Todorov, Levinas and anti-totalitarian humanism: A perspective on contemporary utopian thought[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the significance of anti-totalitarian humanism for contemporary moral and social philosophy, with special reference to the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Special use is made of Tzvetan Todorov's (1939) work "Hope and memory" to clarify the framework within which anti-totalitarian humanism takes shape, and also to shed light on the relation, similarities and disagreements between the totalitarian utopianism that characterized twentieth century fascist regimes, and other versions and residues of the utopian tradition, such as we encounter in Levinas and the early generation of Neo-Marxist philosophers. Levinas' attempt in his early works to develop a humanism that is founded in both everyday material existence and interpersonal relationships is then examined in closer detail. Interpretations of the utopian significance of his phenomenological notions such as death, time and sociality, Messianic hope, despair and moral repair are offered. It is emphasized that Levinas' early notion of innerworldly bliss constitutes a utopian core in his thought that is to be separate from the notion of innerworldly bliss that characterizes totalitarian utopianism, and also undermines the philosophical foundations of totalitarian utopianism.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Probably the most eminent feature of contemporary humanism is the growth of anti-totalitarianism, in philosophy and in popular awareness. After the horrors that in the twentieth-century resulted from humane-sounding social ideals the awareness has grown of the dangers that lurk in social ideals with

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[1] This article is based on research done for my doctoral dissertation (*Reconsidering humane social ideals – Prophetic hope in Emmanuel Levinas and Ernst Bloch*) completed at the Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) in 2005.

utopian aspirations or pretensions. Increasingly, utopian ideals are suspected as carrying the germs of totalitarianism in its core.[2]

A wide-ranging strand of literature is emerging on the significance of anti-totalitarian awareness. For example, in *Humanity – A moral history of the twentieth century*, Jonathan Glover provides a historical and psychological account of various large-scale atrocities that have occurred in the twentieth century. The book by Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and catastrophe: The passing of mass utopia in east and west,* is an expression of anti-totalitarian awareness with a focus on the Cold War. The anti-totalitarian humanism in Alain Finkielkraut's *The wisdom of love* takes shape within a conceptual framework that emphasises the normative importance of the irreducibility of the interpersonal relationship to any all-encompassing social or ideological system. This is also the case with Tzvetan Todorov's book *Hope and memory*, on which I shall elaborate below. We can see that in Western societies this anti-totalitarian awareness extends beyond academic literature. For example, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg can be regarded as public symbols of anti-totalitarian awareness.

By anti-totalitarian humanism can be understood all philosophical and moral engagement with past evils that involve the systemic violation of human dignity, and the critical awareness of the risks involved when a society sets itself the objective to create the preconditions for a more equitable social order. Seen thus, anti-totalitarian humanism is not confined to moral engagement with and reflection on the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century only.

This article departs from a twofold appreciation of anti-totalitarian humanism and aims at discerning the ambiguity which characterises its contribution to contemporary social discourse and moral philosophy. On the one hand the infiltration of anti-totalitarian awareness must be regarded extremely positively as it has contributed to the maturation and expansion of our moral awareness. On the other hand, the extent to which the assimilation of anti-totalitarian humanism leads to a stigmatisation of "utopia" as a figure of discourse is concerning, as this may result in an eventual impoverishment of moral discourse. In her monograph entitled *De terugkeer van het engagement* (The return of social engagement), Karen Vintges suggests that the anti-

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[2] See Finkielkraut (1997:42): "Beyond the infinite variety of their recipes, all social utopias pursue the same obstinate dream: To realize a communion in collective life as perfect as that of conjugal symbiosis." See also Joachim Fest, *Der zerstörte Traum: Vom Ende des utopischen Zeitalters* (1991). Richert (2001:399-421) explains and discusses Fest's critique of utopia.

totalitarian (and post-modern) critique of grand narratives is, for example, not unrelated to the neo-liberal hegemony of our times:

> In spite of how much sympathy one may have for post-modern thought, one cannot help but suspect that in its pure form it [post-modernism] has been disastrous for the practical and political actions of several social groups during the last twenty years. The post-modern attack on the grand narratives of Western culture has significantly influenced university life since the beginning of the nineteen-eighties. However, what started as an academic hype has spread out to political movements where it has had a paralyzing effect.

> (Vintges 2003:20-21 – my translation)

The French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has been of fundamental importance for the rise of anti-totalitarian humanism. With his stress on the irreplaceable dignity of the human individual and his uncompromising emphasis of the ethical appeal of those who are excluded and the marginalised, the influence of Levinas' work has to a great and significant extent established the framework within which contemporary anti-totalitarian humanism takes shape. In line with the twofold appreciation of anti-totalitarianism from which this article departs, I also intend to show that Levinas' relationship with it is characteristically an uneasy relationship. I'll argue that although Levinas has been fundamental in the rise of anti-totalitarian humanism, his thought does not correspond perfectly with all the basic premises of anti-totalitarianism.

Perhaps the very appeal of Levinas' work partly resides in the fact that his uncompromising critique of the defacement of the human in the grand narratives of modern history has not resulted in apathy towards or an abjuration of utopian thought as such. What Levinas has in common with anti-totalitarian humanism is the suspicion that institutional pursuits of the Good carry the germ of totalitarianism in its core.[3] In this regard can be noticed that Levinas interprets Hitlerism and Stalinism as the culmination of Western humanism (DF 281). However, he significantly admits that "this mistrust [should not be] confused with the abandonment of all human ideals and

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[3] Levinas (2001a:206/1999:232). Subsequently the following abbreviations will be used for reference to texts by Levinas: CPP (*Collected philosophical papers*); DF (*Difficult freedom*); EE (*Existence and existents*); EN (*Entre Nous. Thinking of the other*); GDT (*God, death, and time*); GM (*Of God who comes to mind*); K (*Richard Kearney. Dialogues with contemporary continental thinkers*); OB (*Otherwise than being or beyond essence*); RB (*Is it righteous to be?*); TI (*Totality and infinity. Essay on exteriority*); TO (*Time and the other*). Further details appear in Works consulted.

consists, above all, in putting into doubt [h]umanism in the narrow sense of the term" (DF 282). Levinas' warning against the dangers that lurk in utopian ideals, and his condemnation of its culmination in totalitarian ideologies, thus clearly does not imply a denunciation of all humanist ideals. What we may lose sight of when we reduce Levinas' social ethics to its anti-totalitarian aspects is the critical challenge his work poses to all established discourses and belief systems.

