The Other in Our Shul:
The Application to the Rabbinate of
Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy and Talmudic Lectures

Brent Gutmann

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
2013
Referee: Rabbi Dr. Haim Rechnitzer

Dedicated to my loving wife, Jill

and my sweet daughter, Daria

Thesis Summary

Philosopher and Talmudist Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) developed a system of thought with useful applications to ethical scenarios including the applications to the rabbinate found within this thesis. His system of thought is pre-intellectual—it posits that interpersonal experiences precede conscious analysis of those phenomena. Further, Levinas believes these pre-intellectual encounters constitute the foundation of ethical behavior as experienced through what he called the face-to-face encounter with the Other (person). This encounter interrupts the process of consciousness, and imposes a radical demand to serve the needs of the Other, even to the deficit of our own needs.

This thesis seeks to apply aspects of Levinas's theory of the Other to the contemporary role of the congregational rabbi. Levinas's philosophical and Talmudic writings serve as the primary sources for that application. These applications illustrate how Levinas's thought may be applied to analyze and inform the course of best action in congregational situations. It promotes the value of Levinas's philosophy in the education of rabbis.

KEYWORDS: LEVINAS, PHILOSOPHY, TALMUD, ETHICS, THE OTHER, ONTOLOGY, PHENOMENOLOGY, HUSSERL, HEIDEGGER, CONGREGATION, RABBI, APPLICATION.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the opportunity and support I have received from teachers and family as I have composed my rabbinic thesis. I am deeply grateful to all the HUC faculty, administrators, and my classmates, who have supported and taught me over the last five years I have been in rabbinical school, culminating in this thesis that I proudly submit.

I would particularly like to thank my thesis referee, Rabbi Dr. Haim Rechnitzer. He helped me process and develop the ideas for this work from the proposal stage through its submission. In guiding me he demonstrated trust and enthusiasm to guide me through this journey.

I am sincerely grateful to Rabbi Dr. Michael Morgan for first teaching me about Emmanuel Levinas as an undergraduate student at Indiana University, and for instilling within me an appreciation for Levinas's philosophy that remains to this day.

Special thanks to my friend, Lauri Harwood, who graciously offered her superb skills to help me edit this thesis and gave me encouragement during the final stretch.

My deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Jill, and my daughter, Daria, to whom my thesis is dedicated. Jill and Daria have lovingly supported me in more ways than I can explain here and especially while I composed this thesis.

Digest

While struggling to unpack the philosophical terminology contained in Emmanuel Levinas's writing, I came to understand the philosophical system it contains as both sensible and compelling. His philosophy seeks to describe our most fundamental existence as relating to other people, not as objects, but as independent sentient beings for whose well-being we must radically (as we shall see) concern ourselves. Most simply, Levinas's philosophy may be understood as an imperative that one responds to the needs of others before one's own.

Levinas would state, "Ethics is first philosophy."[1] The term "first philosophy" was coined by Aristotle to signify the study of the fundamental nature of reality, or as it would later be termed, Being. Levinas understands the way in which one engages with others as being the most fundamental experience of reality. Through his philosophy, he would demonstrate that ethics guides these interactions so as to show the primacy of activities and reflections that improve the well-being of others.

The study of Emmanuel Levinas undertaken for this rabbinic thesis extends beyond my original exposure to Levinas during my undergraduate days, and yet I would require many more years if I were to present comprehensively all that Levinas has written. Levinas wrote prolifically over the course of his nearly nine decades of life and his writing extends into multiple disciplines. In addition to Levinas's philosophical writings, he delivered commentaries on the Talmud, albeit with a philosophical orientation. Levinas's approach to Talmud constitutes, according to translator Annette Aronowicz, "an attempt at translating Jewish thought into the language of modern times."[2] As a

[1] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 75-87.

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*. trans. Annette Aronowicz. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), ix.

student of rabbinic literature, I feel inclined not to ignore Levinas's commentary on the Talmud and thus I include two of his Talmudic lectures as major components of this thesis. I shall use those commentaries along with a general presentation of his philosophy to demonstrate how Levinas's thought can provide insight into guiding a rabbi's engagement in his or her ministry.

