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LEVINAS' "TRAGIC" PHILOSOPHY: READING LEVINAS WITH SCHOPENHAUER

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Being in Levinas is violent, some have said colored by the ontology implicit in "social Darwinism". Certainly, Darwin was being misread and misused before, and after Levinas was writing. Yet Being has something pre-Heideggerian to it in Levinas, for Being, *essence*, proves to be constant presence in *Otherwise than Being* (1974). We are struck to read, in Levinas, the following remarks: "Despite or because of its finiteness, being has an encompassing, absorbing, enclosing essence." Ontologically, "The veracity of the subject would have no other signification than this effacing before presence, this representation" (Levinas 1998a: 134). Or again, "There is not a break in the business carried on by essence..." (1998a: 183). And, "For the little humanity that adorns the earth, a relaxation of essence to the second degree is needed, in the just war waged against war..." (1998a: 176).

This is not Heidegger's *Sein*. For that reason we should look to earlier thought for this Being as encompassing essence, or as oneness, with its conflicting drives. Levinas's expression, the "irony of essence" brings something else to mind. He says, the "irony of essence," from which "probably come comedy, tragedy, and the eschatological consolations" together "mark the spiritual history of the West" (1998a: 176), even as they trap the subject

in the “either/or” of “being confused with the universal at the moment that thought, which embraces the whole and is engulfed in it, thinks ‘nothing less than death’” (1998a: 176). Before this conception of Being, which spawned aesthetics of tragedy and its extremes, as well as a host of doxic consolations, the subject seeks either resignation or denial. But this dilemma, he adds, “is without a resolution, [because] essence has no exits: to the death anxiety is added the horror of fatality” (1998a: 176). That then is the order of being and the situation of the “subject” in it and as it. If things were otherwise, would they rekindle hope? Or again, what is the “relaxation of essence” that must be? I will venture that it is simply a wager, a wager with eyes held open.

In looking for antecedents of this “ontology”, it is hard not to think of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Recall the wisdom of the Dionysian in *Birth of Tragedy* (1871), for whom being also was “the primal Oneness, eternally suffering and contradictory” (Nietzsche 1993). This is the early Nietzsche, who is still close to Schopenhauer. And the curious resemblances become the more striking when we read, further, that Being is “also...the delightful vision, the pleasurable illusion for its constant redemption: an illusion that we, utterly caught up in it and consisting of it...are required to see as empirical reality.” (1993: 25). To be sure, being in Levinas is just this totality, suffering and contradictory, even as it is the pleasurable mis-promise of redemption. Likewise, Being for Levinas also consists of beings, we are Being, and this, in a sense that runs counter to Heidegger’s *Dasein*. In short, I think Levinas’s Being or *Essence*, verb-like and active though it is (and as Heidegger’s was also), is very deliberately a philosophical Being that consciously predates Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. This is true even as Levinas rethinks the formal structures that Heidegger uncovers concerning Being, setting them in the schema of the face to face encounter. For instance, if in Heidegger, being “calls” to us; if Being is intimated in the beginning which was that of the pre-Socratics, if Being resonates in Hölderlin and Trakl’s poetry in Heidegger, then Being does none of those things in Levinas’s work. It is, preeminently, intuitively, the other human who calls, who speaks to us, who judges us (in *Totality and Infinity*), while Being churns with its layers of “orgiastic” primeval qualities: the *il y a*, the elemental, and its inexorable, intention-less capacity to fill in gaps or sew up breaks in its midst: the primal oneness, in Nietzsche’s words, promises redemption but offers no transcendence outside of the illusion we are caught up in.

Levinas’s is a *philosophical*, it seems a 19th century, conception of Being that deliberately, and on several counts, misreads Heidegger’s Being as event, *der Schein*, or presence-absence. If, in the early chapters of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas maintains Heidegger’s distinction between Being and beings, by the concluding chapter, “Outside,” Being is always there, carrying

on, indeterminate positivity. It ceases to be a play of presence and absence, of disclosure and what it discloses. Being has modalities but none of the qualities, as a question or a call, that it does in Heidegger; and, insofar as we are ourselves beings concerned about our finite being for Levinas, then that concern remains secondary to human *jouissance*, to a certain play, and even to a kind of illusion born of Being itself, from which we have to “sober up,” according to Levinas. But this sobering up out of the illusions of distraction and redemption could never be a matter of getting “out of being”, for Heidegger. It remains, for Levinas too, a wager: the only wager worth making. He is more explicit about the wager quality of transcendence in his 1974 work, *Otherwise than Being*. There, transcendence no longer takes place in de facto conversation or teaching, but comes to pass as the groundless *condition* of speaking-to another at all.

