The other inspires an obsessive responsibility in oneself. This is ethical sensibility, and what that canoe trip has inspired in me. It inspired the questions and sensibilities Levinas describes in terms of encountering human others:

sensibility is being affected by a non-phenomenon, a being put in question by the alterity of the other, before the intervention of a cause, before the appearance of the other. It is a pre-original not resting on oneself, the restlessness of someone persecuted -- Where to be? How to be? It is a writhing in the tight dimensions of pain, the unsuspected dimensions of the hither side. It is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothingness... (Levinas 1998, 75)

A bear called me into question, inspiring me to ask myself if I have a right to be in Temagami, in the bear's neighbourhood. Thinking about Levinas' ethics in terms of actually meeting a bear face to face challenges their applicability within the more than human world. Applying his understanding of ethics directly, should I lie down and let the bear eat me? I have no more right to be than the bear, but does the bear have more of a right to be than I do? Does the fact that I am a visitor while this is the bear's home change our obligations? Is the bear perhaps required to show me hospitality? Such questions are irrelevant in Levinasian ethics, since "...I am responsible for the Other without waiting for his reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair" (Levinas 1985, 98-99). It is lucky for me we did not meet any bears on our canoe trip.

Levinas' ethical theory does allow that in justice my companions could intervene on my behalf. Each of us would, in actuality, be obligated to say "Here I am," to offer ourselves in place of each other. Most ethical claims are not so extreme. In *Daki Menan*, most of the others I encountered voiced harmonizing, if infinite, claims.

### **Being With/in, Ethical Subjectivity in *Daki Menan***

Each of the others places an infinite demand on me. However, there are psychological, social, and economic limits to my ability to act on my responsibilities to them. The demands of ethics are infinite, but our capacities are not. Ethical command cannot be rationalized. However, this does not mean we can do nothing, or that we are excused. What *can* I do? I can write letters to government officials and newspapers, and present papers at conferences. I can participate in blockades. A number of other people familiar with the situation in *Daki Menan* have voiced a desire to put themselves in the place of suffering others in this manner. In previous conflicts in the Temagami region, 344 people, including the soon to be Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae, were arrested for blockading road construction in 1989 (Back 2002). This is commonly known as the Red Squirrel Road blockade. I did not understand Levinas' writings on substitution until I recognized my desire to participate in such blockades as an example of this.



Awakened to ethical subjectivity, one is implicated, under accusation. This does not mean that one is literally accused by the other, but that one feels obliged to the other before the other speaks. As Levinas says, "The neighbor assigns me before I designate him. This is a modality not of a knowing, but of an obsession, a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition....In an approach I am first a servant of a neighbor, already late and guilty for being late" (Levinas 1998, 87). In ethical subjectivity, oneself is under accusation, unable "to slip away" (Levinas 1998, 85).

As Levinas says, one is obligated as "me" -- it is me that is under accusation of the others in *Daki Menan*. I am obligated to speak about this, to provoke you to respond in turn, to demand justice. What specifically places me under accusation is my presence in this land in which I have no right to be. I find this lack of a right to be here particularly stark in that I am an Anglo-Saxon in North America. I have no right to be here. My being here is part of the displacement of Native peoples. This is an enactment of the most obvious and painful aspect of the fear Levinas recognizes in the fear of the *Da* of my *Dasein* occupying the place of another. People of my culture have claimed this land as "my place in the sun" and attempted to displace the original inhabitants of the land.

It is my own sense of white guilt that places me under accusation in this way -- neither the Anishnabai, nor any nonhuman others in the area, have done

anything to make me feel unwelcome.<sup>79</sup> On the contrary, the people I met demonstrated a degree of welcome I have seldom experienced. Mary Carol and Alex Mathias invited me and my friends to share food with them, and offered us shelter from the rain. They gave us a map of the trails in the old growth forest at the north end of Obabika Lake, and told us about Chee-skong-abikong. All they asked of us was to speak to others, so that the land and their way of life might continue. They asked me to speak on their behalf, not in place of them, but to add my voice to theirs', to speak in places to which they might not have access. They indicated that more voices are necessary, because theirs' are not being heard.