In presenting Levinas's philosophy, my objective is to present his thought in terms as approachable as possible. Despite the simplicity of his overall message, Levinas's writing is profoundly complicated. His philosophical writing may be characterized as containing technically specific philosophical terms presented in a seemingly convoluted writing style. He plays with confounding contradictions ("the past that was never present," "humility which commands from a height," etc.), and his own philosophical jargon relies on the subtle applications of common terms ("the face of the Other," "the said," and so forth), yet it could be said that the opaqueness of Levinas's writing suits the content of his thought. The ethical force that Levinas describes – which demands we sublimate our own interests into the interests of the other – comes prior to comprehending the effect this force has on us.[3] Thus Levinas, as he describes this force, must short circuit his readers' attempt to "rationalize" ethics. This idea adds depth to Levinas's assertion that "ethics is first philosophy," in that ethics is the relation to others which proceeds philosophy. We shall come to understand the precise workings of Levinas's philosophy in later sections of this thesis.

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 7.

The Life of Emmanuel Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas preferred to differentiate his philosophical writings from his involvement in Jewish scholarship and communal work,[4] yet all of his writing is characterized by an almost obsessive preoccupation with compelling his reader towards ethical engagement with his or her world.[5] Nonetheless, Levinas only begins formulating his original philosophy and commenting on Talmud after his experience of the Holocaust and World War II. Levinas's personal experience of these events included the murder of his parents, siblings, and extended family and his imprisonment as a soldier fighting for the French. While Levinas's decision to pursue the study of Talmud may have been a reaction to these two experiences and were a consequence of the fact he was Jewish, his most significant experience with regard to shaping his philosophy was the implications of philosopher Martin Heidegger's decision to become a Nazi. Simon Critchly writes, "… His philosophical life was animated by the question of how a philosopher as undeniably brilliant as Heidegger could have become a Nazi …"[6] As Levinas's life is examined in this section, we shall see how the various traumas Levinas experience animated, not only his efforts toward developing his own philosophy, but also his study of the Talmud. Furthermore, we shall come to understand how, although Levinas's work as a philosopher is independent from his work as a Talmudist, nearly all of his work is united by a single objective of compelling his reader to ethical behavior.

During his childhood, Emmanuel Levinas experienced lesser hardships and inconveniences as a result of World War I and discrimination against Jews in Lithuania. Still, the most significant details to be observed from the period of his young life seem to be his natural intellectual

---

[4] These include Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic Lectures, his essays on Judaism contained in the work *Difficult Freedom*, as well as numerous articles and interviews given on Jewish subjects.

[5] Levinas strongly objected to being identified as a Jewish philosopher. He ensured the religious ideas in his philosophy acted as examples rather than necessary premises. See: Robbins, Jill, ed. *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2001. p. 61.

[6] Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.

endowments and the mostly secular nature of his upbringing. Levinas was born in 1906 in the older, densely Jewish, area of Kovno (today in Lithuania), at a time when the Jewish Enlightenment was starting to make its first inroads in the region. His birthplace had been an important center of Jewish religious life containing several important yeshivot.[7] He described Kovno as the place in Eastern Europe where "Judaism knew its highest spiritual development." He explained, "The level of Talmudic study was very high, and there was a whole life based on this study and experienced as study."[8] However, his childhood occurred "at a time when Judaism was approaching modernity…"[9] and Levinas's family was among those Jews who welcomed the spirit of enlightenment. His parents spoke Yiddish with each other, but they spoke Russian with him and his younger brothers Boris and Aminadab.[10] His father owned a Russian bookstore in Kovno and Levinas took to reading Russian literature.[11] By offering Levinas the opportunity to be exposed to non-Jewish texts, his parents set him on a path that would eventually lead him to study philosophy. Levinas stated that his parents' generation, "while continuing to initiate youth into Hebrew, saw the future of young people in the Russian language and culture."[12] He emphasized, "That was the future, however uncertain it might have been."[13] Uncertain indeed, when with the start of World War I in August of 1914 that relatively peaceful life, according to Levinas, "had been forever disturbed."[14]

During World War I, the Germans occupied Kovno in September 1915 and Levinas's family fled to Kharkov, Ukraine, but otherwise the focus of his life remained unaltered. Even in Ukraine, his parents ensured their children received a secular education. Levinas was one of the few Jews admitted to the Russian *Gymnasium* school. Asked how he first became interested in philosophy,

---

[7], Jill Robbins, ed., *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 84.
[8] Ibid., 24.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 84.
[11] Ibid., 23.
[12] Ibid., 24.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 25.