In this regard one needs to bear in mind also the disagreement between Levinas and the characteristically anti-humanistic trends in contemporary French philosophy, such as structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction (of which the latter two traditions draw on the latter work of Martin Heidegger). By stressing the autonomy and quasi-independence of the manifestation of being in language or linguistic structures, these movements have disseminated the idea that the human is merely a moment in the manifestation of being. As Levinas remarks on structuralism: "It consists in preferring even in the human order mathematical identities … Henceforth the subject is eliminated from the order of reasons" (CPP 142).[4] What separates Levinas from contemporary French anti-humanism is that his thought implies an ethically decentred subject, where the instance that decentres the subject does not place the humanity of the subject under erasure, but where, on the contrary, the humanity of the subject is founded in relationship with the fellow human being.[5]

Apart from explaining Levinas' influence on anti-totalitarian humanism, this article explores what separates characteristically totalitarian utopianism from other versions and residues of utopian thought such as we find in Levinas and the early generation of neo-Marxism. Section 2 elaborates on the significance of anti-totalitarian humanism for contemporary moral philosophy by showing how it has broadened the scope of our moral awareness (Section 2.1), and by discussing the suspicion it holds against the dangers that lurk in utopian ideals (Section 2.2). In Section 2 special use shall be made of insights from Tzvetan Todorov's work on moral and social philosophy in order to outline the framework of anti-totalitarian humanism. Section 3 provides an outline of Levinas' humanism by sketching the general background against which it takes shape (Section 3.1), and focuses on Levinas' early work with the aim of exploring those utopian residues in his thought that may be easily

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[4] Vintges (2003:11-12 – my translation) argues that the assimilation of post-modern French philosophy has been significantly influenced by political liberalism, which "has become invisible as the dominant ideology of Western countries". Especially those aspects of French philosophy that tend to be quietistic with regards to political reality have been assimilated in popular awareness.

[5] See OB (57-59) and also Terreblanche (2001:328-329).

overlooked if one were to narrow down one's attention to those aspects of his social philosophy that are in agreement with anti-totalitarian humanism only (Sections 3.2 and 3.3).

2.   ANTI-TOTALITARIAN HUMANISM

2.1   Engagement with the past

Anti-totalitarian humanism broadens the scope of our moral awareness by directing our attention to areas of life that were previously neglected by moral philosophy. It has contributed to the rise of memory as a moral category. Increasingly, academic attention is being given to the horrors of the past and the public explication of these horrors. This has helped to establish an awareness of the normative importance of the public expression of the memory of past horrors in monuments and memorials.[6]

Few authors write as insightfully about the emergence of the moral significance of memory as Tzvetan Todorov. His book *Hope and memory* can be seen as a concretisation of the way in which Levinasian ethics has infiltrated into our popular awareness and established the framework of anti-totalitarian humanism.[7] Todorov pays special attention to the particular, stresses the irreplaceable dignity of the human individual and the importance of recognising past suffering. From this should already be noticeable how Todorov's moral work takes shape within a Levinasian framework.

On the surface it seems that Levinas and Todorov can complement one another with respect to some lacunae in their work. Seen from a Levinasian perspective, Todorov's *Hope and memory* unfolds within the field of tension between knowledge and justice. Todorov is engaged in exploring the possibility of understanding manifestations of systemic evil, such as Nazism and Stalinism in particular. On the one hand, Todorov stresses the

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[6] A number of articles by Johan Snyman (1998), highlight the moral significance of the "politics of memory" for South African history. He focuses mainly on traumatic episodes from South African history, such as the Anglo-Boer War, apartheid and their legacy. In "Interpretation and the politics of memory" and "Die politiek van herinnering: Spore van trauma" (Snyman 1999b), Snyman investigates various "strategies of remembrance" that have been followed to cope with the traumas that women and children suffered in English concentration camps in the Anglo-Boer War. He explains the special moral significance of memorials. His article "To reinscribe remorse on a landscape" (Snyman 1999a), provides a sharp critique of the intellectual self-identification of white Afrikaans people during the apartheid era. He argues that under the regime of Afrikaner nationalism, "humanism and humanitarianism [were] expurgated from 'official' Afrikaner culture" (Snyman 1999a:285).

[7] Tzvetan Todorov's (2000) book on Nazism, Soviet Communism and the moral and political significance of memory is titled *Mémoire du mal, tentation du bien. Enquète sur le siècle.* The title of the English translation – somewhat freely rendered – is *Hope and memory. Lessons from the twentieth century* (2002).

importance of engaging cognitively with past horrors, and of recognising their historical and human reality. "Humans develop themselves as humans by developing their powers of interpretation. The more they try to understand the world, the more they understand themselves, and the more fully human they are" (Todorov 2003:123). On the other hand, he warns against the danger that our attempts to understand the past may turn into a rationalisation or justification of past horrors. "It might be thought that when the object of knowledge consists of such extreme forms of evil as the twentieth century has known, understanding is not a particularly desirable aim. Trying to understand evil could make it seem almost ordinary" (Todorov 2003:123). Eventually Todorov opts for supporting cautious cognitive engagement with past injustices. "Understanding evil is not to justify it, but the means of preventing it from occurring again" (Todorov 2003:124). In Todorov's work, historical memory thus attains a cautionary and preventative significance.

We can appreciate Todorov's dual attention to *understanding* (knowledge) and *justice* (ethics) in the light of Levinas' notion that the Good precedes knowledge and ontology (see TI 42-48). In Todorov's (2003:174) *Hope and memory* the underlying purpose of the argument remains ethical, but rather than stressing one-sidedly that ethics has priority over knowledge, Todorov explores his subject within this field of tension. One lacuna in Levinas' work that can be complemented with reference to Todorov is the absence of writing by Levinas on the philosophy of the social sciences. What Levinas' writings have to say about the philosophy of the social sciences is, in a sense, no more than just noting that there is a dimension of any community that sociology cannot capture.[8] In contrast to this, Todorov pays special attention to the moral significance of cognitive aspects of social life, such as preserving an awareness of the past, understanding and judging it (Todorov 2003:123-125). He underlines and elaborates on the moral significance of the social science of history (Todorov 2003:127-128).