We know that this later work is decidedly grimmer. We know, too, that the relationship between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* has been characterized as two sides of the same coin: the first approaching the question of exteriority and transcendence, while the second examines interiority, sensation, and a split sensuous subjectivity. Others have claimed, on the contrary, that *Otherwise than Being* is the mature work, a work that returns to indeterminate Being, and to modalities of our sensuous life to emphasize the fact of transcendence-in-immanence over transcendence in *Totality and Infinity*'s curved, intersubjective space.¹ I am less than sure that the two works are two sides of the same coin. The concern with the Other is the same, but the terms of the debate, and its interlocutors, have changed between 1961 and 1974. If *Totality and Infinity* is a “treatise on hospitality,” then *Otherwise than Being* is an exploration of the conditions of sensuous immanence – which turns on the wager that prethetic sensation can be brought to concepts – through which hospitality might precisely come to pass. But it no longer comes to pass in any history, as we saw it do in the penultimate chapter of *Totality and Infinity*, dedicated to the “history” of generations. It may be that Being is what changes *least* in the two great works. In both, Being offers a limited possibility of “love of life”; in both works, the human experience of Being lies on a continuum that runs from too little soup to too much soup, too much sun, etc. In both works, we are not indifferent to *essence*, to the outside that Levinas calls “exteriority” in 1961. But essence is indifferent to us, even as it is our adjuvant and our necessity: we eat it, breathe it, we *offer* parts of it to others. Being as essence provides the *gravitas* of gifts offered to others. So, being remains characterized by an instability whose translation in “natural” terms is closure, oneness, and the imminent possibility of excess. And its translation in “animal” terms is struggle and contradiction. Being is

¹ See Jacques Rolland (2000).

an economy of “my place in the sun”: always the stake of a usurpation. I suspect that this is because the Being around us and the Being that *is* us are not only perishable; Being is or “essences” as finite positivity, and as forces that move (us) between penury and excess. The ambiguity of Being in Levinas is unavoidable. But we recognize it more readily than Heidegger’s Being; it has something more concrete to it than Heidegger’s Being: *essence* is the single source of value, enjoyment, and *gravitas* on the one hand; danger, competition, and violence, on the other.

In this ontology, Levinas is no utopian. Nothing about Being is utopian in Levinas and the only philosophy that successfully infuses the ethical into ontology, for him, is Ernst Bloch’s messianic Marxism, as he ventures in 1974. This is why, though what we call transcendence runs the gamut in Levinas from a perishable, sensuous transcendence through the transcendence that marks an experience of time as an interruption in 1961, the partial, ontological transcendence is always suspect. Only the face to face encounter is actual “transcendence”, because transcendence must temporalize otherwise – as a lag: we must not come back from it and represent it as an intentional object. In the same work, *Totality and Infinity*, the transcendence of the face to face encounter is metaphysical only in the sense that it does not correspond to the continuum of being *or* to our “participation” in Being with its accompanying temporal modes. In *Totality and Infinity* the face to face encounter results in our addressing the other before us, and the address brings to light an aspect of intersubjectivity in which an “I” undergoes, without reflection, two irreducible singularities: that of the other’s non-objectal “face” and that of itself as unable to slip away. From this, and with the movement of consciousness back to re-presentation, Levinas argues that a sort of law of distribution of responsibilities – the “law” of the third party – opens the vertical experience of responsibility to an economy that is ontological, or ontic, but modified by the face to face to *open* the question of justice, though never to establish the deduction of justice. So we are always in difficulty calling the face to face relationship justice’s condition of possibility; for, as a condition of possibility, the face to face is peculiar because it is groundless, pre-reflective, and unfolds in uncanny repetitions without origin, like the logic of retroactive efficacy that Freud discovered in his studies of the psychology of trauma and its symptom, hysteria. No deductive ground, no Kantian condition of possibility, then, only a movement and a new temporalization of consciousness: the “I” is faced by the other, and the third looks at “me” through the eyes of that other, as though justice were always about to happen, in the space of intentionality’s restored sovereignty.