Levinas answered, "It was first of all my readings in Russian, specifically Pushkin, Lermontov, and Doesteoevsky, above all Doestoevsky." He explained that the presence of "essentially, religious anxiety" in these books, distillable to questions about the meaning of life, specifically kindled his interest in philosophy.[15] He continued to study in the Russian *Gymnasium* until his family returned to Kovno in 1920 where he began studying at a Hebrew *Gymnasium*.

Levinas made continuing his secular education a priority of his young adulthood. He left his family 1923 to enroll at the University of Strasbourg in France. He studied classics, psychology, and sociology before he took up study of philosophy. Edmund Husserl's philosophy became his specific focus after he was introduced to Husserl and his "Göttingen circle" of philosophers by his professor Jean Héring.[16] In 1929, Levinas's first published article was a review of Husserl's *Ideas I*. In 1930, he completed and defended his doctoral dissertation, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*. The following year, he co-translated Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* with fellow Strasbourg student Gabrielle Pfeiffer. While participating in monthly philosophical meetings organized by Gabriel Marcel in 1931 and 1932, he met Jean-Paul Sartre and other young French philosophers. Later, Levinas humorously commented, "It was Sartre who guaranteed my place in eternity by stating in his famous obituary essay on Merlau-Ponty that he, Sartre, "was introduced to phenomenology by Levinas.'"[17] Although Husserl was not the first philosopher to discuss phenomenology, he was seen as its most prominent proponent. Phenomenology studies the structures of consciousness through a first-person point of view, and Levinas would maintain this approach later when he began to compose his original philosophy.

At the same time, hints of Levinas's interest in ethics began to emerge early in his academic career. He wrote his undergraduate thesis under the auspices of his professor Maurice Pradines. His

---

[15] Ibid., 28.
[16] Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002), 31.
[17] Critchley, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, xvii and 1.

thesis used the event of the Dreyfus affair to demonstrate the importance of valuing ethics over politics and ethnic origins. He argued ethics to be the ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* which were espoused during the French revolution.[18]

Following the completion of his bachelor degree (*liscense*) in philosophy in 1927, Levinas spent two years studying in Freiburg, Germany. He attended Husserl's final lectures before his retirement in 1929; however, Levinas remarks that even at that time it was apparent that Husserl's thought would be "continued and transfigured by Heidegger."[19] Seen as the most brilliant disciple of Husserl, Heidegger's improvements upon Husserl's phenomenology led to Heidegger's pioneering of a new approach to philosophy, ontology. Whereas phenomenology studied the structures of consciousness, ontology studied the structures of "being." Heidegger criticized Husserl's highly intellectual attempts to understand consciousness as falsely describing our primary experiences of being as intellectual. Instead, Heidegger sought to understand the experience of being that he identified in its most primary form to be a concern for self-preservation, and thus to comprehend every object we encounter to the extent that it possesses the potential to effect our self-preservation.

In 1929, Levinas attended a debate between Heidegger and the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, which centered around questions such as "What is finitude?" "What is objectivity?" "What is culture?" and "What is truth?"[20] But his admiration of Heidegger ended abruptly in 1932, when, ten days after being named Rector of Freiburg University, Heidegger joined the National Socialist (Nazi) party. Regardless of Heidegger's political motives for joining the Nazi party, he demonstrated no

[18] Ibid., xvi. and Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, 30. While one might attribute his selection of the Dreyfus affair as a topic indicated an indication of an early affinity for Jewish studies, it should be known that Levinas attested that his advisor's passion for Dreyfus was actually what prompted him to study it.
[19] Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, 32.
[20] See: Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

outrage or remorse for the suffering that members of his party were inflicting on others at the time. Outraged with Heidegger, Levinas abandoned a book in progress on Heidegger in 1932.[21]