With regards to the preservation of the past by way of historiography, Todorov distinguishes three stages. First of all historical facts are to be established (Todorov 2003:123). During the second phase, which Todorov (2003:122) refers to as the "Construction of meaning", facts are to be interpreted. Thirdly, the writing of history ought to be applied to serve a moral and normative purpose (Todorov 2003:127). In underlining the normative aspect of history writing, Todorov states: "Scholarship is obviously not the

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[8] See CPP (141-143). Levinas contends that the rise of the social sciences (e.g. structuralism, psychoanalyses, and sociology) has meant that the human is made subordinate to anonymous structures. See also his sceptical remarks on the social sciences in Levinas (TI 228).

same thing as politics, but scholarship, being a human activity, has a political finality, which may be for good or for bad" (Todorov 2003:128).

Memory attains its moral significance within a framework of interpretative practices. "'[M]emory,' without further definition, is neither good nor bad in itself" (Todorov 2003:160-161). Todorov elaborates on the possible uses and misuses of memory, and warns against the danger of two possible misuses of memory, both of which depend on the way in which we attach significance to the past, namely trivialisation (*banaliser*) and sanctification (*sacraliser*). Both of these characteristically follow from a lack of circumspection applied with regards to the past.

> We can fall into the frying pan by making the past sacred and thus isolating it completely from the present; and we can fall into the fire by making it trivial, by seeing the present exclusively through the lens of the past. To assert that an event is singular, or unique, or specific is not the same thing as saying that it is sacred.
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> (Todorov 2003:161)

While it is important that an awareness be cultivated of the singularity of events such as the Holocaust or the system of apartheid (to prevent their re-occurrence), asserting this singularity carries the latent danger that we will sanctify the past, and then we no longer engage with the past in a meaningful or interpretative manner. "Sanctification is a mark of restriction, by definition; it places its object in a separate category and makes it untouchable" (Todorov 2003:162).

Trivialisation of the past takes place as "[an] opposite process whereby present events lose all their specificity through unwarranted parallels with the past, [which] is just as bad" (Todorov 2003:163). We trivialise the past when, for example, we accuse any suspect or evil person of being a "Nazi". This implies that we fail to recognise what is unique, singular and separate about the specific evil that has taken place. Todorov summarises the dilemma as follows: "A sanctified past brings nothing to mind but itself; a trivialized past reminds us of anything and everything" (Todorov 2003:164).

Under a section on "the vocation of memory," Todorov (2003:168-176) moves to a solution of this dilemma. He stresses that there is nothing intrinsically good about recalling the past. In order to eliminate possible misuses of memory that may occur in working through traumas, such as memory generated out of self-interest, practices of memory need to be subordinated to an impersonal maxim of justice.

> In public life, similarly, recalling the past does not provide its own justification. To be useful, it has to go through a process of transformation, and just like a personal memory, it has to be worked through (*durchgearbeitet*, in Freud's terminology). In this case, the transformation consists in going from the particular case to general maxim – a principle of justice, a political ideal, or a moral rule – which must be legitimate in itself and not just because it relates to a cherished memory … Memory of the past can be useful to us if it hastens the reign of justice, in the most general sense – and that means that the particular must be subordinate to the abstract precept.

(Todorov 2003:173)

2.2 Totalitarianism and utopian ideals

Anti-totalitarian humanism has made a contribution towards sharpening our awareness of the dangers that lurk (latently) in some humanistic ideals. The distinction Todorov makes between totalitarianism and liberal democracy provides a conceptual framework within which we can come to a closer understanding of this. He states that "the hope of plenitude, harmony, and happiness" for all belongs to the kernel of totalitarianism (Todorov 2003:18). In contrast to this, liberal democracy does not hold out the promise of such bliss.

> [A]ll that it [liberal democracy] guarantees is that each individual will be allowed to seek his or her own happiness, harmony and plenitude. At best it provides citizens with peace and order .… But it certainly does not promise them salvation.

(Todorov 2003:18)

What is translated here as "salvation", is "le salut" in the original French text. In Levinas' early work, which we shall look into in Section 3, "le salut" is also a concept of central importance and there it is likewise translated into English as "salvation". It seems that in the case of both Levinas' and Todorov's use of "le salut", the translation can be broadened in such a way that, depending on the context, both "bliss" and "salvation" can be used as synonyms. While "salvation" is active and suggests an event or a happening, "bliss" rather describes an attained state of being. Captured in the word "bliss" is the notion of a state of wellbeing, and that of happiness in a dignified and humane existence. The meaning of the French "salut" is rich and inclusive. "Salut" is, of course, used in several languages to say goodbye to someone, to wish him/her health, safety and wellbeing. The Latin word "salus", from which "le salut" stems, includes three interrelated levels of meaning, namely that of

health, of wellbeing, and of holiness. To "le salut" there is both a secular and a religious overtone, but its secular and innerworldly meaning is undoubtedly more important in Levinas' and Todorov's use of the word.

Todorov (2003:18) explains the philosophical background of totalitarianism in terms of its characteristic substantiation of bliss: "The promise of happiness for all allows us to identify the family to which totalitarian doctrine intrinsically belongs: in theory, totalitarianism is a form of utopianism." Totalitarianism always has a utopian source of inspiration. However, it seems that one has to guard cautiously against concluding that all utopian thought contains the seed of totalitarianism in the germ. Todorov acknowledges this by making a terminological distinction between "utopia" and "utopianism": "Utopias can have many functions, as tools for thinking, or as modes of criticizing existing societies; but only *utopianism* seeks to bring utopia to the real world" (Todorov 2003:19). Thus, while "utopia" functions as an ideal or a figure of social discourse, "utopianism" is associated with ideologically entrenched misuses of utopia for achieving party-political or dictatorial gaols.

Todorov adds a further significant qualification as to what separates (totalitarian) utopianism from "utopia" as a figure of moral discourse: totalitarianism is always a form of "scientism", grounded in the supposition that a new world can be constructed by us as humans, and the belief that it is within our human reach to know reality all-pervasively; thus, the belief that man can make himself into God. Scientism does not leave room for religious openness, or, in other words, (by way of its scientism) totalitarianism becomes its own religion. In this regard Todorov points to totalitarianism's connection with millenarism, the Medieval and Protestant "heretical form of Christianity that promised its believers that they would gain salvation in this world, without waiting for the hereafter" (Todorov 2003:18).

