

KOJÈVE AND LEVINAS: UNIVERSALITY WITHOUT TOTALITY

A Thesis

by

ANTHONY JOHN PEPITONE

Submitted to Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2010

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Kojève and Levinas: Universality without Totality. (May 2010)

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I have structured my master's thesis in terms of an opposition between Kojève's existentialist, Marxist philosophical formulation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Levinas's post-Heideggerian, anti-Hegelian phenomenology in *Totality and Infinity*. While Levinas's project is explicitly anti-totalitarian, Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* emphasizes the End of History in Hegel's philosophy without shrinking from its totalizing aspects. While the philosophical project of each thinker is generally antithetical to the other, it is my contention that the universal and homogeneous state, conceived by Kojève to be the rational realization of the end of history, is a legitimate moral project for Levinasian ethics.

This thesis provides both an exegesis of Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology* and an interpretation of the tragedy of the slave understood in terms of Hölderlin's theory of the tragic. It is through the master/slave dialectic that history consummates in the end of history. Later in the thesis, I outline Levinas's project as an ethics as first philosophy in opposition to the Eleatic traditions in Western philosophy. We can trace Levinas's project in his unconventional reading of the cogito and the idea of infinity. Whereas Descartes represents a philosophical return home for Hegel, Levinas's reading of Descartes represents a philosophical sojourn away from

home in the second movement of the *Meditations*. With these notions, we have a formal basis in accounting for the conflict in Levinas's thought between the moral necessity of universal rights and the dangers of assimilation. Finally, I argue for why the universal and homogeneous state is an ethically worthy goal from a Levinasian perspective. On this question, I engage the thought of a number of thinkers of the left: Kojève, Derrida, Horkheimer, Adorno and Žižek.

I conclude that Levinas's thought on universalism and eschatology can serve as a moral basis for the left-Hegelian project of realizing a universal and homogeneous state. Because such a state is distinguishable from a totalizing End of History, the eschatological concern for one's singularity within history is compatible with the prophetic call to strive for political universality. Ultimately, it is the responsibility to this prophetic call that guarantees one's singularity.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to bring the thought of two original thinkers into correspondence. More narrowly, it is structured in terms of an opposition between Kojève's existentialist, Marxist philosophical formulation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Levinas's post-Heideggerian, anti-Hegelian phenomenology in *Totality and Infinity*. While Levinas's project is explicitly anti-totalitarian, Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology* emphasizes the End of History in Hegel's philosophy without shrinking from its totalizing aspects. From this strange, if not impossible, philosophical encounter between Kojève and Levinas, it is my contention that the rational realization of the End of History in the universal and homogeneous state is a legitimate moral project for Levinasian ethics. In Chapter II, I show Kojève's argument for the End of History and how the universal and homogeneous state follows. In Chapter III, I outline the form of Levinas's ethics as first philosophy, and then endeavor to show how his ethics pertains to the politics of universalism. In Chapter IV, I present a number of arguments and readings that demonstrate how Levinasian ethics is consistent with the politics of a few thinkers of the left: Kojève, Derrida, Horkheimer, Adorno and Žižek.

With Chapter II, I present Kojève's reading of the Hegelian master / slave dialectic as a tragedy. Starting with Descartes' epistemology, Hegel begins with the cogito as the origin of modern philosophy where thought begins its return home to the mind. In Hölderlin's theory of judgment, there is a rejection of the cogito in favor of the

This thesis follows the style of *Research in Phenomenology*.

ineffable intuition of undifferentiated being. It is this intuition that is conveyed through tragedy, in Hölderlin's theory, where the tragic hero is annihilated in the tragedy's presentation of undifferentiated totality. I argue that Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness synthesizes Descartes' epistemology with Hölderlin's theory of judgment. Self-consciousness thus begins with the certainty of consciousness, but genuine self-consciousness only comes about through the recognition of others. For consciousness to achieve self-consciousness, it begins with the desire for others' desire (or pure prestige) and proceeds through a dialectic between master and slave. Through the slave's transformation by way of labor and struggle against the master on fear of death, genuine self-consciousness emerges at the End of History when the slave overthrows the master and then assimilates into a homogeneous society of citizens without slave or master. This moment is presented by Kojève in the dramatic aftereffects of the French Revolution when Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* and Napoleon engaged in the Battle of Jena.¹ For Kojève, Napoleon represented the universal political expansion of the French Revolution, which would culminate in the universal and homogeneous state. In such a state of affairs, the singularity of the slave is annihilated in the totality of history through the process of self-consciousness' supersession.

If Hegel's philosophy of history is tragic, we can consider Levinas's philosophy as anti-tragic. My reading of Levinas largely centers on his work *Totality and Infinity*, and seeks to describe, by way of exegesis, how the conflict in Levinas's thought between the particular and the universal (for which religious and political identity in Levinas's thought can respectively serve as shorthand) can be traced back to the conflict in identity inherent to one's self-identity in the ethical relationship. For Levinas, the history of

philosophy after Plato is the history of reducing the other to the same. For the sake of a genuinely ethical relation, the other must be maintained against reduction to the same, and we can trace this project in Levinas's unconventional reading of the cogito in Descartes. By focusing on the second movement of the cogito regarding the idea of the infinitely perfect being, Levinas develops out of Descartes' thought an ethics as first philosophy. On this reading of Descartes, finitude is equated with the imperfection that desires the infinitude of perfection through the idea of the infinite. I argue that the relationship between the ego and the idea of the infinite offers a formal structure (similar to Plato's divided line), which may serve as a basis for the deformed relationship between the Self and Other. It can also serve as the basis for understanding the relationship between ethnic and national identity. This in turn will help put into relief questions about assimilation in the universal and homogeneous state. Nonetheless, so long as the End of History is generated from within history, history reserves the final judgment on the value and worth of individuals. Against this tragic conception of history, Levinas poses the eschatological as an anti-tragic order from which each individual's worth and singularity is preserved by judgments that have their basis in an infinite time that exceeds history and its tragic totalization.

In Chapter IV, I address the question of how Levinasian ethics is consistent with the project of a universal and homogeneous state. Whereas Descartes represents a philosophical return home for Hegel, Levinas's reading of Descartes represents a philosophical sojourn away from home in the second movement of the *Meditations*. Similarly, a Levinasian could interpret Kojève's conception of post-historicity as humanity's sojourn away from itself. For example, in Horkheimer and Adorno's

Dialectic of Enlightenment, Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens serves as a metaphor for the self-imposed slavery of the masters in their blind use of instrumental reason.

Emancipation shows itself as a sojourn with the wholly other Sirens who symbolize the infinitude of practical reason. Related to practical reason, Derrida outlined a reading of the Kojève's End of History as an ethically necessary sojourn in the time of "the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of *man as other*."² From the standpoint of Levinasian ethics, we can interpret the universal and homogeneous state as the project for the systematic elimination of the need and dispossession of the stranger (i.e., those that stand behind the Other as a third party), by means of the universal rights to liberty, equality and fraternity. I finally address Žižek's criticism of Levinas's ethical thought, since this criticism stands in direct opposition to my thesis. While Žižek argues that love for the Other and justice for the third are structurally antithetical, I argue that Žižek neglects the aspect of infinity in Levinas's thought, and this is the primary cause of his misreading Levinas.

In the final analysis, there is a moral duty to realize the universal and homogeneous state to the extent that it realizes the prophetic call for universal rights. As distinct from the End of History, the universal and homogeneous state does not necessarily imply the dangers of total assimilation and de-diversification. Derrida shows how the work of justice is interminable, and this interminability preserves discourse.

I have not tried to synthesize the thought of Kojève and Levinas, but I have instead highlighted the wide divergences in their thought. Descartes serves as a key point of reference for many of these divergences. Whereas Hegel adds to the cogito the desire for prestige in the anthropogenesis of human recognition, Levinas reads desire as integral

to Descartes' project for understanding finitude in light of infinitely desirable perfection. This positive notion of infinity serves as the grounds for Levinas's notion of eschatology, which preserves the singularity of the other from the tragic finality of history's progression and conclusion.

NOTES

¹ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 44.

² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 74.

CHAPTER II

KOJÈVE'S END OF HISTORY

In this chapter, I will provide both an exegesis of Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology* and an interpretation of the tragedy of the slave understood in terms of Hölderlin's theory of the tragic. Within this dialectic, we can see the movement from the consciousness of the Cartesian subject to the self-consciousness of a subject desirous of recognition in the synthesis of Hölderlin's theory of tragedy and Descartes' epistemology. Kojève's commentary on Hegel's master/slave dialectic highlights the role of death and work as the driving factors of the master/slave dialectic. In the slave's absolute fear of death at the master's hands, there is a realization that the natural world must be overcome. Through the slave's slavery to the master, work is performed for the slave's immediate pleasure and consumption, but the slave's work of transforming the world also transforms the slave. In this transformation, the slave passes through slavery and overcomes the fear of death as well as her innate animal nature. Kojève's depiction of Hegel's master/slave dialectic is tragic to the extent that the singularity of the slave is superseded by the End of History, which brings the dialectic to a conclusion. In such a state of affairs, there is neither master nor slave but rather the supersession of the two at the End of History, here identified with the universal and homogeneous state, where the "strictly particular, personal, individual value of each is recognized as such, in its very particularity, by *all*, by Universality incarnated in the State as such; and in which the universal value of the State is recognized and realized by the

Particular as such, by *all* the Particulars.”¹ This outlines the anthropogenesis of self-consciousness.

It is difficult to summarize the entirety of Kojève’s *Introduction* because it is really an assembly of lectures. It can be said that this assembly of lectures offers a Marxist, existentialist reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. The whole of the *Introduction* reads Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in terms of its internal structure with a particular focus on the first part (or the first four chapters) of *Phenomenology*², which interprets both a totality (from an existentialist perspective that understands one’s end as the organizing principle for one’s possibilities) and a realism (from a dialectical materialist perspective) within the whole of the *Phenomenology*.

While Kojève’s end-of-history thesis may be idiosyncratic in the sense that it less properly exegetical than propagandistic, it still provides both a materialist and a phenomenological context for Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. As we shall see, full self-consciousness requires a certain, concrete state of affairs where one (such as Hegel) is afforded self-consciousness through recognition. Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel depicts him as a realist (= materialist); yet, Kojève’s own philosophy of Hegel could be described as idealist (= existentialist) in the following sense:

Hegelian philosophy is not a truth in the proper sense of the term: it is less the adequate discursive revelation of a reality, than an idea or an ideal, that is to say, a “project” which is to be realized, and therefore proved true, through action. However, what is remarkable is that it is precisely because it *is* not yet true that this philosophy alone is capable of *becoming* true one day. For it alone says that truth is created in time out of error and that there are no “transcendent” criteria (whereas a theistic theory of necessity either has always been true, or is forever false). And that is why history will never refute Hegelianism, but will limit itself to choosing between its two opposed interpretations.³

All of normativity (i.e., the ideal) is neither relative to *any* given time or place (relativism) nor absolute beyond any time or place (absolutism). Instead, all morality is relative to the absolute end of history wherein the discourse of emancipation was determined by the time and place of the French Revolution in the Napoleonic Code and the Universal Rights of Man. It is from this set of historical circumstances where the opposing interpretations of Hegel (left and right Hegelianism) can be said to have its origin in the opposing political factions of the French Revolution. It was during the tumultuous time period “that we derive our most common as well as our most crude political metaphor. The [radical] Jacobin faction began to sit to the left of the president’s chair in the assembly, and the [moderate] Girondins to his right.”⁴ If all normativity has a political motivation in the events and the aftermath of the French Revolution, then ethics is reducible to politics. In Chapter III, it will be noted how Levinas objected to this reduction as an undesirable consequence of German idealism. For the time being, we can see how Kojève envisioned a universal and homogeneous state as the properly post-historical outcome of the Left Hegelian interpretation of the End of History. Such a state is universal (or “nonexpandible”⁵) and homogeneous (“free from internal contradiction: from class strife, and so on”⁶) wherein slavery and mastery are superseded by citizenry.

The realization of this discourse of emancipation in a universal and homogeneous state is not predestined, but its very possibility is itself a confirmation of Spirit’s historical agency in determining between the left or right Hegelian interpretation of the rightful ramifications of the end of history; however, it should be noted that there was a shift in Kojève’s thought regarding the timing of the End of History. In the cited passage above regarding the opposing interpretations of Hegelian philosophy, Kojève (such as

Marx) believed that the universal and homogeneous state was essentially synonymous with the End of History (on his left Hegelian interpretation) and therefore a future event. Kojève announced a change of opinion on this matter in the footnote added to the second edition of his *Introduction* (this footnote will become even more pertinent in Chapter IV). Namely, on his later interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, Kojève seems to downplay the idealist aspect of his reading of Hegel by arguing that Hegel was originally correct that the End of History occurred contemporaneously with the tumultuous historical events that surrounded Hegel's writing of the *Phenomenology*; therefore, the universal and homogeneous state was not essential to the End of History. As a consequence, however rational and worthwhile the universal and homogeneous state remains, its significance is comparable to a dénouement of the climactic events of the French Revolution, "[S]o-called world history since then has been the working out of less than world-historical fundamental details."⁷ In Chapter IV, we will review Derrida's reading of the ethical significance Kojève ascribed to the trends and conditions leading to the universal and homogeneous state, but this chapter will focus on Kojève's understanding of Hegel's master / slave dialectic, and how it lead to the End of History.

The first two chapters of the *Introduction* give Hegel's master/slave narrative preeminence for the sake of developing this narrative into a grand narrative that brings an understanding of Spirit's struggle for self-consciousness throughout history's development and conclusion in the events of the French Revolution and the person of Napoleon. Kojève speaks of four irreducible premises that are necessary for that which is accomplished in Hegel's *Phenomenology*:

By accepting these four premises, we understand the possibility of a *historical* process, of a *History*, which is, in its totality, the history of the

Fights and the Work that finally ended in the wars of Napoleon and the table on which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* in order to *understand* both those wars and that table. Inversely, in order to explain the possibility of the *Phenomenology*, which is written on a *table* and which explains the wars of Napoleon, we must suppose the four premises mentioned.⁸

Roughly, these four premises are as follows: 1) speech reveals Being, 2) desire transforms Being, 3) desire for non-Being liberates one from Being, and 4) for the sake of liberation through the non-Being of the other's desire (i.e., recognition), the other must not be annihilated. Whereas the first premise concerns the bare consciousness of what can be articulated, the other three premises motivate the development of self-consciousness through desire.