This groundlessness may be all to the good: it seems to me that even the minimalist Rawlsian “veil of ignorance” proved an implausible ground

from which to deduce a "maximin principle" of justice. And if groundlessness points toward a utopian vision, it also undoes utopia as promise for history.

Justice arises as the modification of the hiatus *Totality and Infinity* called the face to face encounter – that lag or lapse in time and consciousness – which first inflected the continuity of time as Being or *conatus* (and *conatus* as time). Justice is then the hiatus-return from the hiatus, or interruption by the other who calls to "me." Yet justice is not a simple return to brute Being or essence carrying on – and therein lies the difficulty. If the face to face alters the regularity of time and space between beings, that alteration can either be metaphysical or a matter of "mere" immanence: as metaphysical (and this is certainly one possible reading of it), the intense alteration of time and space must find some correlate in history (*Totality and Infinity* resurrects the term "eschatology," but presents as "metaphysical desire" and as responsibility). Since this correlate cannot be found in the history of the State or in the history of Being, conceived as "orgiastic" – i.e., conceived as an economy of death (note that this term "orgiastic" is used by Nietzsche and Derrida, to quite different ends though they acknowledge it as what subtends cultures' efforts at distancing from it), it must be in a certain structural history of the family. This was Levinas's choice in 1961: there, we find a certain justice incarnate in the election of the son by the father and the service of the brothers to each other and to their father. If there is another, responsibility-inflected "justice" in *Totality and Infinity*, then either it really is not in history or its passage through history makes it invisible. However that may be, by 1974, the immanence option is chosen, and there, responsibility is suffering, persecution, entrapment in one's flesh *and* being-for another. But the matter of justice as *received*, i.e. that others treat *me* as an other, remains "miraculous": wonderful, yet inexplicable within the framework of Levinas's descriptions. In that work, being-for-another *is also* a question: when consciously "enacted" it might look like loyalty, love, or what Ricœur thought he perceived of "friendship" in Levinas. But we cannot consciously "be" for-the-other. Rather, we can never "otherwise than be," outside the immediacy of the lag called interruption or originary susceptiveness. Levinas's later emphasis on immanence restricts the metaphysical options in reading him. Still, if there is a microstructure to being-for-another, then any recognition of it after the fact, *nachträglich* and in its *uncanniness*, certainly opens, as a *problem* or as lack, the fact of being-for-self. From this lack, social extensions of for-the-other justice might run a gamut from supererogatory individual gestures to calls for reparative or distributive justice, concerned with diminishing the harms propagated by the for-myself economy. Of course, the problem remains of passing from the split self of obsession, persecution, substitution, and expiation back *to* the consciousness/Being that is social and historical: the only way "back" from transcendence

in immanence is modal: via sensibility and affects, and their dynamism and memory, which is incarnate but other than merely physiological.

I pursue this line of argument because I find compelling the late Jacques Rolland's claim that we can pursue two possible readings of Levinas: a secular one, which concentrates on the face-to-face encounter, and a metaphysical one, which attends to the question of the force of the face, its source and meaning, and the so called "illeity" – that "trace in the trace of an abandon" (1998a: 94) – which assures that "spirituality is sense" in a way that excludes orgasm because it excludes Being (1998a: 96-97).² Now it seems to me that the most interesting reading keeps these two positions from becoming fixed. The most compelling reading would keep these positions as enigmas that are not also mysteries, as Levinas says (1998a: 94). A compelling reading would keep the secular and the metaphysical readings destabilized and *as if* occasionally infecting each other with a question. That is what I believe occurs in *Otherwise than Being*. And we see this deliberately unstable sort of reading at work in Derrida's recent remarks on what Judaism means to him in "L'autre Abraham" (*Judéités*, 2000), where he reads God's call to Abraham through Kafka's *other Abraham* who, when halted by the call, asks in all ingenuousness: "Who, me?" Can "Who, me?" be Levinas's "Here I am?" I am inclined to think they go together, perhaps the way justice and substitution do.