> Totalitarian doctrines are instances of utopianism (the only known instances in the twentieth century) and, by the same token, variants of millenarism – and that means that they belong, as do all doctrines of salvation, to the field of religion. It is, of course, no coincidence that this Godless religion prospered in a period marked by the decline of Christianity.
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> (Todorov 2003:19)

These conceptual distinctions made by Todorov have direct consequences for our understanding of contemporary humanism, including the early generation of neo-Marxist philosophy. It is evident that the utopian family of neo-Marxists, which consists of Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) and the first generation of the

Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), subvert the "scientism" of totalitarian doctrine. This generation of thinkers shall be referred to as "the Messianic neo-Marxists".[9] In contrast to the "scientism" of totalitarian utopianism, the Messianic neo-Marxists do recognise some darkness to reality,[10] and this leaves room for religion, cultural expressions of religion and religious openness, all as expressions of Messianic hope. There seems to remain, however, something which the Messianic neo-Marxists hold in common with totalitarian utopianism: The ideal of terrestrial or innerworldly bliss as a moral category. Both totalitarian utopianists and members from the early generation of neo-Marxists – such as Bloch (1986:91) and the later Benjamin (1996:51) especially – aspire (or in the case of totalitarianism, pretends to aspire) to the establishment of structures and conditions that would allow for the flourishing and completion of human potentialities and longings that remain suppressed under the hegemony of capitalism. To the more fundamental disagreement between neo-Marxism and totalitarianism, I shall return below.

Now, if one explores Todorov's distinction between totalitarianism and liberal democracy further interesting possibilities are opened. It seems that where one places Levinas within this framework is of decisive importance for the way one will conceive of the landscape of contemporary social and humanistic philosophy. Given the strong normative and philosophical divide between liberal democracy and totalitarianism (which Todorov also explains), and the strong anti-totalitarian trend in Levinas' work, one may very well ask oneself whether not too many readers tend to appropriate Levinas too quickly into the moral and philosophical framework of liberal democracy. Characteristic of liberal democracy remains its curtailment of the pursuit of the moral good to each individual's realm private decision-making. Consequently, the liberal mind frame of the world in which we live perhaps makes Levinas' "ethics of responsibility for the other" appear to be an "ethics of small goods",

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[9] What unifies Bloch and the early Frankfurt School, and separates them from Habermas and the second generation of critical theory, is their imaginative openness to the social future. The Habermasian approach to the social future seems to be of a more immediate and pragmatic nature. In representatives of the early Frankfurt School, *Messianic hope* pierces into their largely pessimistic outlook on the status quo of society. This defining characteristic of Messianic neo-Marxism is well expressed in the title of Martin Jay's book on the first generation of the Frankfurt School, *The dialectical imagination* (1973). For an excellent overview of the two separate generations of critical theory, their philosophical resources, and the exponents of each generation, see Willem van Reijen (1981), *Filosofie als kritiek. Inleiding in de kritische theorie*.

[10] Relevant in this regard are for example Bloch's notions of the "darkness of the lived moment" (Bloch 1986:287, 290) and of the *incognito* of the human subject in the face of death (Bloch 1986:1177).

or an ethics of charitableness. When we have assimilated the anti-totalitarian humanism in Levinas, one should perhaps not underestimate the extent to which his thought directs attention in moral philosophy towards Messianic neo-Marxism rather than towards liberal democracy. This seems to be clearly suggested by Levinas' remark on the derailment of Marxist ideals: "That Marxism could have turned into Stalinism is the greatest offence to the cause of humanity, for Marxism carried a hope for humanity; this was perhaps one of the greatest psychological shocks of the twentieth century" (RB 217). It seems that Levinas, Messianic neo-Marxists and totalitarian utopianism all have in common the ideal of innerworldly bliss.[11]

Within this larger utopian family a fundamental separation emerges between, on the one hand, Levinas and the Messianic neo-Marxists, and, on the other hand, totalitarian utopianism. What separates Levinas and Messianic neo-Marxism from totalitarianism, apart from the recognition of darkness and opacity to reality shared by the first two, is the approach they take to defining and concretising the content of innerworldly bliss. Characteristic of totalitarianism is the rigid determination of the content of bliss, and a preoccupation with concretising the good in the political implementation of a blueprint of the ideal society. In contrast to this, Levinas and the Messianic neo-Marxists – to a large and significant degree – leave the content of bliss open.

Todorov points out that what we find in totalitarianism is a convergence of the millenarian dream, with two eminently modern phenomena, namely the revolutionary spirit (with its use of violence) and the rise of scientistic doctrine.

> Since time immemorial men have used violence to impose good. The French Revolution had no need of a science-based justification to legitimate The Terror of 1793-94; and so we can see that the use of force is not intrinsically linked to the cult of science. At a particular point in history, however, a conjunction occurred bringing together several pre-existing strands: revolutionary ardour, implying the use of force; the millenarian dream of building an earthly paradise here and now; and the pseudoscientific doctrine asserting that complete knowledge of the human species was about to become available. The moment of this meeting marks the birth of totalitarian ideology.

> (Todorov 2003:27)

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[11] For Levinas' further praise of Marxism, see TO (58-62) and EE (45).

The utopian thought of Levinas and the Messianic neo-Marxists takes shape in a manner that stands in stark contrast to the totalitarian valorisation of violence and the rigid way it attempts to determine the content of what is good. We can recognise a noticeable resistance against the fixation of the content of bliss in the early Frankfurt School.[12] This is, for example, eminently expressed in the later Horkheimer's *Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen* (Burning desire for that which is structured wholly otherwise).[13] It seems equally evident that Levinas too resists all attempts to determine conclusively the content of bliss and salvation. Throughout his mature and later work runs the notion that the Good cannot be captured within the (cognitive) realm of being (TI 103).