The first premise is pertinent to the consciousness of the Cartesian cogito in giving to one's self one's own world. In the articulated thought of the cogito, *I think*, speech reveals being, *ergo sum*. It is precisely this speech that discovers the given being of one's own existence; otherwise, "There is no human existence without Consciousness . . . without revelation of Being by Speech."⁹ Why is Speech necessary for Consciousness of Being? In a sense, Hegel addresses the possibility of intuitions without concepts. Whereas such intuitions were blind for Kant, Hegel provides arguments for the muteness of isolated intuitions as a *reductio ad absurdum*. In its place, Hegel offers a totally immanent "Hegelian Logic," which Hyppolite provisionally defines as starting with:

an identification of thought [speech] and the thing [being] thought. The thing, being, is not beyond thought, and thought is not a subjective reflection that would be alien to being . . . Human language, the Logos, is this reflection of being into itself which always leads back to being, which always closes back on itself indefinitely, without ever positing or postulating a transcendence distinct from this internal reflection, without ever positing a beyond which would not be reflected completely, or a reflection which (although mediating) would be alongside being.¹⁰

The *reductio* can be born out in the project of not only giving sight to intuitions without concepts (in the refusal to identify the intuited thing with the conceptual thought), but also tragic speech of the ineffable, as we shall see in Hölderlin.

One means for examining the divergent thought between Hegel and Hölderlin is through Descartes. Hegel writes in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

Now we come for the first time to what is properly the philosophy of the modern world, and we begin it with Descartes. Here, we may say, we are at home and, like the sailor after a long voyage, we can at last shout 'Land ho'. Descartes made a fresh start in every respect. The thinking or philosophizing, the thought and the formation of reason in modern times, begins with him. The principle in this new era is thinking, the thinking that proceeds from itself.¹¹

If it was Descartes that announced the homecoming of philosophy to the land of thought, we can say that Hegel and Hölderlin both seized upon Descartes' discovery of the journey's end, and then took philosophy in opposite directions. Hegel consummated the end of the journey by "hitting land" through a philosophy of self consciousness built upon consciousness and desire (as we will see shortly). Hölderlin, by contrast, reversed course seaward for the ineffable in a rejection of both the Cartesian consciousness of understanding and the philosophical destiny of "thinking that proceeds from itself."

Hegel's appreciation for Descartes was more than nominal:

Hegel aligns the thematic purpose of the *Phenomenology* with the completion of the philosophical projects inaugurated by early modern figures such as Descartes . . . Although Hegel's aspirations to complete the projects of his predecessors in modernity unfolds along a number of fronts, one of the crucial lines of his approach may be summed up as a wish to fulfill the promise of his predecessors' interest in the *mathesis universalis*. Hegel, not unlike his predecessors in modernity, maintains a marked faith in our prospect to determine absolutely certain foundations of knowledge, and holds that the human subject stands at the center point of a universe that it is able entirely to comprehend, a power that, in earlier times, might have been reserved only for God . . . However, Hegel contends that his predecessors fail because they relied on inadequate

notions of systematicity and method . . . they misconstrue our cognitive powers as an instrument.¹²

In making the mind out to be a “thinking thing,” Descartes reduces the mind to an instrument in some sense. One way in which the “Cartesian dualism” of the subject/object relation lends itself to instrumentality is through the reification of consciousness (hardly a controversial charge since it is Descartes who conceives of the mind as a thing). Adorno addresses this issue in his criticism of Descartes’ use of clearness as a methodological criterion:

that would be suitable only for a static subject and a static object. It does so, no doubt, out of excessive zeal for the specialized activities of the individual disciplines, which establish their objects and their object domains without reflection . . . When consciousness does not conceive [individual items of knowledge] as pinned down and identified like things – photographable, as it were – it finds itself of necessity in conflict with the Cartesian ambition.¹³

Cartesian reason is what Hegel refers to as sensuous certainty. Such certainty is sufficient for the immediate self-presence of the cogito, which poses the:

"unity of that which feels and that which is felt." But this unity reveals itself as including an ineluctable multiplicity and as being a mediation of various "heres" and "nows." The *thing*, the unity of various properties and negation of their separation, is born *for-us*. The object and the I are no longer immediate but have become the former an *extended thing* and the latter a *thinking thing*.¹⁴

If the reasoning of the cogito comes by way of sensuous certainty, then we have a key insight into the nature of the self consciousness it affords. Charles Taylor draws a contrast between the Cartesian mathesis universalis and the Hegelian mathesis universalis in the former’s linear *understanding* (associated with bad infinity and exemplified in the infinite extension of space) and the latter’s circular *reasoning* (associated with the good infinity of totality):

Because reality is a circle, which can only present itself in its true form as the result of a process of development, which process is itself seen as posited by what results from it, we can only present the truth about the absolute in a system. Science itself must be a circle which reflects and gives an adequate account of the linked levels of being which are essential to the whole . . . To try to express this philosophy in any one principle or proposition is inherently against its nature . . . The type of thought which underlies this form of science Hegel calls 'reason' (*Vernunft*); this is the thinking which follows reality in its contradictions, and therefore can see how each level turns into the next one. Reason in this sense is contrasted to understanding (*Verstand*) which is the habit common to most, of holding fast to the principle of identity.¹⁵

Of course, for Descartes, the one self-evident proposition for the foundation of his *mathesis universalis* was the *cogito*. While the self-consciousness of the *cogito* affords some sense of self-identity, Hyppolite notes how the specific "I think" (of the *cogito*, for our purposes) could not lead to authentic self-consciousness of itself devoid of dialectical reason:

Hegel undoubtedly does not presuppose self-consciousness, the equation "I = I" as Fichte did; rather, he uncovers it in the development of consciousness. But in order to follow him, we must admit the movement from the specific to the universal, which at the level of the I is the original identity of this I and the universal I, of an "I think" that transcends any specific "I think" and of the "specific I think" itself.¹⁶

To be fair to Fichte, the I in his conception is more of a performative activity than a factual presupposition.¹⁷ Nonetheless, it is precisely the performative activity of the *cogito* that entails its ontological certainty and implicit self-identity. Proceeding by the way of understanding (*Verstand*), we can see how the *cogito* implies self-consciousness through the principle of self-identity implied by understanding; i.e., "I think; therefore, I am (I)."

Hegel's objection to Descartes' foundation for knowledge would be that the self-consciousness implied by the *cogito* would not be explicit. For genuine foundational

knowledge, self-consciousness must be not only explicit, but irreducible to any singular propositional certainty found along the endless, linear extension of understanding. In the self-consciousness to the equation “I = I,” it seems that Descartes’ cogito implies self-consciousness, if the principle of self-identity is indeed implied by way of understanding. If so, then Descartes’ foundationalism begins with the unity of thinking and being: “I think” = “I am.” Nonetheless, Hyppolite notes that this unity of understanding and being is merely opinion:

Certainty’s subject seems to have for itself a privilege. It believes that it takes hold of an indivisible intuition of its being which is below language, but all the “I’s” claim to have the same intuition. Their confrontation makes the claimed immediacy of their viewpoint disappear . . . This “I,” originary and original, is in its ground only a universal, since language states it. It is not unique insofar as it says “I”; it only believes itself to be unique. This unicity is an opinion. The “I” who intends itself as unique is really more of a “One” (*On*), who constitutes the abstract medium of experience, just as abstract being constituted the medium of the felt. Here the lived sublates language only in intention and not in fact. “The “I” is merely universal like ‘now,’ ‘here,’ or ‘this’ in general (PH §102). And this universal that language states is the poorest form of thought.”¹⁸

In the sense that bare intuition might have its own understanding, the mythically “originary and original” “I” that Hyppolite speaks of is the I capable of a genuinely tragic disposition as found in the beautiful soul, “[T]he spontaneously pure conscience turns from action to talk, to the expression in literature of its own inner convictions, but which it can never act out for fear of losing this sense of its purity and universality.”¹⁹ If Hegel ultimately finds the Cartesian understanding wanting for more, Hölderlin perhaps finds it wanting for less as an example of the beautiful soul.

In Hölderlin’s fragment “Being Judgement Possibility,” some ontological remarks are made that will be of direct relevance to his theory of the tragic. Hölderlin posits that “*Being* - expresses the combination of subject and object.”²⁰ This undifferentiated unity

of being precedes any judgment of the I including the seemingly tautological principle of self identity, “When I say: I am I, then the subject (I) and the object (I) are not combined in such a way that no separation can take place without injuring the nature of what is to be separated; on the contrary, the I is only possible through the separation of the I from the I. How can I say: I! without self-consciousness?”²¹ Judgement is the originary rendering of being into subject and object.²² This rendering of judgment is only possible through the concept of possibility belonging to the understanding, which conceives of the possible as a differentiation of actuality; however, through perception and intuition, it is suggested that one may witness the undifferentiated being of actuality.²³ In the self-consciousness and self-identity that follows from the judgment of the cogito’s understanding, the possibility of thought proceeding from itself disqualifies the cogito as a means of combining subject and object.

This valuation of intuition as a pre-conceptual grasping directly leads itself to paradox. On the one hand, one cannot *say* “I” without implying the identity of self-consciousness; yet on the other hand, it is pre-judgmental intuition that is capable of perceiving (without concepts) the unified subject-and-object of absolute being preceding any principle of identity (between subject and object) determined through judgment. Therefore, the pre-judgmental, pre-conceptual intuition of absolute being is ineffable and incommunicable. Regardless, Hölderlin acknowledges that it is precisely paradox that allows us the keenest insight into ancient tragedy, “The significance of tragedy is most easily understood [*begriffen*] through paradox.”²⁴ What is the sign by which we understand the paradox of tragedy? The sign is the meaning of the tragic hero fated for demise:

The sign is in itself meaningless, without power, but that which is original is straight out. For really the original can only appear in its weakness, but insofar as the sign in itself is posited as meaningless = 0, the original too, the hidden ground of everything in nature can represent itself. If nature genuinely represents itself in its weakest gift [*Gabe*], then, when [nature] presents itself in its strongest gift, the sign = 0.²⁵

We can summarize Hölderlin's conception of the tragic as follows. While the self-identity of I=I leads to the differentiation of the subject from object (where the subject = 1, in some sense), the tragic hero = 0. The sign of the tragic (the tragic hero that = 0) contrasts with the totality of the undifferentiated One by virtue of the sign's decimation and the diffusion of tragic significance where, "All is speech against speech which mutually negates itself."²⁶ The end of tragic drama is the paradox of giving voice to the ineffable intuition of absolute being where the nihilation of the mortal hero demonstrates its tragic difference from the totality of the immortal absolute.

Hölderlin offers a resource that is as unique as it is impossible: a modern account of the pre-modern understanding of ancient tragedy. In Hölderlin's absolute separation of being from identity, it would seem that the cathartic insight into being that one experiences through the reflection of tragic drama can only come from a theater of non-identity or difference between the finite nullity of the hero and the infinite totality of the One. Hölderlin's theory of tragic difference lends Hegel a necessary speculative resource for his dialectical project insofar as it is Hegel's project to bring the tragic hero of difference within the circle of totality as a subject that conceptualizes the whole. In the sense of reason (*Vernunft*), Hegel can dialectically identify the identity of the Cartesian subject with the non-identity of the tragic hero in the subjective articulation of the undifferentiated unity of being ($1 + 0 = \text{One}$). More precisely, we can say that the

synthesis of the bad infinity of Cartesian understanding with the finitude of Hölderlin's theory of the tragic results in the good infinity of circular totality.

As mentioned above, the point where Hegel takes Descartes as a point of departure in the direction of thinking that proceeds from itself is precisely the point that the Hölderlin rejects in favor of the ineffable that proceeds from being itself. In Kojève's words, "the point of departure for the Hegelian system is analogous to that point in pre-Hegelian systems that leads necessarily to silence [or to contradictory discourse]."²⁷ The manner in which Hegel conceptualizes the conclusion of history is through the consummation of thinking that proceeds from itself (the identity of speech and being through understanding) towards the ineffable that proceeds from being itself (the difference between speech and being in tragic reflection) in the recuperation of this ineffable or contradictory discourse. By way of bringing Descartes full circle, Hegel meets and recovers Hölderlin's philosophy of the tragic *conclusively*, since Hölderlin's philosophy of the tragic also begins with Descartes through the rejection of the Cartesian methodology of thought that proceeds from itself.

Hölderlin provides a better sense of ancient tragedy than Hegel if we grant that Hölderlin was closer (and tragically so) to ancient tragedy than Hegel. Ancient tragedy is nonetheless necessary for understanding the *Phenomenology's* end of history. Perhaps this is the poetry of Hölderlin's madness: he witnessed the very tragic nature of ancient tragedy, its bounded temporality and dénouement in the end of history. Hölderlin could not accept the pastness of ancient tragedy and believed in the *possibility* of genuine tragedy in the future. In his nostalgia for the Greek immortals and despair of the Christian divinity of his contemporary age, we find in Hölderlin the beautiful soul par excellence,

as described by Taylor above. In the inaction of Hölderlin's self exclusion from his contemporaries, we find the historical demonstration of Hegel's *reductio* argument mentioned above. If Hölderlin's isolated existence was in fact that of the beautiful soul in Hegel's opinion, perhaps Hölderlin's theory of the tragic would not have been possible apart from its origin in a beautiful soul. If Hegel's philosophy is the final philosophy born of heroic effort, Hegel cannot cast himself as a *tragic* hero, since it is this:

figure that best represents the forms our consciousness takes prior to our attainment of absolute knowledge, while we remain as it were only part way along the path of experience, . . . In contrast with the Hegelian figure of the final philosopher, this tragic hero of experience enjoys no complete speculative self-knowledge, but is instead subject time and again to encounters with phenomena that overthrow her sense of self and of the world, and reveal the finitude of her cognitive powers.²⁸

If this is granted, perhaps we may view Hölderlin as the tragic hero in the drama of Hegel's final philosophy. In the final analysis, Hegel's project requires that he synthesize both the Cartesian premise of articulate, subject-oriented consciousness as well as Hölderlin's anti-Cartesian conception of ineffable and undifferentiated being.