### **Justice in *Daki Menan***

In Levinasian justice I am required to speak on behalf of others, to demand justice (Levinas 1985, 99). According to Levinas, in ethical subjectivity, one cannot make claims on one's own behalf, but justice prompts oneself to speak on behalf of others. Levinasian justice sketches a process of balancing claims through negotiation, through conversation and advocacy. While I cannot say that one sort of other should take precedence categorically, thematic knowledge matters in balancing claims. Scientific knowledge can help assess claims, but it is important also to consider whose knowledge is used to compare

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<sup>79</sup> The only experience I had in *Daki Menan* that might be interpreted as unwelcoming was a result of my trespassing off the trail near Chee-skong-abikong. I became frightened that we would be hurt by falling rocks if we approached the tower by that route. I heard a warning from the rock, and retreated.

claims. Thematic knowledge is always partial, biased by who asks the questions and defines the problems. Vested interests need to be recognized in balancing knowledge claims.

Scientific knowledge lends support to nonhuman others in *Daki Menan* through identifying old growth forests and endangered species. According to ancient forest scientist Peter Quimby, only 0.4%, less than 1%, of the world's eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) forests remains. Of these, in Ontario only 1.05% of the original white pine forests remain intact (Quimby 1993). The old growth white pine forest around Obabika Lake is the largest (2 400 hectares) of the remaining stands in the world (Quimby 1993). This stand is supposed to be protected under "Ontario's Living Legacy," as part of Obabika River Waterway Park. However, construction of bridges in waterway parks is permitted for forestry (MNR 2002a, 7.2.1), which leads me to question to what extent this old growth forest is protected from logging. There is also the matter of the clear cut planned for the land adjacent to the old growth forest, only 650 metres away.

The clear cut would also seem to infringe on the proper implementation of Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*, which is supposed to protect habitat as well as the members of species. Section five of the *Act* states that

No person shall wilfully,  
(a) kill, injure, interfere with or take or attempt to kill, injure, interfere with or take any species of fauna or flora; or  
(b) destroy or interfere with or attempt to destroy or interfere with the habitat of any species of fauna or flora, declared in the regulations to be threatened with extinction. (*Endangered Species Act* R.S.O. 1990)

The implementation of the *Act* is questionable. The MNR has produced the *Significant Wildlife Habitat: Technical Guide* that instructs how to identify significant habitats for species at risk. It does not mention Eastern Cougar, or any other predator species. The guide says only thirteen species are nationally endangered (MNR 2000, 54), and that these species are protected under "the *Habitat of Endangered and Threatened Species* component of the Natural Heritage section of the *Provincial Policy Statement*" (MNR 2000, 55). However, the *Endangered Species Act* identifies eighteen animals and insects, including the Eastern Cougar (*Felis concolor cougar*), and eight plant species, including Small White Lady's-slipper orchid (*Cypripedium candidum*), Wood Poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*) and Hoary Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum incanum*), as endangered in Ontario (*Endangered Species Act* R.R.O. 1990).

The land and water around Obabika and Temagami are home to a number of endangered species, such as the Eastern Cougar, American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*), and possibly Aurora Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis timagamiensis*). The Aurora Trout, a species unique to this region, was officially extirpated,<sup>80</sup> but a population has been maintained by the MNR, and reintroduced to a number of lakes in northern Ontario. Fishing for Aurora Trout was permitted from August 1 to October 15 in 2002, in Carol, Liberty, and Reed Lakes according to the MNR

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<sup>80</sup> Generally "extirpated" means locally extinct: that populations may survive in other areas. In this case, the only population that survived was that kept by the MNR, meaning the species became extinct in the wild.

fishing website (MNR 2002b, 5). Protection of American Ginseng is unclear: "A statute protecting wild American Ginseng was enacted in Ontario in 1891, but repealed as 'archaic' legislation in 1960. Wild American Ginseng is listed under Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), which controls international trade in this plant or its parts" (ROM and MNR 2002).

Scientific knowledge is familiar territory in environmentalist discourses. The validity of certain studies might be questioned, but the legitimacy of science itself is not generally challenged, aside from recent discussions about the social construction of knowledge as discussed in the previous chapter. Spiritual knowledge is less broadly respected. The proposed (and MNR approved) clear cut would infringe on what the Anishnabai know to be a sacred place. If carried out, the clear cut may be visible from sacred ground on the ridge above Chee-skong-abikong, overlooking the small lake of the same name, at the north end of Obabika Lake, which is a vision quest site. In addition, some people have expressed concern that the vibration of the logging machinery may cause the sacred tower to fall -- there used to be three towers at the site. Alex Mathias has likened the situation to "demolishing the Sistine Chapel and leaving the altar," saying "My spiritual beliefs come from the forest for miles around the Spirit Rock," and that "My people have been coming to the spiritual site for thousands of years" (Mathias quoted in Back 2002). Mathias has been active in protesting clear cutting and the building of logging roads in the Temagami area, and

participated in the Red Squirrel Road blockade. He has been living on his traditional family lands, wherein he grew up, full time since 1992. He sees it as his spiritual duty to protect the integrity of the land.