Apart from deciding conclusively on the content of bliss, totalitarian regimes tend to demarcate humanity into two groups. The groups constituting totalitarian movements characteristically tend to claim that their cause embodies an incarnation of absolute good, and that they bear some quality by which they are superior to their opposition. "Totalitarianism promises happiness for all – but only when all who are not worthy of it (enemy classes, inferior classes) have been wiped out" (Todorov 2003:312). Such movements tend to claim superiority by constantly inferiorising targeted opposition groups. Interestingly, Todorov points out that such a division of humanity into two groups is not only restricted to regimes that one would without hesitation call 'totalitarian'. It also characterises international politics since the attacks of 11 September 2001. Both American President, George W Bush, and Al Qaida leader, Osama bin Ladin, operate on the grounds of the belief that their cause represents an incarnation of good (Todorov 2003:xxi). Herein, both see a justification for a violent implementation of their cause. "The U.S. government claims to be entrusted with the mission of imposing these [neo-conservative] values [of 'freedom, democracy and free enterprise'] over the face of the globe, by force if necessary".[14] One can add to this that both Bush and bin

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[12] Martin Jay (1985:4) remarks as follows in this regard: "In recent years, Max Horkheimer, more than anyone else responsible for the genesis of the *Institut's* 'Critical Theory,' has come to believe that this refusal to picture the 'other' society beyond capitalism is not unrelated to the Jewish ban on naming or describing God".

[13] See Horkheimer (1970), especially pp 75, 76, 88. Horkheimer also concludes his foreword (written in 1971) to Martin Jay's *The dialectical imagination* as follows: "The appeal to an entirely other (*ein ganz Anderes)* than this world had primarily a social-philosophical impetus. It led finally to a more positive evaluation of certain metaphysical trends, because the empirical 'whole is the untrue' (Adorno). The hope that earthly horror does not possess the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish" (in Jay 1973:xii).

[14] Todorov (2003:xviii). On the parallel between totalitarianism and Islamic neo-fundamentalists, Todorov (2003:xiv) remarks as follows: "In both cases violence is used in the name of a hegemonic ideology, and in both cases individual freedom is repressed."

Ladin define their cause by way of a demarcation of humanity, where the opposition is labelled as a "bad other" and degraded in their humanity.

Levinas' stress on the separation between "the same" and "the other" (TI 53) should not be confused with what is dismissed here as the demarcation of humanity. A demarcation of humanity, characteristically, calls attention to a specific attribute of a group of people with reference to which they are then degraded to the status of the "bad other". For Levinas, in contrast, "the separation of the I with regard to the other must result from a positive movement" (TI 53). Also, the alterity of "the other" is not an attribute (TI 36). For Levinas "the other" bears his/her alterity as a quality. Let us now look into Levinas' humanism in closer details.

3. AN OUTLINE OF LEVINAS' HUMANISM

3.1 The individual subject and the indifferent march of history

The general background against which Levinas' humanism takes shape is his notion of the indifferent march of history, which is developed most clearly in his vehement critique of Hegel offered in *Totality and infinity* [1961]. Levinas claims that Hegel understands history as a totalising and all-encompassing process. The particularity of the human person and of human relationships, human dignity, and the vulnerable and the excluded individual, are all overseen as they are made subservient to the indifferent march of history.

> If it [history] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me (TI 52).

The self-realization of "Spirit" through history, Levinas suggests, is nothing other than the violent reduction and incorporation of the other into the self-same realm of being. Herein Levinas seems to be drawing on the conventional and popularised reading of Hegel. According to such reading, Hegel claims that the sublation of all contradictions in an all-encompassing synthesis at the end of history, in which justice and freedom are realized, means that history by itself compensates for the violence and the suffering that occurs through its course. The *telos* of justice would indemnify the innocent lives that are surrendered in the process of history's dialectical unfolding. Levinas objects that in Hegel the subject is made subservient to the "virile judgement of history" (TI 243). This means that the subject is not

allowed the possibility of realizing its subjectivity in responsibility for the other. "Existence in history consists in placing my consciousness outside of me and in destroying my responsibility" (TI 252).

Hegel's view of history, however, does hold a reverse-side, which Levinas, in spite of his relentless criticism of Hegel, acknowledges as a reality and integrates into his own thought. Even if one rejects the notion, ascribed to Hegel, that history is teleologically heading for a fulfilment and that human lives may be surrendered for this purpose, this conception of history brings to light something of which the truth cannot be easily denied: history marches forth indifferently. The historical time of the objective order is rushing forth in complete indifference to the individual subject and its particularity: "The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which particular existences are lost, are computed, and in which at least their essences are recapitulated" (TI 55). The denunciation of the belief that history is heading for a *telos* does not alter the fact that in the objective order events do not unfold without suffering, bloodshed and the surrender of human life. Levinas uses 'war' as a metaphor for the cruelty that displays itself within the objective order of the totality of being. "The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality …" (TI 21). History shows itself to the human individual as a cruel and indifferent march of events. Two aspects of Levinas' account of the indifferent march of history are significant here. First, Levinas takes the Hegelian view of history to the tribunal of ethics. In history the subject is delivered to the cruel unfolding of events in the objective order. Rather than question the legacy of history, the dialectical tradition – and Hegel in particular – provides a rationale for its cruelty. In Hegel the promise of fulfilment at the end of history would justify the suffering that takes place through the course of history.

Secondly, Levinas objects that Hegel's dialectical understanding of history is supported by what he calls in his early work the economic interpretation of time (EE 90). According to this interpretation of time, a given instance of suffering in the present can be compensated, indemnified and redeemed by happiness in the future. Levinas is opposed to the ontological status that the dialectical tradition grants to this interpretation of time. Levinas questions the plausibility of the economic interpretation of time, because he takes the impossibility of repairing pain and suffering by way of compensation seriously. "Pain cannot be redeemed. Just as the happiness of humanity does not justify the misery of the individual, retribution in the future does not wipe away the pain of the present" (EE 91). The economic interpretation of time overlooks the seeming irreparability that characterises subjective experience of pain.

For the remainder of Section 3 emphasis shall fall on mainly Levinas' early works *Existence and existents* and *Time and the other* (both from 1947) in an attempt to shed light on utopian residues in his thought of which the significance extends beyond those aspects of his thought relevant to anti-totalitarian humanism. In order to show how Levinas aspires himself for a humanism that is founded in both everyday material existence and interpersonal relationships, an interpretation of his phenomenological analyses of solitude and death, everyday life and salvation, and the intertwinement of time and sociality shall be rendered

3.2 Solitude, alterity and time in *Time and the other*

In his early works Levinas takes as starting-point for his reflections the phenomenological evidence that the subject experiences its own existence as a being stuck to itself. For understanding this it is important to take into account the notion of the *there is* (*il y a*) as developed by Levinas. In opposition of his phenomenological predecessors, Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas contends that being as a realm of "light" and intelligibility is preceded by a more fundamental layer of being. In experiences such as for example insomnia the subject finds itself backed up against being and stripped of its initiative. This implies that the subject borders on "the being without beings", which negates the possibility of meaning, differentiation and subjectivity (EE 57). Somehow the fatality of the *there is* does open up to allow the emergence of a subject. This event Levinas describes as the hypostasis (see EE 65).