Within the purview of the Cartesian premise alone, the human existence consciousness affords through speech is necessary but insufficient for what constitutes genuine self-consciousness. Hyppolite notes:

The complete unity of being and the knowledge of being will lead us either not to reach or to go beyond consciousness, which is characterized by the *distinction* between certainty and truth, between knowledge and essence. Beyond it lies *absolute knowledge*, in which being is simultaneously a *knowledge of being*.²⁹

The modern project for a *mathesis universalis* can only be secured through the reason (*Vernunft*) of explicit self-consciousness, and this path to self-consciousness (and its

bridging of the gap between Cartesian consciousness and the intuition of ineffable being)
begins with desire:

For Self-Consciousness, and hence philosophy, to exist, then, there must be in Man not only *positive*, passive contemplation, which merely *reveals* being, but also *negating* Desire, and hence *Action* that *transforms* the given being. The human I must be an I of *Desire* – that is, an *active* I, a *negating* I, an I that *transforms* Being and creates a new being by destroying the given being.³⁰

The self-conscious I absorbed in Being presupposes the bare consciousness that reveals Being in the first place, but it is only through desire that the I forms a negating relation to Being where consciousness can proceed to self-consciousness.

At this stage, we have only one of three premises concerning desire, and we do not yet have an authentic I with genuine self-consciousness. The “greedy emptiness”³¹ of the merely desirous I is shared between humans and animals:

The animal raises itself above the Nature that is negated in its animal Desire only to fall back into it immediately by the satisfaction of this Desire. Accordingly, the Animal attains only *Selbst-gefühl*, *Sentiment of self*, but not *Selbst-bewusstsein*, *Self-Consciousness* – that is, it cannot *speak* of itself, it cannot *say* “I. . . .” And this is so because the Animal does not really transcend itself as *given*;³²

Hence, a second premise concerning desire is needed for genuine self-consciousness. The animal cannot transcend itself because of its solely dependent relation with given Being; however, “To desire non-Being is to liberate oneself from Being, to realize one’s autonomy, one’s Freedom.”³³ It is within a social context that ethics and politics becomes possible, but in the early stages of human development (anthropogenesis), we find the beginning of history in the desire for prestige:

the existence of *several* Desires that can desire one another mutually, each of which wants to negate, to assimilate, to make its own, to subjugate, the other Desire as Desire. This *multiplicity* of Desires is just as 'undeducible' as the fact of

Desire itself. By accepting it, one can already foresee, or understand ('deduce'), what human existence will be.³⁴

In this state of nature, there is a life and death struggle prompted by the desire for the other's desire: one's freedom in the desire for non-Being. Such a struggle is thwarted if the other perishes. The destruction of the other eliminates one's possible freedom. This makes murder impossible for the advancement of self-consciousness, which results in the final premise concerning desire, "One must suppose that the Fight ends in such a way that *both* adversaries remain alive."³⁵

By what circumstances in the life and death fight is it determined how one becomes either a master or slave? The master and slave both have a 2-fold desire: they both desire to not die (a negative desire) and they both desire to live (a positive desire for recognition – or the desire for the other's symmetrical cognition of one's own self):

The vanquished has subordinated his *human* desire for *Recognition* to the *biological* desire to preserve his *life*: this is what determines and reveals – to him and to the victor – his inferiority. The victor has risked his *life* for a *nonvital* end: and this is what determines and reveals – to him and to the vanquished – his superiority over biological life and, consequently, over the vanquished. Thus, the difference between Master and Slave is *realized* in the existence of the victor and of the vanquished, and it is *recognized* by both of them.³⁶

The master sacrifices the desire to not die for the desire to live while the slave sacrifices the desire to live for the desire to not die. While it must be acknowledged that a more precise translation of the Hegelian term "Knecht" is "servant" rather than "slave" [Sklave]³⁷, I believe that referring to this term as "slave" helps enhance the Hegelo-Kojèvian point that that the master is, in his supreme alienation, bears no fundamental relation to the slave. The slave, on the other hand, does not work for the master (as any servant does) so much as for the master's threat of death. Whereas a servant's life may

retain an intrinsic value and entitlement for the master, the slave's life holds no intrinsic value for the master. The slave is property or even a means of exchange for the master, and it is because of this fact that the slave cannot satiate the master's desire for recognition.

From the get-go, the slave is mastered by death as an absolute master, and it is this desire to not die which is, above all, productive. The master merely helps the slave realize the hostility of nature (wherein one can be annihilated if one does not fear death), and this transforms the slave into an agent of transformation where the slave becomes master of both herself and nature. The slave is forced to work on the threat of death according to the master's instincts:

But by acting to satisfy an instinct that is *not* my own, I am acting in relation to an *idea*, a *nonbiological* end. And it is this transformation of Nature in relation to a *nonmaterial idea* that is *Work* in the proper sense of the word: Work that creates a nonnatural, technical, humanized World adapted to the *human* Desire of a being that has *demonstrated* and realized its superiority to Nature by risking its life for the *nonbiological* end of Recognition.³⁸

For the slave's transformation into a free citizen, two conditions are necessary. First, the slave must be in a state of absolute terror (as opposed to the mere fear of death).³⁹

Without absolute terror, the slave does not know the hostility of the natural world, and becomes merely a reformer or conformer rather than a revolutionary dedicated to the total transformation of the master and slave's relationships to each other and to nature.

Secondly, the slave's labor must be "educative-forming [by work]."⁴⁰ In the absence of work, terror will lead the slave to become "a madman or a criminal."⁴¹ If the two conditions are satisfied, the slave has a path for the transcendence of the world, which the master can never achieve:

Now, this revolutionary transformation of the World presupposes the 'negation,' the non-accepting of the given World *in its totality*. And the origin of this absolute negation can only be the absolute dread inspired by the given World, or more precisely, by that which, or by him who, dominates this World, by the Master of this World.⁴²

The given, natural world is the master's world, and the master (along with the master/slave relationship) perishes because the slave's ultimate work of transforming the world, "To be sure, this work by itself does not free him. But in transforming the World by this work, the Slave transforms himself, too, and thus creates the new objective conditions that permit him to take up once more the liberating Fight for recognition that he refused in the beginning for the fear of death."⁴³ Genuine self-consciousness is only possible after the transformation of the world at the end of history, "Now such a State, such a synthesis of Particularity and Universality, is possible only after the "overcoming" of the opposition between the Master and the Slave, since the synthesis of the Particular and the Universal is also a synthesis of Mastery and Slavery."⁴⁴ In this manner, Hegel postulates the end of history in his time. The slave overcomes the fear and terror of death through revolution initiated by the slave's vanguard in the Bourgeois Intellectual:

It is from himself, therefore, that he must free himself. And that is why the liberating risk of life takes the form not of risk on the field of battle, but of the risk created by Robespierre's Terror. The working Bourgeois, turned Revolutionary, himself creates the situation that introduces into him the element of death. And it is only thanks to the Terror that the idea of the final Synthesis, which definitively "satisfies" Man, is realized.⁴⁵

In this manner, the slave finally overcomes his terror of both God (a sublimated master that is immanentized in the secular realization of the kingdom of God) and the absolute master death that staked the slave's identity in the first place. In the end of history, death (as master) is vanquished and the slave's identity and singularity is lost in the complete

gratification of desire in the universal and homogeneous state foreshadowed by Napoleon's Empire:

It is in the Terror that the State is born in which the "satisfaction" [of final Synthesis] is attained. This State, for the author of the *Phenomenology*, is Napoleon's Empire. And Napoleon himself *is* the wholly "satisfied" Man, who, in and by his definitive Satisfaction, completes the course of the historical evolution of humanity. He is the human *Individual* in the proper and full sense of the word; because it is through *him*, through *this* particular man, that the "common cause," the truly universal cause, is realized; and because this particular man is recognized, in his very particularity, by all men, universally.⁴⁶

By virtue of his empire, Napoleon spreads the values of the French Revolution abroad to the very place of Hegel's writing of the *Phenomenology* in Jena. Napoleon lacks only one thing, "The only thing that he lacks is *Self-Consciousness*; he *is* the perfect Man, but he does not yet *know* it, and that is why Man is not fully "satisfied" in him alone. He cannot *say* of himself all that I have just said."⁴⁷ There is a long struggle in the master/slave dialectic where the slave ultimately overcomes death as the absolute master. In the consciousness of this dialectic whereby the particularity of the universal, perfect man Napoleon becomes manifest, Hegel secures for himself authentic self-consciousness.

In this manner, the tragedy of history is concluded. History is totalized as the One through the voiding of the tragic slave. This constitutes the voiding of the sign, but there is also the voiding of the significance of the slave's self-understanding. In part because of the slave's tool-like, reified consciousness, the slave's speech aims at a kingdom of God in theology; yet, "theology always was an unconscious anthropology; man projected into the beyond, without realizing it, the idea that he had of himself, or the ideal of his own perfection that he pursued."⁴⁸ In the sense that the "discourse" of theology is a mere inarticulate pointing, it is analogous to the "speech" of ancient tragedy that gives voice to

the ineffable. It is by the slave's work and struggle, that her purpose becomes clear in the full, explicit self-consciousness of recognition that is impossible without the overcoming of the master. Theology points to that which the slave qua slave, cannot understand. As soon as the slave "understands" that which theology implicitly signifies, the slave is no longer a slave, the understanding (*Verstand*) is no longer understanding but reason (*Vernunft*), and the significance of theological implication is no longer the discourse of theology but the explicit anthropological articulation of that which makes full self-consciousness possible – the immanent kingdom of God or the end of history.

Totality is necessary for the completeness of good infinity, and this requires that history have a beginning and an end. Ultimately, the phenomenology of history's anthropogenesis affords the speculation into the totality of history through Hegelian wisdom. The driving engine of this anthropogenesis is the slave, just as the motivating force of tragedy is the fate of the tragic hero. Both the tragic hero and the slave are ultimately sacrifices in the sense that both find liberation through nihilation. Neither the hero nor the slave can have the self-consciousness of the audience or the Hegelian sage because there is nothing to be self-conscious of in the hero/slave's nullification.

We have seen how Kojève grounds the meaning and standard of history upon its ending. This ending of history is absolute for the standards of freedom and rationality it establishes for all through the achievement of self-consciousness by the subject's desire for recognition. Kojève takes this desire for recognition to be the essence of humanity. After this desire is fulfilled in the End of History, humanity will transition to post-humanity or animality. But can this possibly be the final word on the essence of

humanity? If desire is the essence of humanity, is the Hegelo-Kojèvian conception of it accurate?

In the following chapter, we will see a radically different conception of desire as both insatiable and without lack. In a sense, Hegel's desirous subject is tragic because of the finitude of his / her desire – a subject's human essence is lost in the satiation of desire's lack. For Levinas, desire may be the essence of humanity, but while desire also grounds one's finitude (albeit in the desire for the infinitely perfect), such finitude is not tragic due to the eschatological order that preserves the finite singularity beyond any standard bestowed by history.

NOTES

¹ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58.

² *Ibid.*, 264-69.

³ Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx and Christianity," *Interpretation* 1 (1970): 41.

⁴ Christopher Hitchens, *Thomas Paine's Rights of man*, 1st ed. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2006), 57.

⁵ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷ James Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 82.

⁸ Kojève, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰ Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 3-4.

¹¹ Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 1825-6*, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104.

¹² Theodore George, *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 16-7.

¹³ Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 99-100.

¹⁴ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1st ed. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Pr., 1979), 89.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 115-6.

¹⁶ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 96.

¹⁷ John Protevi, *A Dictionary of Continental Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 217.

¹⁸ Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, 14.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Hegel*, 194.

²⁰ J Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191.

²¹ *Ibid.*.

²² *Ibid.*.

²³ *Ibid.*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 201.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: the Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 14.
- ²⁸ George, *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 47.
- ²⁹ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 87.
- ³⁰ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 38.
- ³¹ Ibid., 39.
- ³² Ibid., 38.
- ³³ Ibid., 40.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 41.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 42.
- ³⁷ George, *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 52.
- ³⁸ Kojève, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 42.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 28-9.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 28.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid., 29.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 30.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 68-9.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 69.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Kojève, "Hegel, Marx and Christianity," 26.

CHAPTER III

LEVINAS'S ESCHATOLOGY BEYOND HISTORY

Existence is an absolute that is asserted without reference to anything else. It is identity. But in this reference to himself [*soi-même*], man perceives a type of duality. His identity with himself loses the character of a logical or tautological form; it takes on a dramatic form, as we will demonstrate. In the identity of the I [*moi*], the identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment, for it appears in the form of suffering and invites us to escape. Thus, escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, *to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [moi] is oneself [soi-même]*. (Levinas)¹

This chapter outlines Levinas's project as an ethics as first philosophy in opposition to the Eleatic and henological traditions in Western philosophy. We can trace Levinas's project in his reading of the cogito. Whereas the cogito leads to the separation of mental and physical substance for Descartes, the self-identity of the cogito characterizes the egoism or enjoyment of the I separated from the divine. From the isolation of the ego there emerges in Descartes' *Meditations* a second movement which is a reflection on the possibility of thought that proceeds from itself by way of doubt. The full peculiarity of Levinas's reading of Descartes comes into full relief by seeing desire as constitutive of the Cartesian subject. Whereas Hegel posits a desire in the subject beyond the scope of Descartes' philosophy, Levinas reads in Descartes a de-positing desire for infinity in the idea of the infinite. Beyond this essential duality, my argument will help contextualize the conflict between the universal and particular in Levinas's thought. This conflict helps to describe the perils of prophetic politics in its call for universal rights.