It may well be necessary to choose a reading, knowing that problems inhere in both options. If one takes up a secular reading of Levinas's responsibility, or his obsession-persecution-substitution, then I think one should take it up strongly and venture the following: as secular, Levinas's is a tragic philosophy. Or, destabilized, it is a philosophy that moves between the tragic and a hope that – as something almost more aesthetic (i.e. lived as *aisthesis*) than conventionally ethical, where conventional ethics entails calculations of well-being, criteriologies of duties, or deliberation about virtue – a hope that if the proto-experience of being-for-the-other *can* be said, by Levinas himself, it may be that this instance is a dimension of intersubjective life. And it may be found in the written gift, or in an unusual aesthetics of Saying that creates and undoes itself. If so, it remains true that we cannot prescribe it. We cannot "otherwise than be" through an act of will or creativity, though we can evoke it. Perhaps this holds up a faint image (and the word is dangerous in Levinas) of a non-homogeneous Being, or a punctuated existence, in which for-the-other comes to pass traumatically. Levinas does not speak of non-homogeneous Being of course. And, his for-the-other is never a *structure*, never a phenomenon or a condition of possibility. Yet it is as though, in the telling of it (of the for-the-other), whether in a narration, in witnessing, even in poetry,

² Though this suggests that the spirituality of orgasm or Dionysianism, understood as an impetus to create beauty, parallels the theme, on a different level it seems, of "spirituality as sense."

the idea that we might venture, if unfruitfully, to be for the other, is hinted at. If so, it is advanced with no expectation of it ever being a norm or an ideal. There are no Kantian postulates of the immortality of the soul or the existence of God for a Practical Reason here. Yet it is advanced nonetheless – as a wager and as a hope (“for the little humanity that still adorns the earth,” etc.) and it is described as an event different from the predictability of Being as nature, as politics, and as the psyche of intentionality. So, that is the wager of *Otherwise than Being*; and this is why it has often been noted that Levinas’s last great work has a performative dimension to it: it speaks-to, it gives without wanting a return gift or present.

Yet the last work is clear about one thing: after Derrida’s critique in “Violence and Metaphysics,” the question, What accounts for the force of the other’s gaze? will be left indeterminate by Levinas. Except, perhaps, in his religious writings. But even there, the source or nature of that “force” is not the main concern.³

But we should return to two ambiguities. First, the ambiguity of Being as sustenance, *gravitas*, joy, excess, and Being as history, violence, and predation on the one hand. Second, the exploration of sensuous vulnerability and the approach of the face, through which an “I” is possessed and dispossessed, and as if called on to account for itself, to respond, *even as it feels* tempted to murder the other (“the face is the only thing I can wish to murder”). These two ambiguities are irreducible in Levinas. And yet they can be almost invisible in his work. Is the desire to murder or eradicate the face an after-effect of the face-to-face, or is it entwined with the trauma of my dispossession? If it is not so entwined, then it also does not belong to the order of representation and reflection, because it too is an urge: murder is an immediate urge – and a response. In light of this, I am reminded of survivor Charlotte Delbo’s account of a woman who, too frail to lift stones in the camp quarry, stepped out of the line of laborers and faced the S.S. officer overlooking the women at the Raisko-Auschwitz camp. The face to face instant stopped him – it had everything of a Levinasian moment – and almost immediately he answered, by urge or by reflection I don’t know – and neither does Delbo. As she recounts it:

“The woman moves forward. She seems to be obeying an order. She stops in front of the SS. Shudders run down her curved back with shoulder blades protruding from under the yellow coat. The SS has his dog on a leash.”

³ I agree with Howard Caygill that we actually do quite well reading Levinas’s writings on Judaism and his philosophy together, because in his last great work, Levinas’s description of being-affected by another is at once close to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh *and* in its later chapters, it embraces propheticism as the enactment and figure of ethical investiture “for-the-others” – and these two aspects are not in contradiction to each other so long as we hold that the universe of the prophets led them to ascribe the source of their experience to something that surpasses the existence they know as Being, though Judaism does not hypostatize this “other” site.

Delbo asks, “Did he give an order, make a sign? The dog pounces on the woman – without growling, panting, barking. All is silent as in a dream. The dog leaps on the woman, sinks its fangs in her neck. And we do not stir, stuck in some kind of viscous substance which keeps us from making the slightest gesture – as in a dream” (Delbo 1995: 28).