Although he was not the only Jewish admirer of Heidegger who felt shocked and betrayed when Heidegger joined the Nazis,[22] Levinas had been a dedicated proponent of Heidegger's philosophy and much of his own philosophy had come to rely upon it. However, that philosophy was no longer acceptable to him as Levinas, like many others, found Heidegger's actions morally reproachable. Thus, Levinas undertook the difficult task of separating himself philosophically from Heidegger and developing a solid foundation upon which he would construct his own ethically cogent philosophy. Indeed, Levinas's first original philosophical essay, *On Escape*, published in 1935, amounted to an attempt toward distancing himself intellectually from Heideggerian ontology. His essay shifted from ontological questions asked by Heidegger about the physiological nature of being to questions about the primary embodied human experience. Heidegger had developed his philosophy around what happens from the moment that a being recognizes the possibility that it could cease to exist. At that moment, a being recognizes it must continually concern itself with gathering sustenance to remain physiologically alive. Herein Levinas understood how Heidegger's philosophy resulted from his being's concern for itself, and Levinas began his effort to develop an alternative understanding of being which made ethics an inseparable part of the fabric of being.[23] Thus, Levinas's critique of Heidegger provided the foundation out of which his own philosophy grew.

Levinas's early philosophical activity prior to the war coincided with the beginning of his career as a Jewish educator. His initial decision to pursue a career in Jewish education was pragmatic.

---

[21] Critchley, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* xviii.
[22] See: Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2003) for an extensive account of the fallout among Heidegger's admirers.
[23] See: Michael Purcell, "On Escape." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 5, no. 3 (2004), 35-38 and "Emmanuel Levinas," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (online, 2013) http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/#TraResBey.

Levinas was barred from joining a French university (*lycée*) faculty in his early career because he did not know Greek and consequently could not pass the test to attain a teaching certification (*Agrégation*). Instead, he accepted a teaching position at *École Normale Israélite Orientale*, a school founded by *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in 1930. *Alliance* was an organization dedicated to promoting the integration of Jews into their states as citizens through education, and *École Normale* in particular was committed to teaching students from the Mediterranean basin.[24] Levinas's involvement in *Alliance* made him especially conscious of intensifying antisemitism in Europe. In one of his early articles (1935) for *Alliance*'s newspaper he wrote, "Modern Jewish consciousness has become troubled. It does not doubt its destiny but cannot calmly be witness to the outrages overwhelming it."[25] Despite first pursing his career as a Jewish professional for pragmatic reasons, Levinas soon began to champion Jewish welfare more broadly.

Levinas's involvement in philosophy and Jewish thought would further intensify as the violence of World War II and the Holocaust affected him personally. Levinas was drafted into the French army as a Russian and German interpreter when war broke out in 1939. In 1940, he was taken captive by the Germans. Fortunately, his status as an officer saved him from being sent to a concentration camp, although Jewish prisoners were kept separate from non-Jews. Still, Levinas lost most of his family in the Holocaust. His parents and brothers most likely were shot by Nazis close to Kovno in 1940. His wife, Raïssa, and daughter, Simone, were saved by Maurice Blanchot, the French writer, philosopher, and literary theorist, but their fate remained unknown to Levinas while he was in prison. It was in the fog of that uncertainty that he began to write his first original book of philosophy, *Existence and Existents* (*De l'existence à l'existant*) while still in prison. Scholar Richard A. Cohen explains the essence of this book in Levinas's understanding of the end of theodicity. Cohen writes, "Levinas faces the question squarely; he does not shirk from asking: What can suffering mean

[24] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings,* xiv.
[25] Ibid.*,* xii.

when suffering is rendered so obviously 'useless' (*inutile*), useless to its core? What can suffering mean when it is 'for nothing,' when it heralds and leads only to death and is intended only for obliteration?"[26] Herein Levinas began to associate the ethical flaws he first confronted in Heidegger with a more general ethical lack in Western thought.