In *Time and the other* Levinas takes seriously the question as to what kind of alterity will allow the subject a relation by which it can break its being stuck to itself. From the outset Levinas states that it would have to be an alterity of such a nature that the relation to this alterity will be neither one of *knowledge* nor one of *ecstasis*.[15]

First of all, the subject encounters the alterity of things. The "light" of the intelligible world allows the subject to relate to exterior objects in the world. Things, however, are not sufficiently other as they can be appropriated to become part of the self-same sphere of the subject. "The light that permits encountering something other than the self, makes it encountered as if this thing came from the ego" (TO 68). Things, and the light that brings them to disclosure, are as if they came from the subject. Things are thus not sufficiently other and the relationship to things is one of knowledge (see also TO 41).

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[15] Levinas has in mind the Greek root *ekstasis*, which refers to "standing outside oneself".

Levinas then phenomenologically considers another kind of alterity, one that is at the opposite extreme, the *alterity of death.* While one encounters things in light, characteristic of death, in contrast, is that "the very relationship with death cannot take place in the light, that the subject is *in relationship with what does not come from itself*" (TO 70, italics added). In what sense does the relationship with death take place outside of light? Levinas explains this in two ways. First, death is a relationship with what falls outside of light, because one cannot appropriate death in the way which one appropriates things. While things lose their alterity in one's appropriation of them, death dispossesses one of one's identity. The second explanation is connected to Levinas' notion that the proximity of death is announced in suffering. "The way death has of announcing itself in suffering, outside all light, is an experience of the passivity of the subject" (TO 70). In suffering, the subject is stripped of its initiatives and deprived of its mastery over existence. This means that in suffering the subject approaches the *there is.* Since proximity of death is shown in suffering, and since suffering approaches the *there is* (which is what precedes light), the relationship with death does not take place in light.

We have seen that the relation with things, in the end, does not offer the subject liberation from itself. In its mastery over existence, the subject is returned to a situation of being encumbered with itself. In the relation to death, Levinas sees the inversion of this. "What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer able to be able [*nous ne 'pouvons plus pouvoir'*]. It is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject" (TO 74).

Death is characterised as the absolutely other. In the course of *Time and the other* (66-79), the meaning of Levinas' use of the term *the other* shifts back and forth. The emphasis fluctuates between *the other in general* [*l'autre*] and *the personal other* [*l'atrui*]. The *other* is what falls outside one's grasp, what overcomes one, what cannot be controlled in the subjective sphere. "The relationship with the other will never be the feat of grasping [*saisir*] a possibility" (TO 76). Death comes from outside light, and befalls one as the unexpected. "Death is thus never assumed, it comes" (TO 73). Death is the other (*l'autre*). "My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken [*brisée*] by it" (TO 74). Death thus breaks the self's solitude, but in a way which is violent and that results in the annihilation of the self. Inasmuch as death means the disappearance of all subjective mastery over existence, the subjectivity of the subject no longer prevails in death: "If it [death] opens a way out of solitude, does it not simply come to crush this solitude, to crush subjectivity itself?" (TO 77).

While the alterity of things is not strong enough, the alterity of death is so overwhelmingly strong that it crushes the subject. This leads us back to the initial question: "How can a being enter into relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?" (TO 77). For understanding Levinas' solution to this problem, it is important that we take into account his understanding of time as the possibility of a relation between the present and the future. The fact that the salvation or release from solitude offered by death is not true salvation can also be explained by the fact that death represents a *future* which is not yet *time* (TO 79). Death bears a characteristic by which we recognise the future. As is the case with death, the future is what cannot be *mastered* or *assumed*, but *comes*. In clear suggestion of the resemblance that death and the future bear of each other, Levinas states: "The future is what is in no way grasped. The exteriority of the future is totally different from spatial exteriority precisely through the fact that the future is absolutely surprising" (TO 76).

There are two reasons as to why the futurity of death is not yet time. First, the subject who stands in relation to its own death is a solitary subject. Time cannot possibly be the accomplishment of a *solitary subject* (TO 77). Secondly, in time a relation would have to be accomplished between the *present* and the *future*. The mere *event* of the future represents an unbridgeable interval with the present. Therefore time is not yet possible. "What is the tie between two instants that have between them the interval, the whole abyss, that separated the present and death, this margin at once both insignificant and infinite, where there is always room enough for hope?" (TO 79). This formulation clearly suggests that time becomes possible only when the subject – captured in the present – relates to an alterity that is sufficiently other to break this spell of the same in the present, and which at the same time is not so absolutely other that it annihilates the subjectivity of the subject. This is accomplished in the relationship with the personal Other [*l'autrui*]. "The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history" (TO 79). For Levinas, time is sociality.

3.3   Time, hope and repair in *Existence and existents*

For a better understanding of these ideas on time, hope and sociality let us now turn to a striking passage in Levinas' other eminent work from his early period, *Existence and existents* (88-94). Levinas here investigates the ontological root of solitude and its situatedness in time. He starts by thinking through the possibility of time from out of the present. Characteristic of subjective existence in the present is being stuck to oneself. For Levinas the tragic aspect of the human is, most primarily, this being stuck to oneself in the

present. "In situating what is tragic in the human in the definitiveness of the present, and in positing the function of the I as something inseparable from this tragic structure, we recognise that we are not going to find in the subject the means for its salvation" (EE 93). The tragedy of existence in the present has two aspects: 1) in the present one is stuck to oneself, 2) and the present is the locus of the irreparability of pain. The hope that rises out of the present is "hope for an order where the enchainment to oneself is broken" (EE 89), and also, "hope for the reparation of the [irreparability of pain]" (EE 91). In both cases hope has "[t]he irreparable [as] its natural atmosphere" (EE 89). Thus hope in the present for the present is hope in the true sense of the word, since it is hope for the possibility of the impossible; which is to say, hope for what is not possible in the present.