Here we see both ambiguities laid out: Being as viscosity, something unreal “carrying on”, absolute *gravitas* and the positive, soundless *il y a* of snow and passivity. And the face, as what I answer – and the only thing I want to murder. But when, how? In any answering lies the recommencement of intentionality and thematization. Perhaps the face as the paradigm of nonviolent resistance, evokes passions including hatred because through it the split quality of the self is “felt”. Could that be why Levinas’s descriptions of the face in the 60s move to explore the split self in *Otherwise than Being*, toward that “self” of pre-conscious experience? Beyond that, if Being and its time-space is necessary to us, and *is* us, even as it is marked by paralysis *and* will to power, or a Stoical and mechanistic perdurance in which victims and cries have the silence of a viscous dream, then their avenging too dissolves in the pro-cess of becoming. Delbo’s moment, however many its analogs, is swallowed up and lost – save for its transformation into a poetics of horror and memory. I think we have to admit that there is not enough, in the face to face or in the split self, to make Levinas’s vision a utopia – even just a formal one.

But I think that exalts his philosophy rather than condemning it. I repeat that the secular reading must entertain the idea that his is a tragic philosophy. And here I am taking the concept ‘tragic philosophy’ not from Nietzsche but from the Franco-Russian scholar of German Idealism, Alexis Philonenko. For Philonenko, a “tragic philosophy” is one that refuses to introduce wholly indemonstrable or doxic elements from theology, ideology, or faith into its thinking (Philonenko 1990). As such, a tragic philosophy is good philosophy, or philosophy *tout court*. As such, a tragic philosophy is rare for the very reason that human hope only reluctantly embraces a philosophy with no doxa or lacking some stimulus to hoping and acting. Here, I should make a brief stop at Philonenko’s discussion of tragic philosophy. His discussion unfolds in his praise of Schopenhauer and of Schopenhauer’s rethinking of Kant’s first two *Critiques*. So, I will look briefly at Philonenko’s Schopenhauer and then at Kant, and then return to Levinas. Certainly, we might include under the rubric of tragic philosophies those of Heidegger, Deleuze, and others. And yet, there is room for hesitation. For instance, though resoluteness before one’s ownmost possibility has little of the tragic, to my eyes. On the other hand, the transition from *Angst* to serenity in Heidegger suggests something of what Philonenko praises in Schopenhauer. But this question should be addressed later, or by others. I propose to turn, now, to Philonenko, and to show in what respect one may read, fruitfully, Levinas’s as a tragic philosophy.

SCHOPENHAUER'S "TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY"

By Philonenko's definition, a tragic philosophy concerns the way one approaches life and death, being and non-being. Schopenhauer's thought was tragic in the vein of the Greek tragedians who did not attempt, unlike Plato, to take from our mortality its "sting", but rather invited the spectator present to a certain distance and a fitting into being or a *homoiōsis*. Schopenhauer would be the first, modern tragic philosopher thanks to certain deliberate "errors" he makes re-reading Kant. The first such "error" was to combine Kant's transcendental analytic and the deduction into one act: Perception. All perception is spontaneous understanding, for him. And this applies to animals as much as to humans. The second "error" was to naturalize Kant's heuristic "noumenon", or thing-in-itself. Schopenhauer transformed the thing-in-itself into a supra-personal "Will", something like a life force, although our concept of "force", he insisted, was already derivative from perception, which spontaneously grasps causality – though it can *not* grasp what escapes causality: that is, *that* there is Being. Schopenhauer's impersonal "Will" – like the Being of Nietzsche's Dionysian Greeks – continuously "gives rise" to entities, which come into being and pass out of it, with no question of immortality for any of them. It is acceptable to take these beings as what-is, but their impermanence invites us to assign the weight of being to that through which they are, Will, or the *that*, the "*dass*" of their being: *that* they are at all. While this evokes Heideggerian themes, Schopenhauer cuts us off from any questioning after the so called "Will". Humans, he argues, experience the force of Will in themselves, as sensation, yet neither sensation nor affect gives us access to the Will, as such.

The task of thinking in regard to Will is to refrain from making of it a transcendent thing. It is no god, and we can faintly say that it is the principle of life. Translating it intellectually for ourselves, we might consider it *the* law of life. But principle and law are all related to the human conception of causality, which for Schopenhauer inheres in perception and causality is the single concept to which Kant's categories may all be reduced. Will thus remains an enigma; but *that* there are beings is not a mystery. So, this *that* has, in a sense, more being than the myriad expressions of it to which it gives rise.