Inevitably, his effort to develop an ethically cogent philosophy would be aided as he began to study Talmud. Following the War, a friend, Henri Nerson, introduced Levinas to Monsieur Chouchani (also Shushani), an enigmatic and anonymous Talmudic master who also taught Elie Wiesel. Very little is certain about Chouchani's identity or origins to this day, but what is known is that Levinas studied intensively with Chouchani from 1947 to 1951. During part of this time, Chouchani even lived with the Levinas family in their apartment above the *École Normale*. Presumably, the sessions, discussions, and lessons Levinas had with Chouchani became the basis for his later Talmudic lectures. In 1960, three years after Levinas co-founded the Society of French Speaking Jewish Intellectuals (*Colloque des intellectuels juifs de langue française*), he began giving Talmudic lectures at the conclusion of their annual meetings – which he would continue to deliver until 1991.[27]

One might suspect that the ethical aspects of Levinas's philosophy have been influenced by his Talmudic scholarship. While this is possible, Levinas ardently sought to ensure his philosophy only on solid philosophical arguments. Thus, he resisted being identified as a *Jewish* philosopher. Asked in an interview how he felt about being presented as a "Jewish thinker," he responded:

> I am Jewish and certainly I have readings, contacts, and traditions which are specifically Jewish and which I do not deny. But I protest against this formula when by it one understands something that

[26] Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation After Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 269.

[27] Four of Levinas's lectures were published in a volume in 1968 and another five in 1977. These nine lectures were translated into English and combined into one volume by Annette Aronowicz. Another collection of Talmudic lectures and other material primarily delivered in the last few decades of the conference were collected and translated to English by Gary D. Mole. Of the two lectures I will present in this thesis, one comes from the collection translated by Annette Aronowicz and the other from the collection Gary D. Mole translated. A significant portion of the material from Levinas's Talmudic lectures remains unpublished and unavailable in English.

> dares to establish between concepts relations which are based uniquely in religious traditions and texts, without bothering to pass through the philosophical critique.[28]

Levinas intended for his philosophy, even when it introduced "Jewish" ideas, to be capable of withstanding philosophical scrutiny. Although Levinas lived his personal life as an active and observant, albeit, non-Orthodox Jew, his religious affiliation is irrelevant to the merit of his philosophy. In fact, Protestant theologians were the first to take note of his philosophy. Levinas explained his approach to referencing religious texts:

> There are two ways of reading a biblical verse. One consists in appealing to the tradition … without distrusting and without even taking account of the presuppositions of that tradition … The second reading consists not in contesting straightaway, philosophically, but rather in translating and accepting the [verse] which, once translated, can be justified by what manifests itself.[29]

Introducing religious arguments into his philosophy is precisely the practice which compromises the ability of that philosophy to withstand philosophical critique. Conversely, to translate the content of biblical thought as faithfully as he could into a form which could endure a rational philosophical critique would prove quite useful in addressing what Levinas considered the ethical weaknesses of the dominant Western philosophies.

Levinas's most significant philosophical activity coincides with his study of the Talmud: he began to write prolifically after World War II and continued to do so nearly until his death in 1995. In 1947, he published his first original book of philosophy, *Existence and Existents*, which he began writing in prison, and delivered four lectures at the *Collège Philosophic* which would be published in 1948 as *Time and the Other*. In 1951, he published a significant essay, "Is Ontology Fundamental?," in which he reworked the argument in his pre-war essay *On Escape*. It contains his clearest articulation of his criticism of Heidegger:

> Our relation with the other certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension. [The other] does not affect us in terms of a concept. He is a [human] being and counts as such.[30]

---

[28] Robbins, *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas,* 61.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 6.