Levinas believes that in this exigency and desperation we recognise the ontological root of hope. If hope is this longing for the repair of what is irreparable, it means that we have to distinguish hope from the "expectation of fortunate events" (EE 89). Relief from pain in fortunate events is not what hope aims at most deeply.

> The future can bring consolation or compensation to a subject who suffers in the present, but the very suffering of the present remains like a cry whose echo will resound forever in the eternity of spaces. At least it is so in the conception of time which fits our life in the world, and we shall … call this the time of economy (EE 90).

What Levinas calls "economic time" is not the time of the interpersonal relationship that the citation above (TO 79) refers to. Thus, what Levinas calls "the time of the world" (which is about compensation and reward), stands separate from social time. In conceiving of salvation in terms of compensation for suffering, we remain oblivious to the irreparability of suffering. In order to perceive what is characteristic of and authentic about hope, we need to distinguish repair from *compensation*. What hope truly aims at is *repair*. The scheme of salvation from pain and suffering by way of future happiness belongs to what Levinas calls "economic time" or "the time of the world".

In economic life some extent of salvation is accomplished, which is, however, no ultimate salvation. Salvation in the world resides in the fact that pain and suffering is compensated for, as they are consoled. "Time in the world dries all tears; it is the forgetting of the unforgiving instant and the pain for which nothing can compensate" (EE 90). To economic life belongs, of course, "our so called material life" (EE 92), where labour earns wages, where effort is compensated by reward. "The world is the secular world where the I accepts wages" (EE 90). It may also include religious practice, when for

example one prays in order to gain something (EE 90). This is clear from the way frequently thought of the relation between time and eternity, where eternity is regarded as the locus of salvation.

> It is generally thought that redemption is impossible in time, and that eternity alone, where instants distinct in time are indiscernible, is the locus of salvation. This recourse to eternity, which does not seem to us indispensable, does at any rate bear witness to the impossible exigency for salvation which must concern the very instant of pain, and not only compensate for it (EE 91).

This passage conveys the importance of a notion of innerworldly bliss for Levinas' thought, his intention to conceive of repair as located within the moment of suffering itself, as well as his understanding of time as the condition for the possibility of repair. Essential to economic time is that time is understood as a series of instants following on each other. Thus, instants are understood as equal in value and distinct from each other: the pain of one instant is compensated for by the reward or happiness in a next instant. But in the economic notion of time we remain oblivious to what is authentic to the structure of time. By conceiving of salvation as part of a scheme of pain and consolation, we remain oblivious to what is meant by salvation.

> [T]his compensating time is not enough for hope. For it is not enough that tears be wiped away or death avenged; no tear is to be lost, no death to be without resurrection … True hope is hope for the Messiah, or salvation (EE 91).

In Levinas' early work we encounter three levels of thinking about time: first, time as thought of from out of the present (which is the impossibility of time); secondly, economic time; and finally time as sociality. In the economic conception of time it is assumed that moments are equal in value and succeed one another from out of themselves. Within this conception of time we remain oblivious to what hope aims at, and hence we cannot conceive of salvation in the true sense of the word. Levinas' phenomenologically attempts to think the possibility of time from out of the present and concludes that this is not possible. The present, as it were, exercises a spell whereby the subject remains imprisoned in the self-same realm. The condition of the possibility of time is thus not given in the present or in the subject itself (EE 93). In the present there can be only a hope of time, and time is what hope aims at.

> As there can be only a hope of freedom and not a freedom of engagement, this thought knocks on the closed doors of another dimension; it has a presentiment of a mode of existence where nothing is irrevocable … And this is the order of time (EE 89).

As in *Time and other* (where Levinas investigates the possibility of time with respect to the subject's relation to various kinds of alterity) he now, once again, comes to the conclusion that the relationship with the social other is the condition of the possibility of time.

> How indeed could time arise in a solitary subject?… [T]he absolute alterity of another instant cannot be found in the subject, who is definitely himself. This alterity comes to me only from the other. Is not sociality something more than the source of our representation of time: is it not time itself?… The dialectic of the social relationship will furnish us with a set of concepts of a new kind (EE 94).

That sociality is time means that for Levinas, salvation inherently and immanently belongs to the structure of time itself. Time accomplishes the repair of the irreparable. Hope is located in the present, in the impossibility of time in a solitary subject. And in time, what hope aims at is realised. In time as sociality – the relationship with the other – the "I" is created anew and liberated from its initial, seemingly irreparable, imprisonment in itself. In the relationship with the other the present is offered a new beginning. In this sense time is the resurrection of the present, and the salvation accomplished by it is an innerworldly one.

In the light of this we come to understand why for Levinas the social relationship has a Messianic character. We have seen that "[t]he true object of hope is the Messiah, or salvation" (EE 91), and that the struggle for salvation is inscribed in our everyday struggle for material well-being (TO 61-62). As in the relationship with the other hope realises its aim, and time is accomplished, it means that immanent in the relationship with the other is a Messianic moment.[16]

Levinas' notion of sociality as time, according to which time accomplishes the *turning inside out* of the subject's imprisonment in itself, represents a significant moment in his theory of ontology. In imprisonment in

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[16] One can explain Levinas's noticeable enthusiasm for the social philosophy of Ernst Bloch (see GDT 92-105, GM 33-42) by reference to this emphasis on time as the condition for the possibility of repair. While traditionally salvation is understood as belonging to eternity and time is associated with moral failure (GDT 93), in Bloch time is precisely the condition for the possibility of repair, of redemption and provides the opportunity for the Good to be concretised in being. See also Hermsen's (2002:127-129) remarks on the different nuances of the relation between time and hope as conceived by Levinas, Bloch and Hannah Arendt.

the present, the subject is deprived of its mastery over being and is, as it were, in the hold of anonymous being. This imprisonment represents the point of contact with the primordial layer of being, the *there is.* The turning inside out of the present in what Levinas calls time means that the relationship with the other accomplishes an inversion of being. The primordial layer of being (the *there is*), the inescapable prison, is – in the social relationship – exalted into something else. In his later work Levinas calls this "otherwise than being". It is, however, significant that in Levinas' early work this notion of an "elevated order of being" makes up part of his account of the world. In the notion in Levinas' early work that time is sociality, we clearly notice what can be called the extra-moment in his theory of ontology: The relationship with the fellow human being accomplishes an interconnectedness of ethics and ontology – of being and the Good. In a context such as this, what is often referred to as "otherwise than being" can perhaps better be described as an "elevated plane of being".