Will has no ends other than to produce; no hidden *teloi* are at work in life; these are the errors of Idealism into which thought fell the moment Kant reintroduced, as Postulates of practical reason, the idea of immortality and that of the existence of God in his second *Critique*. For Schopenhauer, we may well fear our death, but the fear lies in a misunderstanding, as there is no being that does not perish, just as there is no being that is not an epiphenomenon of Will. These beings, from plants to animals to humans, enter

into conflict given their multiplicity and given that they each carry life force thanks to Will. So, the meaning of being is a matter of approach. The noumenal Will cannot be grasped, yet as the “*that* there is life at all”, this Will has more, or a different truth of, Being than do its expressions. Beyond that statement, though, “life” is inexplicable, its ground is unknowable, and our philosophical calling is to accept this without illusions or artifice. Schopenhauer’s critique of his *maître penseur*, Kant, is that the father of Idealism destroyed the basis of other rational psychologies when he showed that it was incoherent to speak of the soul as “substance”, in the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason”. But when Kant introduced the immortality of the soul and the existence of God as “postulates” of practical reason, he committed an error of analogy, even if we argue that these Postulates belong only to practical, not pure, reason. For, ultimately, there are not two reasons, and the practical Postulates encourage us to believe in the possible reconciliation of duties and personal happiness. It is thus at that point that Kant reintroduced a doxic element into a thinking that he had first purged of it: the site where pure reason showed that there was no substance-soul, no immortality, and no experienceable “god”. The same site at which the answer to the question, What may I be permitted to hope? should simply have been: a modest life here, with others, but nothing beyond that.

Philonenko urges that Schopenhauer gave us a tragic philosophy in the best sense of the term: he summoned us to let nothing into philosophy that belonged to doxa or misled the human character. More important, Schopenhauer let nothing into his philosophy that might prod our desire, or our imagination, into excitement about some form of afterlife, or conciliation of duty and happiness, some “higher” enduring meaning. Beings come and go as expressions of a thing called Will. If that suggests that what we see and understand around us has the non-being or non-truth of *all* ephemera, then we can, at the least, *know* this much. But philosophy must stop there. There should be no resurrections of prods to desire, whatever their form, lest philosophy reopen the door to metaphysics, a temptation that it appears almost incapable of resisting.

LEVINAS AND TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY

On the basis of this short survey of Schopenhauer, praised by Alexis Philonenko, I want to return to Levinas. My interest in defining Levinas’s as a “tragic philosophy” is not to deny that later works, like *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, do speak of “God” as a syntagm that comes to mind – if only from the face to face encounter. It is also true that Levinas will ask of Heidegger, in 1974: “Is the error of philosophy to have taken Being for God, or to have taken God for Being?” These are not secular questions; but they are also not doxic in the sense

noted above. We should take seriously Jacques Rolland's remark that one can read Levinas's as a secular philosophy; and, as a secular philosophy, it is tragic in this sense: the "nature" or quality of Being is in important respects closer to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's conception than to Heidegger's. Being in Levinas is pro-cess, *conatus*, pro-duction; it does not call to us; Being as *il y a* is constant presence even as it is taken in its *verbal*, non-substantial sense. This should recall Schopenhauer's unceasing production of ephemera as confusion, competition, almost unending finiteness. The moiling of the "there is" also evokes this. And in its nocturnal positivity, it reminds us of a silent, or buzzing, dream, as it also did for Delbo. In an important sense, Levinas's thought refuses to admit into philosophy what philosophy cannot grasp, like a postulate of practical reason. This does not mean he will not allude to transcendence or what "does not appear" (Levinas 1998a: 168). But he knows that philosophy gets "the last word" (1998a: 168) and that "language...exceed[ing] the limits of what is thought" opens to risks of ideology or hypostatization, which must be held in check. So he would never deduce or explain the "force" of the other's face or gaze; he would never urge us to otherwise than be, and he doesn't promise that thinking the otherwise than being, in all its paradox, could help us to be otherwise. Like Schopenhauer, Levinas acknowledges the irreducibility of conflict among beings, singly and in groups. Indeed, by 1974, he recognizes the function of aesthetic creation, in poetry ("does poetry succeed in reducing the rhetoric?" he asks), as an adjuvant to his wager. Yet he never drops the conviction that the dead temporality of visual art offers no promise of anything beyond being. Levinas is not an opponent of compassion or *pitié*, he conceives these over and above – perhaps coming out of – the face to face encounter or the pre-reflective experience of the "other in the same", which he finds expressed in remorse and likens to the bite of conscience in *Otherwise than Being*. Indeed, it sometimes seems that brute Being, experienced in the positive ambiguities of insomnia, as horror before the loss of orientation and as oppressiveness – it sometimes seems that brute Being, the "there is", moves between the non-being of Schopenhauer's unending ephemera and the irreducibility of his inaccessible production of being. Of course to say "non-being" here is to follow Philonenko; it does not deny the existence of things, it points to their becoming and their finitude, without asserting anything about the *why* of their production. The *il y a*, too, is always already there, unlimited in its carrying-on, finite perhaps only because we are finite: beyond this, the infinite is a trace and a signification that "does not enter into any present," and may be only "simple politeness" (Levinas 1998a: 185).