Contrary to Heidegger's assertions that any object can be used to sustain our being, Levinas posited that to use another person, in fact, even to attempt to comprehend another person, with physiological vulnerabilities much like our own, constituted an ethical violation of the other. Instead, one is obligated to recognize that the other is neither a part of nor an extension of ourselves, and to make them such deprives them of the quality which defines them as other; to negate their status as independent of our comprehension amounts to "murder."[31] This assertion – that the other person overwhelms any effort to comprehend him – facilitated an important principal of his philosophy, the irreducibility of the other. In 1961, Levinas would rework the idea of the other's irreducibility once again in his first magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity*. *Totality and Infinity* brought together many disparate aspects of consciousness and relation to the other that had begun to appear in his essays. Levinas refined Husserl's phenomenology by responding to many of Heidegger's criticisms of it. He uses the framework of a being tethered to the totality of its consciousness. Like Husserl, Levinas attributes to that being the ability to temporarily transcend its totality. However, Levinas introduced the notion that a being could escape its totality through engaging others in a discourse that unfolds into a responsibility to uphold the notions of justice rooted in the family.

Similarities between Levinas's life between philosophy and Talmudic scholarship will become evident to the reader through the unfolding of this thesis. It will become apparent that each aspect of Levinas's pursuits – philosophy and Talmudic scholarship – assumes ethics as its priority. These themes will be traced in later sections in order to facilitate a Levinasian analysis of three hypothetical scenarios in Jewish American congregational life, thus demonstrating Levinas's enduring relevance in the early twenty-first century.

[31] Ibid., 9.

Levinas's Emerging Doctrine of Responsibility for the Other

The development of Levinas's philosophy was motivated by his desire to rescue philosophy from moral irrelevance. He felt strongly that Martin Heidegger had tarnished the reputation of philosophy by joining the ranks of the perpetrators. Levinas questioned, "How could such a brilliant philosophical mind tolerate the party's hateful platform?" Surely, Heidegger benefited professionally from affiliation by being named Rector of Freiburg University, but Levinas recognized that Heidegger's allegiance to the Nazis revealed a flaw in his underlying philosophy. Levinas developed his criticism of Heidegger's philosophy on the grounds that its ethics gave priority to beings' care for themselves over concern for others. In the philosophy Levinas eventually developed he would establish the primary meaning of existence as a being's response to the demand exerted on it by another person, a phenomenon which he called an encounter with "the face of the Other."

Levinas's philosophical acumen in the complex nuances of Husserian phenomenology and Heidegger's ontology aided his criticism of Heidegger. Levinas's original philosophy developed out of his critiques and his awareness of the weaknesses inherent within the philosophical systems he inherited.

Emmanuel Levinas was a translator and scholar of Edmund Husserl's philosophy before he began to articulate his own philosophy. Levinas spent nearly a decade of his early career studying and translating Husserl's work from German to French, thereby being heavily influenced by it. Indeed, his doctoral dissertation was a study of Husserl's philosophy (page 3). As a result, he was heavily influenced by the philosophical approach Husserl developed, phenomenology, the study of consciousness. In a 1986 interview, Levinas revealed how he first discovered Edmund Husserl through a fellow Strasbourg student, Gabrielle Peiffer. Peiffer spoke to Levinas about the novel new

phenomenological approach Husserl had developed and which was beginning to generate much excitement throughout the discipline of philosophy.[32]

Husserl's philosophy contributed to one of the most significant shifts in philosophical approach since its inception. Prior to Husserl, philosophy had been dominated by metaphysical theories, which sought to understand constant principles of reality which could be objectively generalized.[33] Skeptics criticized these theories by objecting, "If we can only experience objects through our own eyes and mind, how can we be certain they really exist?" They objected that no such principle could only be said to exist conditionally (merely as a hypothetical concept), because any principle one asserts must originate from one's subjective consciousness. Inspired by psychology, Husserl adopted a method he called *epoché,* or "bracketing." *Epoché* entailed accepting any phenomena experienced from an individual's first person point of view as conditionally true, and avoiding assertions as to the metaphysical nature of reality. Husserl writes:

> The objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always exists for me, the only world that exists for me – this world, with all its objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as transcendental Ego, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological *epoché*.[34]

This statement is the basis for Husserl's method. He borrows the psychological concept of the Ego to orient consciousness around an agent. The Ego serves as the origin of consciousness and subsequently existence. Husserl argues that insomuch as the Ego's experiences a phenomenon, that phenomenon could be bracketed as real; for how could it be said not to exist to the Ego (*viz.* not to possess *Being*) if they were real within its *epoché* of consciousness? Phenomenology enabled Husserl