In Levinas' early work we thus recognise an anticipation of important aspects of his later work. In his early work Levinas expresses his understanding of an elevated plane of being in the perspective of time – more specifically, in the notion that the relationship of the other constitutes the *origin of time.* And in *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* this is expressed in the light of the *origin of consciousness.* Levinas' mature and later works conceive of consciousness as the subject's receptivity to being as an intelligible realm. Now, consciousness originates only when the subject comes to be confronted with a plurality of ethical appeals. The relationship with a singular other is not enough for consciousness, since it entails the subject's *pre-conscious* openness to the other. It is only when the subject becomes confronted with more than one ethical appeal that it is compelled to make a just comparison between them and thus it starts to think. This is what brings Levinas to the conclusion that subjective consciousness is borne in the relationship with the third party, and that "[t]he foundation of consciousness is justice" (OB 160).

Levinas conceives of being and justice as inextricably intertwined in the social relationship. This, however, is never unconditionally the case. One constant notion that runs from Levinas' early to his later work is that the isolated subject does not have the means of its own salvation at its disposal (EE 93). As Theo de Boer (1976: 62) remarks: "Pure being … is that which frightens us, such as the infinity of space in Pascal. It gives testimony of a horrible neutrality with regards to the question of good and bad" (my translation). The trace of the Good in being is realised only when the subject

opens up to the other. In *Totality and infinity* this is eminently expressed in terms of "creation":

> Creation leaves to the creature a trace of dependence, but it is an unparalleled dependence: the dependent being draws from this exceptional dependence, from this relationship, its very independence, its exteriority to the system. What is essential to created existence is its separation with regards to the Infinite (TI 104-105).

The "separation with regards to the Infinite" means that, although creation marks the subject with a pre-reflective susceptibility to ethics, it is left the freedom to close itself off from the trace of the Good. Visker (1999:265) also points to the importance of this paradox in Levinas' notion of creation.

> The miracle of creation may lie in "creating a moral being" (TI 89), but a moral being is a being that "can close itself up in its egoism" and that can "banish the transcendent relation that alone permits the I to shut itself up in itself" (TI 172-3/147-8, translation corrected by Visker).

Levinas' conception of creation is characteristically a minimalist (and perhaps metaphorical) one. As Levinas explains in an interview with Richard Kearney, "[t]he God of ethical philosophy is not God the Almighty Being of creation" (K 67). What this means is that for Levinas God is not to be understood as the creator of the natural realm that is governed by natural laws and characterised by cold indifference. Rather, God stands separate from the realm of ontology, is "otherwise than being" and serves to sanction the moral law, the Good and the Idea of the Infinite.[17]

In the perspective of Levinas' notion of creation he develops in *Totality and infinity*, one can come to a closer understanding of the anti-totalitarian significance of his early work. The trace of "creation" left inside the subject is not only what makes the subject susceptible to the appeal of the fellow human being, but also what marks the subject with an inexchangeable unicity and "its exteriority to the system" (TI 105). Characteristic of totalitarianism in the twentieth century have been attempts to make the individual subordinate to an all-encompassing system, backed up by an intellectual world-view that claims for itself the status of absolute truth. Levinas' notion of creation implies that there is something about the subject which cannot be fused into a unity with – or dissolved into – a community or a system. Therefore Levinas refuses to

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[17] See also Terreblanche (2000:141–144).

conceive of sociality as a mode of fusion (TO 90). In the relationship with the other Levinas sees a collectivity which is "not a participation in a third term … it is not a communion" (EE 95).

4.   CONCLUSION

The rise of anti-totalitarian humanism has made a vital contribution towards the maturation of moral awareness in the West, as well as towards broadening the thematic and conceptual scope of moral philosophy. Tzvetan Todorov deserves praise for his insightful explanation of the origins of Fascism and Soviet Communism, as well as his elucidation of the normative and conceptual framework within which present-day practices of 'the politics of memory' unfold. At the same time, one can recognise in Todorov's work some of the limitations of anti-totalitarian humanism. In his striking and brilliant analyses of the intellectual roots of totalitarianism in the first chapter of *Hope and memory*, Todorov introduces concepts that have the potential to be developed to become part of a potently critical social discourse. However, it appears as if Todorov's adherence to the anti-totalitarian line of moral thought brings about that in the rest of *Hope and memory* his discourse softens out towards a politically correct and conventional position. Since Todorov (2003:19) acknowledges the importance of distinguishing between "utopia" (as a figure of discourse) and "utopianism" (as the totalitarian derailment of utopia), it remains somewhat surprising that he fails to consider the possibility of appropriating the idea of "innerworldly bliss" for the purposes of a critical discourse with respect to the limitations and shortcomings of liberal democracy. What this article has argued is that anti-totalitarian humanism needs not to lead us to a complete abandonment of utopian ideals, but that – instead – anti-totalitarianism should serve to critically inform us in our repraisal of utopian and humanist ideals.

The ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, from which the reflections in this article depart, shows a significant ambivalence in its relation to contemporary anti-totalitarian humanism. Levinas' thought holds a utopian residue that could serve as corrective of the shortcomings of anti-totalitarian humanism. While Levinas' phenomenological account of the interpersonal order and his substantiation of the idea of human dignity practically laid the conceptual framework to which Todorov and other exponents of anti-totalitarian humanism remain indebted, his work also illustrates how it is possible take recourse to utopian ideas in a manner that undermines the foundations of totalitarian utopianism. Moreover, while the outcry against injustice of anti-totalitarian humanists such as Todorov appears to be largely restricted to engagement with human rights abuses rather than systemic

exclusion, Levinas' philosophy incorporates an awareness of both violence and those injustices that are rooted in material existence (poverty or invisible violence). While showing that the preservation of the dignity of the human individual in the face of the impersonal political order is a matter of nonnegotiable importance, Levinas' work also brings to light that one should guard so as to not underestimate the *further* demands set on social and moral philosophy by the idea of the transcendence of the Good.

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