One might counter that a philosophy like Schopenhauer's is really closer to Heidegger's thought than to Levinas's. And, moreover, have there not been books about Levinas's philosophy as a utopia of the other man, a utopia of the human? Does Miguel Abensour (1991: 572-603) not call his thought a

formal utopia; a thought that gives contemporary utopias their conditions of possibility? And is our concern with what Levinas calls the Good beyond being, not to mention our moments of unforeseeable generosity – do these not promise hope for political concord strong enough to motivate those other ethical interruptions that take the form of witnessing for the others, or demanding justice?

I do not believe that Levinas – at least the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being* – decided these questions of “conditions of possibility” or political hope – not *philosophically*. Language and conceptuality, the expression and force by which beings are called forth into being, according to him, also fill in all the gaps, all the lags, even that space where a doubt about something other than being might arise. What is said about the good, or about responsibility, must be *unsaid*, lest it enter the order of being and logic, or being-logic, whereby it becomes either a poetics, a postulate of phenomenological reason, or just open to the doubt of the skeptic. It is all, in fact, a wager.⁴ Now, if Rolland is right and we can read Levinas according to an emphasis on the other *or* on the other of the other, *illeity*, then at the level of the split self we can read Levinas in a secular thought about the flesh and intersubjectivity. But in so doing, we should accept what I would call the tragic wager: there are no doxic prods to desire, no hope for an end of history or of “man”. If responsibility can be described, and unsaid, but somehow recollected *without* reification, then responsibility arises repeatedly – and, why not? – repeatedly throughout history without in any way being able to ransom history or society. If the “human”, understood as *religio*, fraternity, or responsibility, stands facing Being, as neutrality, conatus, *phusis*, then the human is also *in* what it faces. We remain in Being – hence the repeated deception of our illusions about sensuous transcendence in enjoyment and the uncertainty about transcendence in the other-in-the-same “experience”. And Being is us. Moreover, Being has, in its conflict and impermanence, something of Schopenhauer’s beings, which Philonenko perceives to be less “being” than Will – though we will never know what has more “being”, only *that* there are beings.

Philonenko makes a valuable, very Schopenhauerian point about Kant’s “Postulates of Practical Reason” in his *éloge* to Schopenhauer: “Generally,” he says, “we interpret the Kantian postulates—whereby theology was reintroduced – as *calming* for a moral conscience. One even finds,” he adds, “a *je ne sais quoi* of leniency in the postulate of the immortality of the soul. But it is the *contrary* that is absolutely true. These postulates are powerful excitations, and as such take their value from the perspective of this world by infusing

⁴ And it can be, he uses this term in 1961, a sort of liturgy. But here one thinks of the origin of the term *leitourgos* to denote a debt paid by one who was able (the rich) for the maintenance of the beauty and life of the city.

hope into consciousness and by leading it into a veritable agitation, instead of leading it to resign itself before tragedy by strengthening in it the pure thinking of [mortality]" (Philonenko 1990, 304).