---

[32] Robbins, *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 31.
[33] Plato called those principles "forms" (ideal exemplar objects) that relate to ordinary objects one encounters empirically, whereas Aristotle preferred to refer to them as "first cause" which underlie "being as such." Although both posited that the most intellectually gifted individuals could develop an analytic understanding of metaphysical reality, neither metaphysical system could overcome a skeptic's criticism that any description of objective reality depended upon the subjective point of view from which it originated.
[34] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology,* trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 65.

to explain Being without resorting to metaphysical conjectures; the Ego's experience of a phenomenon made that phenomenon real.

Epoché also provided Husserl with an alternative explanation of the one's ability to derive abstract concepts, or ideal species, which could be generalized beyond one's own subjectivity. Ideal species were essential to Husserl's explanation of how individuals develop shared languages which can be used to communicate concepts. He explained the emergence of these ideal species through the process of "analysis." Husserl explained that what we feel, see, or hear can be set apart from normal experiences through what he called "intentional acts." He posited that only intentional acts *(noesis)*, which he described as "being-conscious-of-an-objectivity" *(noema),* were actually raised to what we would colloquially think of as consciousness, and everything we reflect upon, analyze, or understand is an intentional act. The content (i.e., object) of one's consciousness could be assigned a "species," or name, by a nominal act. Further analysis may then perform an eidetic reduction on that species, reducing the content to its abstract features and associating it with species distilled from prior encounters to formulate an "ideal species," which takes on its own objectivity and subsequently also has Being. Husserl's method of studying Being through the individual consciousness of an Ego proved compelling, and a vast array of philosophers, including Levinas, would adopt his approach. Nevertheless, the edifice of Husserl's thought would come under attack toward the end of his life. Heidegger, Husserl's most preeminent student, would articulate the best known criticism of Husserl's work.

Heidegger can generally be understood as criticizing Husserl for over-intellectualizing consciousness. He argued that consciousness was not the fundamental mode of existence or Being. Rather, one's experience of Being as one interacted with the world was most fundamental. Yet, Heidegger also criticized Husserl for overlooking a critical step in the development of consciousness. Husserl did not discuss the process whereby an Ego gains consciousness of itself.

Consequently, Heidegger's philosophy would be underpinned by self-consciousness. This focus would lead him to development the concept of *Dasein*, which integrates consciousness and its materiality to develop the concept of "the Self." Ironically, Levinas would embrace many of Heidegger's criticisms and his solutions to them (self-consciousness would also feature prominently in Levinas's earliest iterations of his philosophy), however, Levinas would reject the solutions Heidegger eventually proposed because Heidegger's understanding of Being was egotistically centered on the Self in such a way that it delegitimized the Being of any other person.

More specifically, Heidegger's sharpest criticisms of Husserl's philosophy emerged out of his rejection of Husserl's concept of time. Husserl derived his concept of time by interrelating the temporal distances (or "flux") between intentional acts. Heidegger objected that this understanding of time "only concerned with time as an object of theoretical knowledge."[35] Flux accounted for conceptualized time, but it could not explain how one experiences time. In other words, one could develop temporal consciousness by conceptualizing a sequence of phenomena, yet flux could not account for one's experience of the past as "remote" or "distant" from the present; neither could flux account for the sense in which the future feels inherently unpredictable.[36] To account for Being's essential experiences like these of time, Heidegger developed ontology, the study of Being according to the quality by which beings exist.

As Heidegger sought to explain how Being interacted with the world, he reasoned that Being must first recognize its own existence before it can relate to other objects (a step which Husserl had neglected). Heidegger coined the term "*Dasein*" (being-there) to describe a being conscious of itself. *Dasein* allowed for Being to relate and experience the world, but it also allowed Being to recognize the possibility of its non-existence. Heidegger writes:

---

[35] Critchley, *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas,* 86.

[36] An enumeration of Heidegger and Levinas's criticisms of Husserl's *time-consciousness* may be found in Rudolf Bennett's essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 87-89.