On this reading of Descartes, finitude is equated with the imperfection that desires the infinitude of perfection through the idea of the infinite. I argue that the relationship

between the ego and the idea of the infinite offers a formal basis for the essential duality of the self, but first I will try to outline Levinas's conception of the separable ego necessary for the ethical encounter with the Other.

With reference to Descartes, Levinas argues that the perfect self-identity of the cogito is a result of metaphysical atheism. In positing this Cartesian disjunction, Levinas distinguishes himself from a long tradition:

Levinas's main criticism of the prevailing philosophies is that all of them are totalitarian and thereby miss what is most important: the Infinite. The framework within which they operate is the totality of beings, even when they make a distinction between the totality and its source; all things and persons are seen as parts or moments of one whole, be this Matter, Being, Spirit, or History. Holism is the original sin of the entire Western tradition. Its secret is the reduction of all differences to one overarching or originating reality: "the Same" (*le Même*), from which all things and relations can be unfolded by philosophy.²

If holism is the original sin of the entire Western philosophical tradition in its aim for totality, then its fallen nature may be characterized as henological. The henological tradition seeks its truth in the whole as *unification* where the same is *resolved* with the other in the One. To maintain the same and the other in separation, the two must be *absolved*:

The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and *absolve* themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated. The idea of Infinity requires this separation. It was posited as the ultimate structure of being, as the *production* of its very infinitude. Society accomplishes it *concretely*. But is not to broach being on the level of separation to broach it in its fallenness? The positions we have outlined oppose the ancient privilege of unity which is affirmed from Parmenides to Spinoza and Hegel.³

The absolving relation between the same and the other can be read in the religious sense of how one can absolve oneself from the yoke of religious or ethical obligation. This dissolution of one's yoke with the divine constitutes a metaphysical atheism or egoism:

One can call atheism this separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated – eventually capable of adhering to it by belief. The break with participation is implied in this capability. One lives outside of God, at home with oneself; one is an I, an egoism. The soul, the dimension of the psychic, being an accomplishment of separation, is naturally atheist. By atheism we thus understand a position prior to both the negation and the affirmation of the divine, the breaking with participation by which the I posits itself as the same as I.⁴

This separated being is analogous to the pure thought that proceeds from itself: a cogito unconditioned by infinity and unaware of its finitude. The I posits its isolated ego, which is at one and the same time, perfectly identical with the I and conditions the I in its separation and egoism. In the self-positing of the I, we may broach the egology of the Cartesian Meditations in their relevance to Levinas's project.

The positing of the cogito's self-identity requires a particular time and place. For Levinas, this time and place is the self present *here* of the first person:

Thought, which idealism has accustomed us to locate outside of space, is – essentially, and not as the result of a fall or a degradation – here. The body excluded by the Cartesian doubt is the body object. The *cogito* does not lead to the impersonal position: “there is thought,” but to the first person in the present: “I am something that thinks.” The word *thing* is here admirably exact. For the most profound teaching of the Cartesian *cogito* consists in discovering thought as a substance, that is, as something that is posited. Thought has a point of departure. There is not only a consciousness of localization, but a localization of consciousness, which is not in turn reabsorbed into consciousness, into knowing. There is here something that stands out against knowing, that is a condition for knowing.⁵

The self-identity of the cogitator follows from the immediacy of the cogito's self-presence. Of course, "here" cannot be taken in any spatial or extensional sense in maintaining the Cartesian presupposition of thinking and extended beings as distinct substances. The substance that exists "there" from sensuous intuition is distinct from the substance that exists here out of its self-presence from rational intuition. As such, the ego

of the Cartesian cogito is perfectly self-identical in the psychic interiority of the cogito. The conclusively existent, cogitator that proceeds from its thought posits its self identity in the distinct, originary thought of the cogito. Given the posited distinctness of its substance, thinking being cannot be identical to extended substance; therefore, thinking being is nothing other than thinking being.

For Descartes, humans are essentially thinking beings, and this self identity entails the absolute separation between thinking and extended being, and yet we cannot think of the I riveted to itself as though the mind were riveted to the body through the pineal gland. Rather, the I is substantiated insofar as it posits thought. For Levinas the self identity of the cogito is the metaphysical atheism of egoism absolved from the divine. Whereas the cogito is the formalized notion of separation:

Enjoyment accomplishes the atheist separation; it deformats the notion of separation, which is not a cleavage made in the abstract, but the existence at home with itself of an autochthonous I. The soul is not, as in Plato, what “has the care of inanimate being everywhere”; it to be sure dwells in what is not itself, but it acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the “other” (and not logically, by opposition to the other).⁶

Without any second moments, the I posits the ego through the self-presence of the cogito while the ego then conditions the I in a material closure that Levinas refers to as atheist separation. The perfect self-identity of the I constitutes its singularity, “The unicity of the I conveys separation. Separation in the strictest sense is solitude, and enjoyment – happiness or happiness – is isolation itself . . . This logically absurd structure of unicity, this non-participation in genus, is the very egoism of happiness”⁷

Levinas’s interpretation of Descartes is distinct in that it distinguishes him from the tradition of henological metaphysics that culminates in Hegel; however, contrary to Hegel’s understanding of Descartes for the significance of his own project, it is

incumbent upon Levinas's project to distinguish his interpretation of Descartes from that of the phenomenological tradition. Nonetheless, one premise that Hegel and Levinas's interpretations of Descartes share up to a point is the necessity of a signification for the conclusive indication of the cogitator's being. It is conceivable that one can have thoughts without speech where the extra-linguistic thought could be formulated into the recognition of one's cognizing, and this recognition could then be the basis for a rational, yet ineffable judgment of the cogitator's conclusive existence.

If, contra Descartes, ethics is first philosophy rather than epistemology, then Levinas cannot presuppose the ineffability of the cogito. In Perpich's *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, the question of the moral skepticism is addressed through the phenomenological performative contradiction⁸ where the very addressing of the question presupposes the face of the Other as addressee. How does this pertain to Descartes' method of universal doubt? Descartes is not merely a moral skeptic, but initially he is even a skeptic about his own existence; however, a non-expressive subjectivity is a *contradictio in adjecto*, because subjectivity requires a face and the face is always already in expression. This is not to say that a mirror is sufficient for philosophically determining one's existence by viewing one's expression (as animals could do, I suppose). This does say that the cogito is inherently *reflective* such as the perfect self-identity of $I = I$ in the posited ego. One cannot reflect without one's self-expression. Since self-reflection is necessary for the cogito, only expressive beings can perform the cogito. Automata (such as animals, for Descartes) are expressionless, and therefore do not admit of the reflective activity necessary for *res cogitans*.

Can we say that a performative contradiction itself is tantamount to the certain deduction of the cogitator's existence just as any diction is sufficient as a cogitation of the cogito? It would be, except that the subjectivity of the cogito (that is, thinking substance) is itself the positing of expression. If the I expresses itself in the cogito, such an expression is a positing that substantiates the Ego through signification, but something beyond the Ego is also indicated. As stated in *Totality and Infinity*, *ex-pression* concretely presses thinking substance out of itself *for* the Other, and so it is a revelation *of* the Other:

[I]n its expressive function language precisely maintains the other – to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon or invokes. To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the *revelation* of the other.⁹

Without the revelation of expression, there is no means of signification by which the Ego could be posited in the Cartesian utterance "I think." If the order of language is not posited by the thinking being's expression, then the cogito retains only the silent, formal self-maintenance of egoism. If signification (qua expression) holds in the cogito, then the separable isolating ego has admitted of the revelation of the Other beyond the perfect self identity of the subject's egoism. On this order of revelation, the ego is conditioned by its relation to an Other beyond the ego's self-containment. Speech and ethics are projected together in ethics as first philosophy; therefore, any epistemological or ontological claim on the identity of the self with the same is contingent upon the self-difference motivated by the ethical claim of the Other. Revelation is a relation and my expression reveals the Other in the sense that all expression is an expression of desire for that which is ultimately beyond possession, so in one's expression, the Other is revealed rather than posited, but who is this Other in relation to the ego? If expression is a

reflection of the I, who is this Other that makes the reflection possible? In short, it is the other of finitude.

We have already seen how the ego loses its isolating powers in the cogito's expression towards the Other, but there is a "second movement" to Descartes' meditation which equates doubt and suspicion with finitude and then infers how this finitude (and hence universal doubt) is possible:

This finitude could not be determined without recourse to the infinite . . .
 The Cartesian subject is given a point of view exterior to itself from which it can apprehend itself. If, in a first movement, Descartes takes a consciousness to be indubitable of itself by itself, in a second movement – the reflection on reflection – he recognizes conditions for this certitude. This certitude is due to the clarity and distinctness of the *cogito*, but certitude itself is sought because of the presence of infinity in this finite thought, which without this presence would be ignorant of its own finitude: . . .¹⁰

The Cartesian method of universal doubt is only possible through the consciousness of the ego's imperfection. In the ego's burdened identity with the I, the I nonetheless finds itself conditioned in its finitude by the posited Ego. Through the imperfection of finitude:

the I is already riveted to itself, its freedom is not as light as grace but already a heaviness, the ego is irremissibly itself. I am not dramatizing a tautology. The turning of the ego back upon itself is precisely neither a serene reflection nor the result of a purely philosophical reflection. The relationship with itself is . . . the relationship with a double chained to the ego, a viscous, heavy, stupid double, but one the ego [*le moi*] is with precisely because it is me [*moi*]. . . . My being doubles with a having; I am encumbered by myself.¹¹

On this interpretation, Descartes argues that a genuine understanding of one's finitude (and hence, doubt) is only possible through an idea of perfection and infinity. We could say that the idea of the infinite is implicit in all expression. In the expression of the face, one reveals the Other that cannot be imagined of one's own powers.

In this idea of infinity, one gains both a sense of self-distance as well as a “metaphysical desire”¹² for the absolute otherness of the Desired, which is beyond visibility. The perfect identity of the I and the ego is predicated upon the Cartesian method of doubt, yet the cogitator’s “doubt makes it seek certainty. But this suspicion, this consciousness of doubt, implies the idea of the Perfect.”¹³ In the finitude of reason, we find the cogito's perfect self identity is not yet a completing (*perfectiō*) in its asymmetrical relation to and metaphysical desire for the infinitely perfect. For Levinas, “Precisely perfection exceeds conception, overflows the concept; it designates distance: the idealization that makes it possible is a passage to the other absolutely other. The idea of the perfect is an idea of infinity.”¹⁴

Because Levinas “sees being informed by a principle of identity and sameness, as hegemonic and henological and therefore irremediably atheistic and “anethical,” Levinas posits the need to pass beyond being – beyond ontology – in order to make ethics possible.”¹⁵ In this context, “henology” concerns the unity of being, and insofar as the principle of identity reduces the other to unity of the same, henology seems to exclude the possibility of ethics. On the other hand, although metaphysical desire is not a desire for unity, it is nonetheless a desire for a completing (*perfectiō*) that can only be found in the singularity of the (one and only) God through the face of the Other. One should note a certain irony in Levinas’s reading of Descartes’ ontological proof for God. Instead of ontologizing God through the idea of the Infinite, Levinas seems to use a henological argument for God’s existence, which infers that a universal whole (in God’s perfection) is logically necessary for the completion of its particular part (in finite reasoning). If such a

reading of Descartes' proof for God's existence is indeed henological, Levinas employs henological reasoning as *the* crucial lever for his anti-henological project.

Nonetheless, on this understanding of perfection, perfect self identity is a contradiction of terms insofar as self identity is a concept derived from the total de-distancing of the cogito's conception. In my expression, the Other is revealed in the idea of infinity, which dis-closes my egoism or metaphysical atheism (a paradoxical phrase for Levinas) in its separation from the wholly Other or God. In the idea of the infinite, the ego's totality is breached. We can maintain the singularity of the I, but it can no longer be at home with itself as it reflects on the conditions the cogito's reasoning, "When the I is identified with reason, taken as the power of thematization and objectification, it loses its very ipseity. To represent to oneself is to empty oneself of one's subjective substance and to insensibilize enjoyment."¹⁶ On my reading, the I identified with reason is the ego, yet the I regains its ipseity through the material conditioning of the ego (egoism). As a product of the cogito, the posited and substantial ego is exposed in its finite reasoning when confronted with the de-posed idea of the Infinite. Whereas the I posits the ego from the *need* for self-possession, the ego discovers upon reflection the *desire* for infinity in the deposited idea of the infinite, "The idea of infinity is the mode of being, the infinity, of infinity. Infinity does not first exist, and *then* reveal itself. Its infinity is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*."¹⁷ Here, we can see the relation between metaphysical desire and metaphysical atheism:

Needs constitute the dynamism through which I attack, appropriate, and swallow the elements and all things that are enjoyable, but desire drives me out of myself toward that which cannot become part of me or my property: something that is absolute, freed or "absolved" from the possibility of being a moment of "the same." Levinas calls this absolute other "invisible" because, even in the form of another person, there is

something in it - precisely that which is desired - that cannot be appropriated, interiorized, and integrated by seeing, perception, observation, or contemplation.¹⁸

In the empty anonymity of one's particular ego posited by need, the asymmetrical, ethical relation with the Other begins with desire. Such desire "is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it."¹⁹ This deepening occurs through a dispossessing of one's self at the command of the other:

In designating what it possesses to the other, in speaking, the subject hovers over its own existence. But it is from the welcoming of the infinity of the other that it receives the freedom with regard to itself that this dispossession requires. It detains it finally from the Desire which does not arise from a lack or a limitation but from a surplus, from the idea of Infinity.²⁰

Levinas's conception of desire is remarkable when distinguished from desire as found in Hegel as desire for pure prestige, which proves to ultimately be a desire for the totality of history through the cunning negativity of reason.