It is not that Levinas was fatally resigned or the exponent of the "pure thinking of mortality," though that strain seems present in his later thought, like an inner struggle, when he exhorts, "a relaxation of essence...is needed...this weakness is needed" (1998a: 185). More than that, I am arguing, following Philonenko, that Levinas was aware that resuscitating hope in our age belonged to "the most immoral of moralities," because the resuscitated hope in question engenders new prescriptions, new norms, new leaders and repeated transgressions; in all this moral busy-ness, the agitation of hope revives false consciousness, celebrates remedies or groups or hierarchies. "The modern world is above all an order, or a disorder in which the elites can no longer leave peoples to their customs, their wretchedness and their illusions... These elites are sometimes called 'intellectuals'" (Levinas 1998a: 184). Levinas would have none of an ethical agitation based on postulates. He is aware that responsibility, or substitution, is too fragile to resist the wave of being-logic. He is aware that war is the outcome of things animated by conatus. The exceptional, generosity, or the interruption of violence, take place, but these have neither regularity nor predictability. "Each individual of these peoples is virtually a chosen one" but the "inordinateness [of this] is attenuated with hypocrisy as soon as it enters my ears..." (Levinas 1998a: 185). Whatever hope generosity engenders is not a "powerful excitation" to pursue the indemonstrable. The excitation to do or to create, may be found in some forms of religious life, "peoples' illusions," but undertaking a difficult task *in view of* hope is a side-by-side activity, which is not the proper of the face-to-face. And the face remains the only thing an "I" can wish to murder or eliminate in a passionate response to the passivity of the "Other".

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LEVINO FILOSOFIJOS „TRAGIZMAS“: SKAITANT LEVINĄ SU SCHOPENHAUERIU

SANTRAUKA

Puikioje studijoje, skirtoje idealizmo palikimui, prancūzų mokslininkas Alexis Philonenko teigė, kad „tragiškoji filosofija“ neprivalo reikšti *nihilistinės* filosofijos. Pasak jo, „tragiškumo“ sąvoka turėtų būti taikoma filosofinėms teorijoms, kurios priešinasi metafizinių prielaidų – ar šios būtų aptinkamos loginiame ar eschatologiniame lygmenyse, ar tiesiog kaip „praktinio proto postulatai“ – įtraukimui į savo sistemas ar įrodymus. Schopenhauerio filosofija būtų pirmoji tokia „tragiškoji“ filosofija ir kaip tokia ji taip pat pasirodo esanti viena pirmųjų „gyvenimo“ filosofijų, nors santykis tarp šių dviejų filosofijų ir yra sudėtingas. Šiame straipsnyje aš klausiu, ar paties Levino filosofija nėra tragiškoji filosofija. Levino filosofijoje atrandame naujovių, įskaitant visišką subjekto išcentravimą, metafizinės kalbos dekonstravimą ir fenomenologinės *epoche* radikalizavimą – iki pat „kūno“. Pakitus subjekto pozicijai, Kito statusas tampa naudingai dviprasmiškas: tai kūnas ir kraujas, bet vis dėlto išlaikantis keistą pėdsaką ir reikšmės perteklių. Ar galima šiuos dalykus nagrinėti

neieškant išėities metafizikoje? Viena yra aišku. Galimi mažiausiai du būdai, leidžiantys perskaityti jo mintį: religinis ir pasaulietinis. Pasaulietinis skaitymas susitelkia ties susitikimu veidas į veidą ir žmogaus juslumą. Šia prasme Levino filosofija atitinka Philonenko kriterijų. Galiausiai problemą sudaro mūsų mirtingumo prasmės permąstymas – tačiau Levino filosofijoje problema yra ir mūsų tarpusavio priklausomybė. Po Schopenhauerio Nietzsche ir Heideggeris toliau vykdė nejaukią užduotį iš metafizikos išėiti į tragiškąją filosofiją. Levino įnašo unikalumą sudaro tai, kad, nors ir vadovaudamasis šių mąstytojų jėga, jis greta pastato baigtybės filosofiją ir intersubjektyvaus suteikimo ir laiko hermeneutiką, kuri nėra baigtinė *per se*. Nauja prieiga prie nebaigtinumo reikalauja trijų dalykų: gyvenamos egzistencijos pertekliaus jos konceptualizavimo atžvilgiu apmąstymo, kartotės laiko ir subjekto be pagrindo. Atvirai nedekonstruodamas metafizikos, Levinas pamina ploniausias skiriamąsias linijas tarp metafiziškumo ir radikalaus baigtinumo. Tačiau jis tai daro taip, kad mirtingume įsišaknijusio mąstymo *rezultatas* galiausiai nėra tik „tragiškas“.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: tragiškoji filosofija, metafizikos dekonstrukcija, baigtinumas, Schopenhaueris, Levinas.