Presumably, the fact that Canada is a signatory to the UN Declaration of Human Rights should prevent the defilement of sacred sites like Chee-skong-abikong, since article 18 of the charter states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance" (United Nations 1948).

The power of economic knowledge is all too familiar to environmentalists. Economic knowledge tends to consider only humans in ethics, treating nonhuman others as objects for use. But I am obligated to the people of the town of Temagami, who have economic concerns about jobs. The need for local livelihoods must be recognized in negotiating justice. On the discussion board of Ottertooth.com, some residents of the Temagami region have argued that the logging of Block 30 is necessary to provide them with jobs so that they can support their families. Others say that Liskeard Lumber will hire only six people to conduct the logging, and there are no guarantees that these will be local people (Temagami Talk 2002).

Economic knowledge often pits economic health against ecological health. Opinions of the residents of the town of Temagami and around Lake Temagami

are divided between outfitters, summer camps, and others in favour of developing ecotourism versus those who support logging and other resource extraction-based economic projects. However, the classic divide between the logging industry and those who favour environmentalist views is not necessarily intractable. Alan Dregson and Duncan Taylor, for example, suggest that economic and ecological interests are not necessarily incompatible, since a healthy economy is only possible in a healthy ecosystem in the long term (Dregson and Taylor 1997, 39). They argue that local economies and environments are interdependent, and point out that conservation has a history of being both economically and ecologically motivated, citing the influence of Gifford Pinchot in forestry. (Pinchot implemented a national system of forest conservation in the United States during Roosevelt's presidency.)

Dregson and Taylor refer to "biological capital," using economic knowledge to support environmental protection. Similarly, environmentalists Thomas Prugh, Richard Norgaard, and Robert Goodland, in their book *Natural Capital and Human Economic Survival* (1995) refer to "natural capital" and sustainability, using economic knowledge to support environmental conservation and protection. Short-term economic gains based on resource extraction are not economically sustainable in the long term. Once an old growth forest has been cut, it is not replaceable on a human timescale. As Dregson and Taylor explain, "If an economy is based on a natural resource and its use...the elimination of that resource will destroy the economy over time. This has been

dramatically shown in the case of much of the Newfoundland fishing industry with the virtual elimination of the northern cod stock" (Dregson and Taylor 1997, 40).

Economic knowledge matters; humans do need to support their families, but an economy built on resource extraction will not support the people of Temagami in the long term. Developing ecotourism would provide a more long-term solution, and harmonize with other people's needs, including other than human persons. Negotiating between conflicting claims can bring disparate groups together, creating alliances and coalitions against economic pressures that put money before health, human and otherwise. Together we can speak, write letters, and take other political actions against greed. The Celebration gatherings organized by Alex Mathias and Earthroots, for example, which are held on the solstices and equinoxes, bringing together members of the Temagami First Nation, Teme-Augama Anishnabai, Earthroots, as well as wilderness enthusiasts and other concerned persons, are a positive step toward building alliances.

It is important in advocacy to act as an ally, to work in coalition, not assuming one can speak for others, but adding one's voice to others' based on that for which they actually ask. Community development worker and popular educator Anne Bishop explains that an ally is one who, rather than being paralysed by a sense of guilt, or reacting against being labelled guilty, is

critical of the real power structures of North America and the world. They have an understanding of themselves as part of a people, or various peoples. They understand that if something is



done to another member of their own group, it could have happened to them....[They] understand that, as part of various oppressor groups (white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle or above in the class structure) they did not individually bring the situation about and they cannot just reach out with good will and solve it. They must act with others to change it. They believe that to do nothing is to reinforce the status quo; not to decide is to decide; if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem....Most try to define what they can do, with others, in a strategic way, and then go home and sleep at night. (Bishop 1994, 94)

Bishop also advises against taking leadership roles (as an expert who knows what is best for another group) for oppressed groups to which one does not belong, or acting as a spokesperson for other groups (Bishop 1994, 99). It is better to add one's voice to other humans in advocacy, rather than claiming to speak for them. Advocacy for nonhuman others is different: humans are obligated to speak for nonhuman others in justice. Justice demands that I amplify the appeals that others do not seem to hear, the calls of nonhuman others, to reshape the nonverbal to speak in a voice that those in power can understand, and that they cannot ignore.