We must now indicate the terms which will state the deformatization or the concretization of the idea of infinity, this apparently wholly empty notion. The infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire . . . Desire and goodness concretely presuppose a relationship in which the Desirable arrests the "negativity" of the I that holds sway in the Same – puts an end to power and emprise.²¹

Desire for perfection is discernable in the I's perfect self-identity with the Ego. Through the idea of the infinite, one discovers the unconditionally desirable. True to its positive nature, the idea of the infinite is self-deforming. In the overflowing of its own idea, the positivity of the unconditionally Desirable becomes manifest to the finite reasoning of the ego. This formal structure of the I, the ego, the idea of the infinite and infinity can be represented as such:

(-> = positing) I <-> Ego <- Idea of the Infinite <- the Infinite (<- = conditioning)

The structure of this schematic is reminiscent of the four segments of Plato's divided line as found in the *Republic* (VI, 509d-511e). To take the I and the Ego as perfectly self-identical is to consider oneself in totality as a singularity. This perfect self identity of the I conditioned by the Ego and the Ego posited by the I is a cyclical process of unification whereby one becomes a unicity. Nonetheless, this totalized self identity is shaken when the ego recognizes the finite, particularity of its anonymous reasoning. Since it is precisely the idea of the infinite that always overflows itself, such an idea is impossible to totalize; therefore, anyone with an idea of Infinity cannot retain the totality necessary for perfect self-identity. Such a totality is breached and overflowed with the idea of the infinite, which seals the disjunction between the singularity of the I and the particularity of the Ego.

It is worth emphasizing that Levinas does not posit the I and the Ego as topographical psychoanalytical terms, à la Freud. In describing Levinas's notions of metaphysical atheism and metaphysical desire, however, it is useful to distinguish between the I and the Ego for describing the movement from ontological self-sameness towards the expression of transcendence in escape and desire. As metaphysical terms, how does Levinas concretize the analysis of escape and desire, beyond questions of identity, into something that resembles ethical practice? I will argue that Levinas's interpretation of the formal structure of the cogito underlies the concrete sociopolitical relations of the Self in relation to the Other and the Third Party.

In the revelation of the cogito, we see that the perfect self identity of the ego is put into question. I wish to articulate the sense of Levinas's sociopolitical ambivalence of identity that follows from his conception of the bivalent self; but before addressing these

issues in Levinas's thought, attention should be given to the concrete structures of interpersonal life as found in the encounter between Self and Other.

Contrary to Hegel's understanding of anthropological transformation through the dialectic between master and slave, transformation does not come from the slave's labor of fear and struggle. Rather, for Levinas, transformation originates through the Other as master/teacher. Levinas explicitly states that an objective of *TI* is to establish "this primacy of the ethical, that is, of the relationship of man to man – signification, teaching, and justice – a primacy of an irreducible structure upon which all the other structures rest (and in particular all those which seem to put us primordially in contact with an impersonal sublimity, aesthetic or ontological) . . ." ²² As reviewed above in Levinas's reading of the cogito, Descartes' epistemology as first philosophy was replaced with ethics as first philosophy, but how is it that ethical transformation must precede the sociopolitical transformations required by justice? An examination of the relation between ethics and ontology will help clarify this question.

Ethics that proceeds from the impersonal order of the ontological (deontology) is better described as politics in its concern for the hypothetical face of the third party:

Discourse conditions thought, for the first intelligible is not a concept, but an intelligence whose inviolable exteriority the face states in uttering the "you shall not commit murder." The essence of discourse is ethical. In stating this thesis, idealism is refused. . . . Idealism completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics. ²³

If discourse conditions thought and the essence of discourse is ethical, then thought itself is essentially conditioned by the ethical. This is formally demonstrated in the finite thought of the cogito conditioned by the perfection of the Infinite and expressed with desire for the Other in the idea of infinity. The injunction to not murder, as expressed in

the face of the Other, is lost in a universal political discourse where everyone is subsumed as a faceless particular subject to the to the impersonal mediation of an all-powerful third party, such as the sovereign of the state. The mediating third party could simply be the hypothetical third found in the categorical imperatives of the moral law (for example, the self-defeating test: what if every third party, in the absence of myself and the Other, stole on the basis of my legislating theft as a universally acceptable behavior?) While ethics precedes the order of the political, the structures of ethics, justice and the master/teacher all direct attentive concern towards a *non-mediating* third party that serves as a condition for the Other's mastery:

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.²⁴

In the above passage, we can discern the following terms: Self (the I of Myself), Myself (commanded by the Self), the Other, and the Other's others. In these four categories, we have a structural hierarchy of ethical obligation. This is represented as follows:

(Enjoys) → Myself <-> Self <- Other <- Others ← (Commands)

Through discourse, we discover the concrete, deformed societal structure that is isomorphic²⁵ with the structure of the cogito. The Other commands me to command myself for the sake of the Other's Others, and the Myself necessarily enjoys its Self in the

metaphysical atheism born of the separation between the Self and Other. The primary motivation for this metaphysical atheism is the physical need for wholeness, comfort and security. John Llewelyn expresses this materialist aspect of Levinas's thought succinctly, "Levinas approves Marx for saying . . . ethics has a base in economics. But Levinas's endorsement of this aspect of Marx's materialism goes along with a more complex conception of materialism and of what constitutes a base." (65, *The Genealogy of Ethics*) Of course, ethics as first philosophy is at great variance with Marxist economism. For Levinas, the "base" of ethics is the presupposition of metaphysical atheism and materialistic egoism for the concrete, eventual welcoming of the Other.

The relationship between the Self and Other should not be read as the dialectical materialism of the Master and Slave where the Self is exploited by the Other's commands until the Self has nothing left to lose; however, there is a passivity on the part of the Self that marks a fundamental asymmetry between the Self and Other. In the experience of suffering (and in the absence of self-possessing enjoyment), the Self is distanced from itself, "But in this extreme consciousness, where the will reaches mastery in a new sense, where death no longer touches it, extreme passivity becomes extreme mastery. The egoism of the will stands on the verge of an existence that no longer accents itself."²⁶

Related to this question of passivity, Derrida notes:

Levinas would probably not say it in this way, but could it not be argued that, without exonerating myself in the least, decision and responsibility are always *of the other*? They always come back or come down to the other, from the other, even if it is the other in me? For, in the end, would an initiative that remained purely and simply "mine" still be a decision, in accordance with the most powerful tradition of ethics and philosophy, which requires that the decision always be "my" decision, the decision of one who can freely say "as for myself, I," *ipse, egomet ipse*? Would what comes down to me in this way still be a decision? Do we have the right to give the name "decision" to a purely autonomous movement, even if it is

one of welcoming or hospitality, that would proceed only from me, by me, and would simply deploy the possibilities of a subjectivity that is mine?²⁷

To extend this logic even further, it is not the singularity of the I that meets the singularity of the infinite through the mediating force of the idea of the infinite. Rather, it is the non-singularity of the ego that provides a home of signification in the welcoming encounter with the idea of the singularly infinite.

In Derrida's reflection on the Self's lack of autonomy in receiving the Other, there does seem to be a double decision where the Other first decides in the radically passive Self, and the Self in turn decides in itself how to carry out the Other's decision in the Myself of the Self.²⁸ While Derrida's remarks are not properly exegetical, they do emphasize the irreversibility and asymmetry that obtains for Levinas between the Self and Other. To remain faithful to Levinas's intention, the encounter between the Self and Other is most likely between a singular Self and a singular Other.²⁹ We can say that insofar as Myself is at home with its Self in enjoyment, its singularity seems obscured; yet, the distinctness of its singularity is enhanced when the distance between the Self and Myself is opened upon suffering the Other.

The Myself, as opposed to the Self, is in a position of autonomy as it enjoys the Self in its separation from the Other. In the above schematic, no one of the four terms is central. Rather, it is the *event* of the asymmetrical, ethical encounter between the Self and the Other that is crucial. Perhaps this unnameable event is tantamount to "the god so close that we can no longer see him. Not because he has disappeared inside us, but, on the contrary, because in coming closer, and disappearing the closer he comes, he has made all our inside, all subjectivity, disappear with him."³⁰ The Other as master teaches and commands self-commandment, and the only ethical response the Self can offer is through

finding the Myself no longer lost in its Self (to be at home with one's Self is to be fundamentally lost in one's Self); however, there is a debilitating loss of meaning without the Other's others. Without this category, the category of the Self (rather than the eventual encounter between Self and Other) becomes the central term between the Other and the Myself in the isolation of idolatrous glossolalia:

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.³¹

Without the third party, the encounter with the other is like the idea of the infinite, *negatively* understood. The Other (or the idea of the infinite, analogously) becomes imagined and posited rather than deposited in my life, and this sense of infinity is self-generated. In this manner, ethics would not be possible without politics to the extent that the third party serves "as shorthand for the impersonal institutions of legal and political judgment,"³² where language can concretely situate itself as justice; and yet genuine speech also speaks to the preservation of the personal singularity in the Other and through the Other.

There is yet another, darker conceptualization that Levinas offers on the meaning of the political as that which is in contradistinction to the eschatological. This distinction will help prepare my argument that the sociopolitical conflict between the universalism of French cosmopolitanism and the particularity Jewish ethnicity (as in Levinas's life) is in some way grounded upon the manifest asymmetry between the Self and Other, which is, in turn, reflective of the formal imperfection of the cogito's self-identity conditioned by the infinitely perfect. I realize the delicacy of this subject and the possibility of

insensitivity on my part, yet I will strive to adequately represent this genuine conflict in Levinas's own thought born of his French and Jewish identities. In addressing this subject, my thesis concerning the universal and homogeneous state will be well served by confronting the question of whether Jewish universalism is paradoxical.

Before addressing the meaning and politics of Jewish universalism, it is necessary to give some sense to what Levinas understood as the realm of the political beyond the impersonal organization of the third party. In short, the political pertains to war and peace:

The moral consciousness can sustain the mocking gaze of the political man only if the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war. Such a certitude is not obtained by a simple play of antitheses. The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore the alienated beings their lost identity. For that a primordial and original relation with being is needed.³³

As I understand the passage, Levinas's reference to being allies politics with ontology. This alliance is consistent with Kojève's conception of self-directed becoming vis-à-vis the negation of being,³⁴ which ultimately results in the end of history and the termination of the master/slave dialectic. The ethical, on the other hand, precedes ontology and so it is allied with what Levinas calls eschatology, which "institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present."³⁵ By way of contrast, Hegel's End of History is an immanent, ontological event, and the universal and homogeneous state that rationally derives from the End of History (in the later Kojève's view with certain provisos) is an imminent, political event predicated upon the totality of history. As with the singularity of the idea of the infinite,³⁶ the order of the eschatological also speaks to an evasion from history's particularization of eternity:

The eschatological, as the “beyond” of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility. Submitting history as a whole to judgment, exterior to the very wars that mark its end, it restores to each instant its full signification in that very instant: all the causes are ready to be heard. It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants in time, when the living are judged. The eschatological notion of judgment (contrary to the judgment of history in which Hegel wrongly saw its rationalization) implies that beings have an identity “before” eternity, before the accomplishment of history, before the fullness of time, while there is still time; implies that beings exist in relationship, to be sure, but on the basis of themselves and not on the basis of the totality.³⁷

The order of the eschatological ensures the preservation of the singularity within history.

The order of the political submits the singularity as a sacrifice to the judgment of history.

As discussed in Chapter II, the singular slave, for example, is equivalent to a tragic cipher at the end of history when all labor (exploitation) and struggle (war) culminates in writing history as a tragedy. Key to understanding the eschatological order is separation – by virtue of eschatology, one is afforded a separation from the totality of history and preserved in her singularity from tragic annihilation. Regardless of what one thinks of the future, eschatological thought rejects any justification for past exploitations and wars that inevitably displace any historical individual’s singular voice with a universal narrative:

The idea of being overflowing history makes possible *existents* [*étants*] both involved in being and personal, called upon to answer at their trial and consequently already adult – but, for that very reason, *existents* that can speak rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history. Peace is produced as this aptitude for speech. The eschatological vision breaks with the totality of wars and empires in which one does not speak. It does not envisage the end of history within being understood as a totality, but institutes a relation with the infinity of being which exceeds the totality.³⁸

Prophets exemplify this aptitude for speech in the production of peace. Universal human rights have “prophetic roots,”³⁹ and the prophet’s concern is properly eschatological rather than futural in her call for responsibility before an infinite God. It is within this

context of the eschatological that we can begin to understand Jewish universalism. With reference to the Jews, Levinas notes that “the truth – the knowledge of God – is not a question of dogma for them, but one of action, as in Jeremiah 22, and that a Jew can communicate just as intimately with a non-Jew who portrays morality – in other words, with the Noachide – as with another Jew.”⁴⁰ By basing truth in action rather than belief, the conditions for a Jewish universalism are established.

A chosen people is chosen by virtue of the active response to the prophetic call to learn from the prophets as masters. What the prophets teach is a universalism. With reference to the Jewish people, Levinas notes:

We have the reputation of considering ourselves to be a chosen people, and this reputation greatly wrongs this universalism. The idea of a chosen people must not be taken as a sign of pride. It does not involve being aware of exceptional rights, but of exceptional duties. It is the prerogative of a moral consciousness itself. It knows itself at the centre of the world and for it the world is not homogeneous: for I am always alone in being able to answer the call, I am irreplaceable in my assumption of responsibility. Being chosen involves a surplus of obligations for which the ‘I’ of moral consciousness utters. “This is what is represented by the Jewish concept of Israel and the sense that it is a chosen people. It is not ‘still anterior’ to the universalism of a homogeneous society in which the differences between Jew, Greek and barbarian are abolished. It already includes this abolition but remains, for a Jew, a condition that is at any moment still indispensable to such an abolition, which in turn at any moment is still about to commence.”⁴¹

The Jewish concept of Israel is a force for homogenization to the extent that this concept is based on moral action rather than belief, yet how is this consistent with the order of the eschatological? The eschatological preserves a sense of singularity beyond history, and in hearing the call of the prophet, “I am always alone in being able to answer the call,”⁴² and so one is taught universalism in one’s unicity. One is called to separation at the center of

the heterogeneous world to create the conditions for universal fraternity and its resulting homogenization.

To the extent that France represents the ideal of universality, we can see why Levinas embraced France, “Adherence to France is a metaphysical act, of course, it had to be France, a country that expresses its political existence with a trinitarian emblem which is moral and philosophical, and is inscribed on the front of its public buildings.”⁴³ Caygill comments that the reference to the “trinitarian emblem” refers to the ideals of the 1789 Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man: liberty, equality and fraternity.⁴⁴

In the schematic below, we can interpret the development from unicity towards ethnicity as the formation of community. We can also interpret one's nationality as the idea of universality or the promise of internationality that is ultimately grounded in the eschatological vocation of Israel. If so, we have the following schematic structurally consistent with the divided line employed thus far:

Individual <-> Jewish Ethnicity <- French cosmopolitanism <- Jewish universalism

And alternatively we have:

Singularity <-> particularity <- idea of universalism <- eschatology

Where “->” = formation of communal identity
and “<-” = formation of universal fraternity

In the above schematic, we can see how concerns regarding ethnic assimilation become evident if one's ethnicity is both pressured in the formation of a concrete, ethnic community while also being chosen for the infinite responsibility of extending and deepening fraternity universally. As Caygill notes regarding universal rights, “The view

that such rights mark a realization of prophetic politics runs the risk of assimilation, namely the dissolution of a particular Jewish identity in the realization of universal human fraternity through the declaration of universal human rights.”⁴⁵ For any person concerned with universal rights, there is a desire to assimilate with the French identity of cosmopolitanism insofar as this identity is grounded upon the universal vocation of Israel, but such a desire risks the loss of one’s particular ethnic identity.

We can say that it is not the community that is chosen by the eschatological call so much as the individual who, in her absolute separation, is “always alone in being able to answer the call,” but nonetheless receives this call through the tradition of her faith community. The question of assimilation remains: if universal fraternity is realized, and the world is made “Jewish” in the sense of moral action rather than belief, what then happens to the Jewish faith community? Is it simply lost in the totality of universal homogenization? I will address these concerns regarding assimilation in Chapter IV, but for now we may view Levinas's conflicting Jewish and French identities as, in some way, a conflict between universalizing Judaism (through universal fraternity – if everyone is Jewish, then no one is Jewish) and particularizing Judaism (preserving the concrete practice of Judaism from disappearing into a secular pluralism). I do not mean to critique, justify or resolve the ambivalence Levinas had between his French and Jewish identities. I merely want to provide an adequate description of that conflict in terms of the universal structures of interpersonal ethical relations that challenge one’s identity on Levinas’s understanding.

Levinas’s thought is nonetheless unequivocally opposed to Kojève’s End of History thesis understood as history’s self-generated tragic structure from which all final

judgments are decreed without consideration for the singularity of any particular within history; however, is the order of the eschatological necessarily opposed to the project of realizing the universal and homogeneous state, if Kojève took such a state of affairs to be the Left Hegelian interpretation of the End of History's rational outcome? Might it be a genuinely ethical project to strive for a universal and homogeneous state given the concerns and issues raised thus far? Given this chapter's exegesis of both the theoretical and concrete aspects of Levinas's philosophical project, I will endeavor to address these questions in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape: De L'Évasion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 55.

² Adriaan Peperzak, *Platonic Transformations: With and After Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 114.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 65-66.

⁶ *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 115.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸ *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 145.

⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 56.

¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ Reginald Lilly, "Levinas's Heideggerian Fantasm," in *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception*, David Pettigrew, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 35.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸ Peperzak, *Platonic Transformations: With and After Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas*, 115.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²² *Ibid.*, 79.

²³ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁵ (-> = positing) I <-> Ego <- Idea of the Infinite <- the Infinite (<- = conditioning)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 24-5.

- ²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?: Four Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion*, Paperback ed., (London: Verso, 2002), 162.
- ²⁹ Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), 27-8.
- ³⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 137.
- ³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 213.
- ³² Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70.
- ³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 22.
- ³⁴ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 5.
- ³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 22.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 173.
- ⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Paperbacks ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 176.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 176-7.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 177.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 260-1.
- ⁴⁴ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 178.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

CHAPTER IV

UNIVERSALITY WITHOUT TOTALITY

In this chapter, I address the question of whether the project of a universal and homogeneous state is consistent with Levinasian ethics, and if it is in fact an ethical demand. I will not try to address how the realization of the universal and homogeneous state is possible or whether ethics is pertinent to its realization from the perspective of Marxist orthodoxy. I only want to argue that while its realization is clearly the rational project for post-historical humanity on Kojève's reading such a realization is also an ethical project from a Levinasian perspective. In this chapter, I discuss the thought of Kojève, Derrida, Horkheimer, Adorno and Žižek – all thinkers of the left. In my argument that a Levinasian can view the universal and homogeneous state as a worthy ethical project, I will try to position Levinas's thought within the context of universal emancipation as thought by the above thinkers.

This chapter has three parts. In the first part, I will address how Levinas's conception of mastery (contrary to Hegel's conception of mastery) is relevant to post-historical society as Kojève envisions it. Derrida outlined a reading of Kojève's End of History as the time of "the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of *man as other*,"¹ when post-historical humanity is obligated to reinvent its humanity through custom and culture. This Levinasian formulation of the end of history understands Kojève as placing a moral imperative on the post-historical projects of humanity, which would include the universal and homogeneous state. Whereas the master in the Hegelian dialectic is superseded in the end of history, the master/student relationship helps serve

the post-historical duty to reinvent humanity in the master's cultivation of desire in the tutor.

In the second part, I explore Hegel and Levinas's differing conceptions of desire. I argue that the insatiability characteristic of desire in Levinas's understanding is often conflated with satiable need. In Horkheimer and Adorno depiction of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens in the *Odyssey*, we have a metaphor that sharply distinguishes between need and desire. This distinction is critical for characterizing the universal and homogeneous state where all need is met and desire is cultivated. For Horkheimer and Adorno, this image is relevant for conceptualizing the domineering nature of instrumental reason as shaped by the desire for pure prestige. To subject instrumental reason to practical reason requires the clarification between desire and need, and the Sirens may serve to illustrate emancipation as the desire for the sojourn rather than the return home.

In the third part, I address Žižek's criticism of Levinas's system of ethics. Žižek essentially argues that the Levinasian ethics of love is a hindrance to the work of justice. If Žižek is correct, Levinas's thought would be generally inconsistent with the work of realizing the universal and homogeneous state. Žižek privileges the Third Party above the Other as the true expression of justice; yet, I argue that he misunderstands the relationship between the Other and the Third Party since the Other is commanded by the Third Party, and the Self is obligated to work with the Other for the elimination of the need and dispossession of those that stand behind and command the Other. From the standpoint of Levinasian ethics, we can interpret the universal and homogeneous state as the universal, legal codification of deontological practical philosophy (interminable

politicization, as Derrida would put it), all of which Levinas considers to be within the political domain rather than the ethical domain.

As detailed in Chapter II, the anthropogenesis of self consciousness was traced in the master slave dialectic as a tragic totality, but what takes place after the tragedy of human history? For Kojève, post-historical humanity marks the beginning of a farce or comedy replete with talking animals. Despite the postmodern irony that characterizes Kojève's geopolitical analysis, one must admire the bravo with which he asserted the counterintuitive implications of his Hegelian philosophy. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Kojève's ironic geopolitical analysis does serve a purpose for what he takes to be the outlines of a general form of life characteristic of the universal and homogeneous state.

What follows is the infamous footnote that Kojève added to the 2nd edition of the Introduction to the Reading of Hegel:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs . . . But one cannot then say that all this "makes Man *happy*." One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be *content* as a result of their artistic, erotic and playful behavior, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it. But there is more. "The *definitive annihilation* of Man *properly so-called*" also means the definitive disappearance of human Discourse (*Logos*) in the strict sense. Animals of the species *Homo Sapiens* would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign "language," and thus their so-called "discourses" would be like what is supposed to be the "language" of bees. What would disappear then is not only Philosophy or the search for discursive Wisdom, but also that Wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any "[discursive] *understanding* of the World and of self."²

In this footnote, Kojève describes how his opinion on the timing of humanity's return to animality had changed from 1946 to 1948. Rather than anticipating this return to animality sometime in the future, Kojève came to the understanding:

that the Hegelian-Marxist end of History was not yet to come, but was already a present, here and now. Observing what was taking place around me and reflecting on what had taken place in the world since the Battle of Jena, I understood that Hegel was right to see in this battle the end of History properly so-called. In and by this battle the vanguard of humanity virtually attained the limit and the aim, that is, the *end*, of Man's historical evolution. What has happened since then was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon.³

In this passage, there are number of ideas worth clarifying. Here, Kojève clearly distinguishes between the end of history and the universal homogeneous state. While it is certain that Kojève did not live in a universal and homogeneous state, he nonetheless interpreted the historical events that followed the French Revolution as consistent with the progression towards the universal and homogeneous state.

It is remarkable that Derrida concurred with Kojève at some level on the basis for present and future political projects: the classical emancipatory ideal exemplified in the French Declaration of Rights of Man.⁴ We should also observe with Caygill that, "There is a sense in which Levinas believed that the declaration of the Rights of Man marked a partial and fragile realization of the universal vocation of Israel, one that needed to be deepened, especially with respect to the notion of fraternity."⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, the universal vocation of Israel pertains to prophetic politics; and within this context, it should become clear through the course of this chapter that the political project of developing the universal and homogeneous state can be grounded upon Levinasian ethics.

From Kojève's ironic perspective, the United States represented the model for homogeneity for the universal and homogeneous state. As mentioned in Chapter II, Kojève became somewhat dismissive of the world-historical import of the universal and homogeneous state after he separated its realization from the event of the end of history (if the earlier Kojève's thought is characteristically Marxist, we can say that the later Kojève's thought is better characterized as existentialist rather than post-Marxist, as we shall see).

With this homogeneity realized in America, all that seemingly remained was the expansion / universalization of the American model:

One can even say that, from a certain point of view, the United States has already attained the final stage of Marxist "communism," seeing that, practically, all the members of a "classless society" can from now on appropriate for themselves that seems good to them, without thereby working any more than their heart dictates. . . . the "American way of life" was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the "eternal present" future of all humanity. Thus, Man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present.⁶

Kojève goes on in this footnote to remark how he revised his opinion upon his visit to Japan, where post-historical civilization developed life-forms or "ways diametrically opposed"⁷ to American animalism. Specifically, it was the Japanese devotion to formality and custom, or "Snobbery,"⁸ inherited from their nobility that impressed Kojève as "anything but animal."⁹

At this point, one may well throw her hands up in exasperation at such soothsaying generalizations and stereotypes; however, while these footnote reflections on Japan and the United States cannot be taken too seriously, they serve as more than mere

provocations. Nichols notes that rather than taking Kojève too literally, one should read Kojève invoking:

two ideal types . . . I suppose that he has in mind traits of the American way of life” that have provoked keen comments from observers at least as early as Tocqueville: a preference for fast and easy satisfaction, a kind of informality or even formlessness, an impatience with tradition . . . Now, ideal types do not exist actually in their purity.”¹⁰

Of course, the American “ideal” is something of an oxymoron, if we take such an ideal to be the very repudiation of ideal life-forms. While neither the Japanese nor the American “ideals” of the end of history should be taken seriously in their purity, one must admit that these ideals pertain to a certain question of purity. As Derrida puts it, “There where man, a certain determined concept of man, is finished, there the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of man *as other* begins or has finally the chance of heralding itself – of promising itself.”¹¹ It is precisely this opposition between formalism and formlessness that Derrida reads as even containing a moral imperative when Kojève says:

To remain human, Man must remain a “subject *opposed* to the Object,” even if “Action negating the given and Error” disappears. This means that, while henceforth speaking in an *adequate* fashion of everything that is given to him, post-historical Man must [*droit*] continue to *detach* “form” from “content,” doing so no longer in order actively to transform the latter, but so that he may *oppose* himself as a pure “form” to himself and to others taken as “content” of any sort.¹²

In one form forming another, we have a portrait of Levinas’s conception of mastery. We should note that whereas the Hegelian master opposes herself as form to the slave as content for the dialectical trans-formation of the slave, the Levinasian master opposes herself to a student capable of being in-formed with the idea of perfection.¹³ Derrida comments that the word “*droit*” in Kojève’s text is both a promise and a prescription for something infinitely beyond in some sense:

Apparently “formalist,” this indifference to the content has perhaps the value of giving one to think the necessarily pure and the purely necessary form of the future as such, in its being-necessarily-promised, prescribed, assigned, enjoined, in the necessarily formal necessity of its possibility – in short, in its law. It is this law that dislodges any present out of its contemporaneity with itself. Whether the promise promises this or that, whether it be fulfilled or not, or whether it be unfulfillable, there is necessarily some promise and therefore some historicity as future-to-come. It is what we are nicknaming the messianic without messianism.¹⁴

What is central to Derrida’s reading of Kojève’s notion of Japanese formalism is that such formalism is itself an ethics or a rediscovery of ethics that announces itself as an ethical imperative within Kojève’s thoughts on the existential prospects of post-historical humanity.

It is by this means of Japanization that Jewish universalism can avoid the total assimilation of Jewish faith communities into secular pluralism. As a prerequisite for the process of Japanization, Americanization creates the conditions whereby people can be treated as indifferent content. If so, the moral imperative for realizing Japanization also holds for Americanization. Counter-intuitively, we could say that Japanization is akin to the metaphysical atheism / egoism required before the Self’s ethical encounter with the Other qua Americanization. Nonetheless, it is precisely the formation of particular and distinctive communities that seems characteristic of what Kojève refers to as snobbism.

With reference to Kojève’s controversial sociopolitical commentary on the total homogenization and satiation of American life, Nichols observes:

Perhaps too, Kojève was expressing here a point of view that has been taken over the years by many philosophers and other intellectuals from Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, and Epicureans among the ancients to Rousseau, Marx and John Stuart Mill among the moderns: if people are able to have all the things that the philosopher in question considers enough for them (meeting their real needs and providing all the genuine satisfactions of which they are in fact capable), these people must properly

be understood to have all that they want (or at least can reasonably want).¹⁵

If we read Americanization with Derrida as, “the cancellation of the gap between desire and need”¹⁶ and Japanization as the cultivation of *desire* (for form, the Forms if you will, or the Good beyond the content of being) beyond bare need through the master/student relationship, Nichols’s observation is most insightful for distinguishing between Levinas’s and Hegel’s differing notions of desire.