## **Conclusion**

Under the law, *Daki Menan* is Crown land -- it is the property of the sovereign by right of conquest. This is an enactment of being at home with itself, being without ethics. Justice cannot be expected to prevail without ethics. It may come to pass if we can learn from the Anishnabai how to live as though the land were *Daki Menan*, our land to be shared in justice, with all peoples, human

and otherwise. No place is exclusively one's own. We range through each other's territories, like canoes through the territories of bears. Those who cannot live with the bears, and let the forest live, should not have the right to be in *Daki Menan*.

## Chapter 9. After Thoughts

Justice may use cost-benefit analyses, the weighing of claims based on economic arguments, but ethics, in Levinas' understanding of the term, requires the pre-conscious emotional defence of the other inspired in oneself by proximity. Short-term economic interest routinely ignores, minimizes, or marginalizes the voices of nonhuman others in ethics. The enlightened self-interest of conservation is not enough. I aim to provoke in others what inspires me to environmental action. I demand justice for nonhuman others, but my more basic aim is to provoke you to also demand justice for others in the more than human world.

The question of including others beyond the interhuman in Levinas' understanding of face to face relations is already a question of justice, but it is first a question of ethics. I am obligated to see the faces of nonhuman others, and to hear myself questioned by nonhuman others. My deconstructive reading of Levinas suggests that his work can be open to such "doggone" others. In ethics, there is not time to first find out what sort of creature the other is before hearing the call to ethics. Ethics comes first, before epistemology, the applying of themes. For Levinas, it is perhaps more important that ethics come before ontology, before oneself, since the other is above oneself, beyond being, calling to oneself with an anarchic, pre-original command.

Levinasian ethics are somewhat limited in terms of recognizing power issues in ethics. Levinasian ethics are not exactly politically blind, but stress

individual responsibility in a way that may be inadequate to address corporate control of resources. However, developing policy principles that might be used to administer justice was never part of my goal. Levinas treats ethics as something like a feeling inspired in oneself by the other, not something for which there can be a universal or objective scale for judging. There is no set of defensible principles -- any particular set of principles is necessarily put in question by the other who stands before me, face to face in ethical relation.

That Levinasian ethics and justice are not programmatic may be perceived as a limitation for environmental ethics and justice developed out of his work, but for others it inspires a new way of doing ethics, provoking a sense of infinite responsibility to nonhuman others. The ethics of being with/in are designed to provoke an ethical response, which may be initially experienced as guilt, prompting one to dismiss the expansion of the infinite responsibility demanded by Levinasian ethics beyond the interhuman, when it was already seen as too radical to be realistic for interhuman ethics. However, I see this expansion of responsibility as positive. Levinasian environmental ethics can expand the felt sense of ethics back to into primacy, multiplying the claims we might hear and to which we are obligated.

I am not advocating a universal ethic. Rather, like Levinas, I am describing the impetus and inspiration of ethical sensibility: how ethics come to pass between oneself and another. These ethics do not give a plan or system that can be applied to adjudicate conflicting ethical claims, but describe how

individuals make decisions in justice. This recognizes the complexity of making such decisions, and the necessity of individual decision and responsibility, and yields an ethic of individual responsibility, hopefully inspiring a sense of empowerment. This way of doing environmental ethics, as interpersonal ethics beyond the interhuman, starts from initial ethical sensibility, that which inspires environmental ethicists, as Evernden discusses. It does not rationalize what we ought to do, but looks at the heart of what inspires ethics in us, and provokes it in turn.

The infinite unbounding of responsibility required in extending Levinasian ethics beyond the interhuman, to the more than human world, is a provocation, and challenge. This unbounding of responsibility is not a weakness but a strength, challenging all systems of justice that would rationalize the dismissal of the ethical claims of some, in preference for the voices of others. Levinasian ethics recognizes that this is always unethical, even when required in the negotiation of justice. As Levinas says at the end of *Totality and Infinity*, "For the little humanity that adorns the earth, a relaxation of essence to the second degree is needed, in the just war waged against war to tremble or shudder at every instant because of this very justice. This weakness is needed. This relaxation of virility without cowardice is needed for the little cruelty our hands repudiate" (Levinas 1998, 185). Justice is "the just war waged against war." We should shudder at the violation of ethics required for justice, even as we carry out justice, but still hear our right to do so questioned by the voices of the others.

A basic aim of my thesis has been to empower people to say that they hear the demands of nonhuman others, to demand justice for the trees, for old growth forests, and for rocks, to make it plausible to say that a nonhuman other obligates oneself, that even rocks, water, and air are morally considerable. In justice, I demand that other than human persons be given due consideration, amplifying the command of these others as I hear them, and letting them continue to interrupt.

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