Hegel’s conception of desire as desire for the other’s desire (or pure prestige) is relevant for Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of instrumental reason as *insatiable* in its desire for dominating everything from nature to desire itself. At the end of history, desire for recognition should be fully satiated in the universal citizenship that supersedes the master/slave relationship. If instrumental reason is indeed an outgrowth of the slave’s relationship with nature, what happens to humanity’s relationship to nature and instrumental reason once humanity has surpassed the age of slavery? In theory, such an end of history marks the full satiation of desire for recognition, but what is to prevent the total animalization of post-historical humanity as the inexorable desire for recognition is displaced onto bare animal need? This is surely the risk of Americanization.

I believe that Levinas's conception of desire offers a paradigm for the limitless aspect of human appetite. Post-historical humanity risks reverting to the lack of self-consciousness characteristic of bourgeois mastery in conflating desire with need. This conflation creates the impression that freedom is the Americanized pursuit of happiness in feeding one's needs based on a lack considered to be insatiable, a la desire. This reversion seems to be depicted in Horkheimer and Adorno’s interpretation of Odysseus’ encounter with the Sirens in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. If the Sirens can be signified

as the wholly Other, Horkheimer and Adorno portray universal emancipation as a radically transformed humanity; and if so, there is a resonance with Levinasian ethics where genuine desire for the Other is unshackled from bare need through instrumental reason's subjugation to practical reason.

As mentioned in Chapter II, the Cartesian reduction of mind to a thinking thing casts the mind as an instrument in some respect. From the self-possession of the cogito and the reification of the mind, we can see how instrumental reason hijacks the emancipatory potential of enlightenment reasoning. Descartes leaves both Hegel and Levinas in suspense at this point. Both must configure desire within the ego to carry it out of its isolated and self-identical self-presence. For Hegel, desire is the birth of self-consciousness from bare consciousness, and the anthropogenesis of self-consciousness leads to a tragic totality in the end of history as reviewed in Chapter II. For Levinas, desire for the Other grounds the finitude of the ego and provides a formal basis for an ethics of the Other.

In fact, it is precisely after this first Cartesian premise essential to modern philosophy, that Hegel's philosophy, through the desire for prestige, branches towards consummated wisdom and Levinas's philosophy branches towards the wisdom of love.¹⁷ By way of metaphor, we can represent this philosophical divergence through Homer's *Odyssey* in Odysseus's dramatic self-conflict between continuing homeward for the consummation of his love with Penelope and allowing himself to pursue the absolute otherness of the Sirens in the compelling infinity by which the Sirens overwhelm Odysseus's presence of mind.

The art of the Sirens' song evokes a mythic and idyllic past that overpowers:

No one who hears their song can escape. Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self – the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings – was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood. The effort to hold itself together attends the ego at all its stages, and the temptation to be rid of the ego has always gone hand-in-hand with the blind determination to preserve it.¹⁸

The Sirens pose an unparalleled opportunity for Odysseus: a chance for a total unburdening and escape from his destined homecoming. For Levinas, Odysseus also represents this effort of the ego to “hold itself together.” With reference to the henological tradition of Parmenides, Spinoza and Hegel, Levinas notes that this tradition posits the time of a separated being’s return, “to its metaphysical source, a moment of a history that will be concluded by union, metaphysics would be an Odyssey, and its disquietude nostalgia.”¹⁹ Additionally, “Ruse and ambush – Ulysses’ [Odysseus’] craft – constitute the essence of war,”²⁰ and so the Greek Odysseus represents the Western political tradition of conflict resolution by means of annihilation. Nostalgia for reunion proving to be his ultimate motivation to the point of madness, Odysseus’s means of ruse and ambush are exercised in their fullest against the suitors of his wife Penelope upon Odysseus’ return home after his encounter with the Sirens. This serves as a metaphor for a metaphysics where the Same is disquieted in its need for the resolution of its indifference to the other. Levinas opposes this metaphysics with his own where the Same is disquieted in the non-indifferent absolution of its desire for the other.

In the encounter with the Sirens, Odysseus places the ruse on himself and ambushes his own desire. On a Levinasian reading, perhaps the Sirens represent the innermost desire for all existents to escape existence for the sake of the Other beyond any need for lack. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the Sirens represent:

The fear of losing the self, and suspending with it the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment. The way of civilization has been that of obedience and work, over which fulfillment shines everlastingly as mere illusion, as beauty deprived of power.²¹

History's path is forged by the technological advances born of unsatiated need. The Western philosophical tradition is marked by a compulsion to reduce the other to the same just as history strives to reduce all desire to that which is manageable through the technological advances of work: need. Odysseus commands his comrades to stuff their ears while having his self tied to the mast so that he may listen to the Sirens' song where he discovers a desire even more primordial than that of his nostalgic need for home:

Society has always made sure that this was the case. Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore anything which lies to one side. The urge toward distraction must be grimly sublimated in redoubled exertions. Thus the works are made practical . . . the landowner . . . listens, but does so while bound helplessly to the mast, and the stronger the allurements grow the more tightly he has himself bound, just as later the bourgeois denied themselves happiness the closer it drew to them with the increase in their own power . . . The bonds by which he has irrevocably fettered himself to praxis at the same time keep the Sirens at a distance from praxis: their lure is neutralized as a mere object of contemplation, as art. The fettered man listens to a concert, as immobilized as audiences later, and his enthusiastic call for liberation goes unheard as applause.²²

Odysseus' comrades are deaf to his expressions. As they work side-to-side, they do not behold the face of the Sirens, their master or even each other. Analogously, the materialist infrastructure of society can absolutely restrain one from the Other as neighbor in the strictest regulation of desire. For Odysseus, the Sirens pose the danger of transforming his odyssey of dogged need into an eternal sojourn of desire: a betrayal of home, family and self. Odysseus' comrades cannot know what Odysseus is raving about

as they are under command to confine their desires homeward bound as they keep to themselves.

Odysseus is thrilled by the spectacle of the Sirens, but the last thing he can enjoy is his own self as the egoism of his self-identity is warped into a complete loss of self. Odysseus is commanded by the Sirens. In turn, Odysseus issues commands to his comrades to loosen his bonds, but he has willed himself into a position where he is incapable of self-command, “Those at the top experience the existence with which they no longer need to concern themselves as a mere substrate, and are wholly ossified as the self which issues commands.”²³ Only those “at the top” can appreciate the distinction between need and desire in their complete egoism; yet, it is also they who are the only ones not at home with themselves, since they are disabused of the illusion that their desire could ever be fulfilled.

In terms of ethical demand, we can say that the demand that Odysseus faces in his openness to the Sirens is compelling to the point of sacrificing his own family and home. Odysseus cannot turn his face from the Sirens - he *must* acquiesce to the infinite demand of the Sirens. We can admit the difference between the moral phenomenology of the Other and the immemorial origin that commands an ethical response in the face of the Other on the basis of an extra-historical identity or primordial covenant on the order of the eschatological. As referenced in Chapter III, Perpich offers a moral phenomenology of the Other in arguing that the moral skeptic ultimately falls into a performative contradiction when contesting the moral phenomenology of the Other:

The would-be amoralist asks for proof or evidence that the other is his concern: “What is my brother to me or I to him that I should concern myself with his welfare?” The skeptic effectively demands a *reason* that would justify the other’s demand for care or concern. In so doing, the

skeptic implicates herself in the very practices of reflection that indicate just the sort of relation she would like to deny. That is, the skeptic uses a faculty or practice granted to her by the social or ethical relationship in order to question whether such a relation could really be attributed to her. Her question thus involves her in a performative contradiction . . .”²⁴

Nonetheless, despite performative contradiction, what can force or compel the moral skeptic to moral action in the face of a lack of reason for responding to the demand of the Other? As Levinas notes, “Responsibility is anterior to all the logical deliberation summoned by reasoned decision. Deliberation would already be the reduction of the face of the Other to a representation, to the objectivity of the visible, to its compelling force, which belongs to the world.”²⁵ Therefore, while societal practices and norms might involve the moral skeptic in a performative contradiction, such practices and norms are *not*, in any event, the ultimate grounds of responsibility for Levinas. The anteriority of responsibility is:

an-archic . . . It is the significance of a past that concerns me, that “regards me,” and is “my business” outside of all reminiscence, re-tension, re-presentation, or reference to a remembered past. . . . Such is my *nonintentional* participation in the history of humanity, in the past of others, who “regard me.” The dia-chrony of a past that does not gather into re-presentation is at the bottom of the concreteness of the time that is the time of my responsibility for the Other.²⁶

In this sense, the formless ground of responsibility beyond representation could serve as the skeptic’s reason for *theoretically* denying the ethical demand of the Other.

Regardless, the face of the other is a channel (such as the idea of infinity) through which the time immemorial of eschatology (the infinite, the invisible, the stranger and the Third Party) necessitates and compels the skeptic’s moral involvement in spite of his or her (ir)rational protests.

In a sense the primordially and anarchy of the Other's commandment is represented in the absolutely mythic and timeless Sirens. They represent an empowered art that *compels* desire towards action, involvement and praxis:

Their allurements is that of losing oneself in the past . . . The urge to rescue the past as something living, instead of using it as the material of progress, has been satisfied only in art, in which even history, as a representation of past life, is included. As long as art does not insist on being treated as knowledge, and thus exclude itself from praxis, it is tolerated by social praxis in the same way as pleasure. But the Sirens' song has not yet been deprived of power as art.²⁷

In this metaphor, we have a notion of how the emancipatory political philosophy of Horkheimer and Adorno can be articulated vis-à-vis Levinas in a prophetic politics that first exposes the difference between need and desire and then cultivates desire on the basis of satiating need. This discussion on the necessitating moral power of time immemorial will prove relevant to the question of fraternity in relation to Žižek's criticisms of Levinas's notion of the neighbor. In a manner, Žižek's argument resembles the Marxist dismissal of ethics as a super-structural effect of the fundamental economic forces; yet, Žižek's psychoanalytical, Marxist criticism of Levinas provide me an opportunity to defend my thesis as Žižek's argument is essentially in direct contradiction with my thesis.

As referenced earlier in this chapter, Levinas took the deepening of fraternity to be especially pertinent to the "universal vocation of Israel,"²⁸ in its representation of the eschatological order. Žižek addresses this theme in his essay "Neighbors and other Monsters: a Plea for Ethical Violence."²⁹ In some sense, Žižek construes Levinas's notion of justice as a context-sensitive deontology open to understanding any party as the Other.

In this manner, Žižek claims, Levinas leaves himself vulnerable to a blind pacifism in the potential justification of any actor, no matter how evil.

To contextualize Žižek's essay, Žižek associates Levinas's concept of the Other with the symbolic "big Other," in Lacan's thought.³⁰ Žižek describes the symbolic Other (in contradistinction to the real Other and the imaginary Other) as "the "substance" of our social existence, the impersonal set of rules that coordinate our coexistence."³¹ It is from this association that Žižek errs in a manner similar to Perpich in grounding the self-other ethical relation on present-standing societal conventions and norms. What proceeds from this error is a number of exegetical premises that falsely characterize Levinas's philosophy.

After this characterization of Levinas's Other as the symbolic "big Other," Žižek writes:

We should therefore assume the risk of countering Levinas's position with a more radical one: others are primordially an (ethically) indifferent multitude, and love is a violent gesture of cutting into this multitude and privileging a One as the neighbor, thus introducing a radical imbalance into the whole. In contrast to love, justice begins when I remember the faceless many left in shadow in this privileging of the One. Justice and love are thus structurally incompatible: justice, not love, has to be blind; it must disregard the privileged One whom I "really understand." What this means is that the Third is not secondary: it is always-already here, and the primordial ethical obligation is toward this Third who is *not* here in the face-to-face relationship, the one in the shadow, like the absent child of a love-couple.³²

There are a number of mischaracterizations of Levinas's thought that follow from Žižek's neglect for the role of infinitude in the ethical interrelationship. First, I doubt that the Other can ever be "really understood" on Levinas's terms. The only way the Other can be a condition of my finitude is through the Other's infinitude beyond comprehension or realization. Such as the idea of infinity, the Other can never be "really" understood just as

the idea of infinity can never be contained – the Other, such as the idea of infinity, overflows the understanding. It is through the singular Other that the infinity of the Third Party and time immemorial claims me, “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice. . . . 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.”³³

As Žižek uses the term, “justice” is political justice or justice as it pertains to the Third Party; however, the Self does not autonomously choose one Other out of the many in an unjust act of love on Žižek’s reading. Rather, it is the singular Other (out of the many) that chooses me in my heteronomy. Nonetheless, it is on this assumption of the self’s autonomy in relation to the Other that Žižek then argues:

This brings us to the radical anti-Levinasian conclusion: the true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face, the one of choosing *against* the face, for the *third*. This coldness *is* justice at its most elementary. Every preempting of the Other in the guise of his or her face relegates the Third to the faceless background. And the elementary gesture of justice is not to show respect for the face in front of me, to be open to its depth, but to abstract from it and refocus onto the faceless Thirds in the background. It is only such a shift of focus onto the Third that effectively *uproots* justice, liberating it from the contingent umbilical link that renders it “embedded” in a particular situation. In other words, it is only such a shift onto the Third that grounds justice in the dimension of *universality* proper.³⁴

In a sense, to give up on the Other is to give up on the possibility of education in the master/student rapport, but from where would we learn the idea of justice and the idea of the other Others (the Third Party) if not from the face of the Other?

Furthermore, the Other cannot speak to the Self unless it is on the behalf of the Third party. Otherwise, the Self / Other relationship is merely an I / Thou relationship without need for discourse; therefore, the discourse of justice is based on an ethics of the

Other insofar as the Other is commanded by the infinite humanity of the Third party.

Reaching past the Neighbor for the sake of the Third as Žižek characterizes justice is the concrete, deformed analogue of dismissing the idea of infinity, which Levinas takes to be infinity's mode of being or "inifinition."³⁵

Certainly infinity itself logically precedes the idea of infinity, but the ego does not first relate to infinity to later construct or imagine an idea of positive infinity. Yet, Žižek nonetheless argues that one's relationship with the third party precedes the relationship with the Other:

Prior to encountering the Other as a face in front of us, the Other is here as a paradoxical background-face; in other words, the first relationship to an Other is that to a faceless Third. The Third is a formal-transcendental fact; it is not that, while, in our empirical lives, the Third is irreducible, we should maintain as a kind of regulative Idea the full grounding of ethics in the relationship to the Other's Face. Such a grounding is not only empirically impossible, it is a priori impossible, since the limitation of our capacity to relate to Others' faces is the mark of our very finitude. In other words, the limitation of our ethical relation of responsibility toward the Other's face which necessitates the rise of the Third (the domain of regulations) is a positive condition of ethics, not simply its secondary supplement. If we deny this – in other words, if we stick to the postulate of a final translatability of the Third into a relation to the Other's face – we remain caught in the vicious cycle of "understanding." One can "understand" everything; even the most hideous crime has an "inner truth and beauty" when observed from within . . .³⁶

Although Levinas would agree that the Self's relation to the Other is marked by finitude, this does not preclude an ethics grounded on the relationship to the Other. While the third party could be conceded as an a priori fact, the relationship to the Other is prior to any transcendental fact analytically deduced from a subject's a priori cognition. Levinas notes, "The responsibility for the Other signified as an order in the neighbor's face is not, in me, the simple modality of "transcendental apperception." The order concerns me without it being possible for me to go back to the thematic presence of a being that would

be the cause or the willing of this commandment.”³⁷ Therefore, Žižek is incorrect to say that the relationship to the third party is prior to the relationship to the Other.

For Žižek, the justice that prioritizes the third party over the Other is all the more just in its blindness, “Thus, truly blind justice cannot be grounded in the relationship to the Other’s face, in other words, in the relationship to the neighbor. Justice is emphatically *not* justice for – with regard to – the neighbor.”³⁸ As an example of justice that transcends the neighbor, Žižek references Che Guevara lauding hatred in warfare for the love of humanity,³⁹ but if one sees the exploitation of the Stranger, the widow or the orphan, it seems that one is all the more compelled and necessitated to intervene by whatever means necessary *precisely on behalf of the Other* through whom one visualizes the invisible third party. For example, Žižek neglects the moment when a person (say, Che Guevara in this context) is inspired, in the face of an Other who happens to be a revolutionary on behalf of the third party (let us say provisionally, Fidel Castro), to join the revolution as the revolutionary's neighbor and comrade.

Furthermore, justice does not need to be blind if its object (the Third Party) is invisible. To make the third party apparent, the singularity of the Other must be amplified and appreciated in its priority to the third party. For Levinas, justice is a discourse with the Other concerning the third party⁴⁰ while the law concerns the conditions for equality between the self and the third; yet Žižek seems to reduce justice (in its virtuous blindness) to the immutable law in a collapsing of religion and politics where the only foundation for ethics is the irreducible and arbitrary law, “When Levinas endeavors to ground ethics in the Other’s face, is he not still clinging to the ultimate root of the ethical commitment, afraid to accept the abyss of the rootless Law as the only foundation of

ethics?”⁴¹ Yet Levinas observes the separation between religion and politics as a condition for a politics of equality:

[T]he distance that separates happiness from desire separates politics from religion. Politics tends toward reciprocal recognition, that is, toward equality; it ensures happiness. And political law concludes and sanctions the struggle for recognition. Religion is Desire and not struggle for recognition. It is the surplus possible in a society of equals, that of glorious humility, responsibility, and sacrifice, which are the condition for equality itself.⁴²

In asserting one’s unquestioned autonomy to refuse the Other for the sake of the third party in the name of the Law, Žižek makes an idealist identification between reason and the will that ultimately “reduces ethics to politics”⁴³ in Levinas’s words. In Kant’s practical philosophy, one does not act freely unless rationally. This is why Kant’s ethical system is to be considered essentially a political system in its abstract, categorical orientation to any hypothetical third party.

Rather than asserting the immutability of a rootless and blind law, Derrida distinguishes justice as a deconstructive element within law for the law’s continual revision, development and refinement:

Politicization, for example, is interminable even if it cannot and should not ever be total. . . . One cannot attempt to disqualify it today, whether crudely or with sophistication, with at least some thoughtlessness and without forming the worst complicities. It is true that it is also necessary to re-elaborate, without renouncing, the concept of emancipation, enfranchisement, or liberation while taking into account the strange structures we have been describing. But beyond these identified territories of juridico-politicization on the grand geo-political scale, beyond all self-serving misappropriations and hijackings, beyond all determined and particular reappropriations of international law, other areas must constantly open up that can at first resemble secondary or marginal areas.⁴⁴

As I understand it, politicization involves the perpetual reduction of ethics to politics while the Other eternally generates new ethical responsibilities on the basis of the

Other's singularity. I will submit that my reading of Levinas entails that the Self is obliged, by the command of the Other, to (politically) eliminate the conditions for the proliferation of the Third party qua stranger. To strive for the elimination of these conditions seems obligatory for the project of enhancing fraternity. The total elimination of the third party qua stranger would constitute the homogeneity of all content, as we have heretofore referred to it. This ethical project of politicization would entail the legal codification of ethics conceived through the idealism of the anonymous, hypothetical third, since Levinas takes such ethics to be essentially political rather than ethical. Contra blind justice, this process of politicization would lead to laws that are increasingly sensitive to the singularity of the Other.

In some sense, if the Third Party qua stranger vanishes completely, the Self / Other relationship would resemble the I / Thou relationship devoid of meaningful discourse: the language of the I / Thou relationship is a reversion to "laughter and cooing,"⁴⁵ whereas the I / Other relationship constitutes language around a third party where, "The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice."⁴⁶ Such a state of affairs devoid of the third party's destitution would resemble the homogeneity of the universal and homogeneous state as Kojève conceived of it; yet, as Derrida argued above, the animalized content of an Americanized end of history is not the end of the story. Homogeneity implies a consistency or equality of content, but by way of the formalist indifference to content, the animalization of the I / Thou relationship can be prevented. Along these lines, Levinas writes:

within the very interiority hollowed out by enjoyment there must be produced a heteronomy that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself. . . . The happiness of enjoyment is stronger than

every disquietude, but disquietude can trouble it; here lies the gap between the animal and the human.⁴⁷

Therefore, the *absolute* homogenization of post-historical society is not a necessity. Justice can retain its essential place in language through the indifference to content characteristic of Kojève's understanding of Japanization. So long as an indifference to content can be maintained, politicization is interminable in the teaching and self-mastery of Japanization. Returning to Derrida's reading of Kojève, the end of history does not result in the elimination of all content, but merely the homogenization of all content characteristic of a universal and homogeneous state. The Japanese indifference to content "therefore conditions the interest in and not the indifference to anything whatsoever . . . Without it, there would be neither intention, nor need, nor desire, and so on."⁴⁸ The idea of justice, and hence language by Levinas's definition, can perdure through an interminable politicization based on an idea of justice:

[I]f there is a deconstruction of all presumption to a determining certainty of a present justice, it itself operates on the basis of an "idea of justice" that is infinite, infinite because irreducible, irreducible because owed to the other – owed to the other, before any contract, because it has *come*, it is a *coming* [*parce qu'elle est venue*], the coming of the other as always other singularity.⁴⁹

The idea of justice (as with the idea of infinity) must be singular rather than particular, since the singular is incomparable and beyond the order of universal/particular. To reiterate, while politicization brings a particular, thematized ethics into a universal, political order, these particular, thematized ethics are in turn grounded in a singular, pre-thematic ethics, properly so called. This would constitute the progressive politicization of ethics. This is akin to the "messianic without messianism," wherein no one system of

law, politics or “justice” could ever do full justice to that which motivates politicization in the singularity of the Other. Regarding the various messianic contents, Derrida notes:

I would hesitate to assimilate too quickly this “idea of justice” to a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, to whatever content of a messianic promise (I say *content* and not form, for any messianic form, any messianicity, is never absent from a promise, whatever promise it is) or to other horizons of the same *type*. An I am only speaking of a *type*, of the type of horizon the kinds [*espèce*] of which would be numerous and competing . . . The singularity of the historical place . . . allows us a glimpse of the type itself, as the origin, condition, possibility or promise of all its exemplifications (messianism or determinate messianic figures of the Jewish, Christian or Islamic type, idea in the Kantian sense, eschatoteleology of the neo-Hegelian type, Marxist or post-Marxist, etc.)⁵⁰

We can say the desire for a messianic content (a messianism) is really nothing aside from a metaphysical *need* for the end of history. The law of the messianic without messianism (not to be confused with any legal content or the law in general in Derrida’s thought)

“dislodges any present out of its contemporaneity with itself.”⁵¹

In Derrida’s distinguishing the idea of justice from the regulative idea of Kantian practical philosophy, we must admit a certain messianism in Kant’s postulating the existence of God for the sake of securing the possibility of the highest good. Levinas claimed that the Declaration of the Rights of Man was a partial realization of the universal vocation of Israel.⁵² If so, then would the full elaboration and politicization of the Rights of Man result in the messianic fulfillment of the vocation of Israel? Regarding the content of messianism, Levinas’s seems to leave open the possibility of a messianism without content in the concluding sentences of *Totality and Infinity*, “Truth requires both an infinite time and a time it will be able to seal, a completed time. The completing of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal. . . . Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic

consciousness?”⁵³ In short, it seems that messianic fulfillment of the vocation of Israel is an impossibility given the infinity of the vocation and the infinite promise of the call.

Derrida refers to the infinite promise as being, “always untenable at least for the reason that it calls for the infinite respect of the singularity *and* infinite alterity of the other as much as for the respect of the countable, calculable, subjectal equality between anonymous singularities.”⁵⁴

It is odd to think of the prophetic call as commanding one to infinite responsibility for a project as grand and overwhelming as the realization of the universal and homogeneous state, but how can *any* one universalistic project be as overwhelming as the infinite responsibility of being chosen by the Other? And while the heterogeneous and singular self is called to be a force for homogenization, it is perhaps within this infinite, unappeasable responsibility in being chosen that one can locate the final assurance and promise against the dangers of total assimilation.

NOTES

¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 74.

² Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 160-1.

³ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 257-8.

⁵ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 172-3.

⁶ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 161.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History*, 86.

¹¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 93.

¹² Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 162.

¹³ Levinas writes, “The other is not for reason a scandal that puts it in dialectical movement, but the first teaching. A being *receiving* the idea of Infinity, *receiving* since it cannot derive it from itself, is . . . a being whose very existing consists in this incessant reception of teaching, in this incessant overflowing of self (which is time).” Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 204.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 92.

¹⁵ Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History*, 84.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 90.

- ¹⁷ For Levinas, the love of wisdom is inspired by the wisdom of love. Llewelyn observes that this distinction was “made in *Otherwise than Being* and underlined in the preface to the German edition of *Totality and Infinity* in 1987 where the wisdom of love is equated with philosophy as the love of love.” John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 164.
- ¹⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 26.
- ¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 102.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.
- ²¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 26.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 26-7.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ²⁴ Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) 144-5.
- ²⁵ Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, 111.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-2.
- ²⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 25.
- ²⁸ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 173.
- ²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 139.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147 & 177.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 143.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 182.
- ³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 213.
- ³⁴ “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” 184.
- ³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 26.
- ³⁶ “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” 184.
- ³⁷ Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, 112.
- ³⁸ “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” 184-5.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-6.
- ⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 213.
- ⁴¹ “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” 184-5.
- ⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 64.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 216.
- ⁴⁴ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 257-8.
- ⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 213.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.
- ⁴⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 92.
- ⁴⁹ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 254.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 92.
- ⁵² Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 172-3.
- ⁵³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 284-5.
- ⁵⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 81.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Insofar as the universal and homogeneous state is synonymous with the end of history, it cannot be a goal of eschatology; however, because Kojève revised his conception of the end of history as a past event wholly distinct from the universal and homogeneous state, we can see how the universal and homogeneous state can serve as a promise consistent with the realization of universal rights. If we grant Kojève the end of history, Hegelian conceptions of desire and mastery are passé even in light of humanity's rediscovery of itself through the process of Japanization; however, Japanization allows for a rediscovery of human form consistent with the Levinasian conceptions of desire and mastery. In the existentialist imperative to formalize humanity, the danger of assimilation by the mass-homogenization of Americanization is circumvented.

While the order of the eschatological is not antithetical to homogenization per se, the eschatological promise, or the messianic with messianism, is inherently anti-tragic in its reference to infinity. While tragedy would annihilate the hero to maintain the narrative wholeness of history, Levinas posits the order of the eschatological that would sooner destroy the whole narrative of history to preserve the singularity.

This puts Hölderlin's anti-cartesianism into a fuller perspective. I have argued that Hölderlin rejected Descartes' foundationalism as irrelevant for any genuine intuition into undifferentiated and absolute being; however, perhaps it is the *second* movement of Descartes' reflection that Hölderlin would find even more antithetical to the sense of undifferentiated being disclosed in tragedy. Instead of a hidden or withdrawn God, the

idea of the infinite manifestly reveals God in the infinity of the idea of the infinite. In this uncontainable idea of the infinite, the totality of the cogito is defaced along with *any* genuine notion of totality that is inseparable from all of being, and it is precisely the notion of totality that Hölderlin's theory of the tragedy is contingent upon.

But the notion of promise conceived by Derrida as the messianic without messianism is always a promise of non-annihilation. If this is so, then even the promise of annihilation is a promise that one is lying, which perhaps invokes the narrative of Abraham and Isaac. It is the singularity that is chosen from outside of history for the great responsibility of realizing the prophetic politics of universal rights. This singularity is not called to create a whole or a totality, but rather to correspond with the idea of the infinite produced by the wholly Other. In this corresponding with the eschatological order, the singularity of the Other is preserved from tragic finality. This correspondence itself is the infinite work of justice whereby discourse, humanity and singularity are preserved.

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