> [The] state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein's ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself face to face with the "nothing" of the possible impossibility of its existence.[37]

Thus Being in its anxiety concerns itself, or "cares" about its continued existence, and Being cares so much to avoid the possible impossibility of its existence (death) that this care becomes "the Being of *Dasein*."[38] Thus, *Dasein's* mission is to protect itself and it starts making use of objects – or as Levinas paraphrased Heidegger's idea, "considering the world as an ensemble of tools."[39] While Levinas, like Heidegger, recognized the need for Being to recognize its own existence, it was Heidegger's concept of care that he would criticize most vehemently. Levinas would claim that Heidegger's concept of care was the flaw in his philosophy which allowed him to join the Nazi party, but criticizing Heidegger on the basis of his own philosophy was not straightforward or simple.

Levinas would argue that although Being wished to master its world, its mastery cannot extend to the human other ("He is a [human] being and counts as such." See page 13), but there is a problem. Heidegger's philosophy does not recognize the existence of other independent beings except as they exist in the construct *Dasein's* Being. Heidegger explains:

> Whenever an ontology takes for its theme entities whose character of Being is other than that of Dasein, it has its own foundation and motivation in Dasein's own ontical [self-descriptive] structure, in which a pre-ontological understanding of Being is comprised as a definite characteristic … Therefore fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein.[40]

Essentially, Heidegger argues that whenever we recognize the existence of things that are other than ourselves, we do so because the foundation and motivation of our own Being is served by it. It is from us alone that "all other ontologies can take their rise." He argues that Being separates other objects as external to ourselves by virtue of our own mind as an "existential analytic," a

---

[37] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial/ Modern Thought, 2008), 53:310.
[38] Ibid., 43:255.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, trans Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 62 and 62n36. See: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §14 and §15 for additional explanation.
[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 3:33–4.

process of thinking by which we attribute existence to those objects. The Being of *Dasein* remains unique as the only ontological Being. Even when Heidegger brings up "them," meaning Others who are similar to the Being of *Dasein* with whom *Dasein* shares the world (Being-with-the-Other), their existence becomes the subject of analysis, indistinguishable from the analysis of any object the Self encounters. Thus, Heidegger subjugates the Being of other people to the Being of the Self. In "Is Ontology Fundamental?", Levinas writes:

> To relate oneself to beings qua beings means, for Heidegger … to comprehend them as independent of the perception which discovers and grasps them. It is precisely through such comprehension that it gives itself as a being and not as a mere object. Being-with-the-Other thus rests for Heidegger on the ontological relation.
>
> We respond: … Is the one to whom one speaks understood from the first in his being? Not at all. The other is not an object of comprehension first and foremost and an interlocutor second. The two relations are intertwined. In other words, the comprehension of the other is inseparable from his invocation.
>
> To comprehend a person is already to speak with him. To posit the existence of the other … is already to have accepted this existence, to have taken account of it. "To have accepted," "to have taken account," do not come back to comprehension[!] . . . It is a question of perceiving the function of language not as subordinate to the consciousness that one has of the presence of the other … but rather as the condition of any conscious grasp.[41]

Levinas rejects the primacy that Heidegger attributed to ontology when it reduces the Other's existence to the existence of the Self. He argues that to speak of existence is to presuppose the existence of speech – approach to the other, that is to say the moment of being, or recognizing being, is a dialogical moment; "To comprehend a person is already to speak with him" – "thought is inseparable from expression."[42] In dialogue, the Self attributes Being beyond the horizon of the Self's consciousness or "totality" to the Other. It recognizes a Being whose consciousness is completely independent from itself. Theodore De Boer explains that Levinas's refutation utilizes a "transcendental framework." Because it is necessary for the Self to attribute existence to the Other to engage in dialogue with him, the other must exist.

[41] Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 6.
[42] Ibid., 7.

"Is Ontology Fundamental?" is one of several texts in which Levinas advances a transcendental argument for the existence of the Other. Another argument for the Other may be found in his early lectures which became *Time and the Other*. There, Levinas describes consciousness as originating out of the Ego's recognition of itself. Reminiscent of Heidegger's *Dasein*, Levinas applies an original term "*hypostasis*"[43] (Greek; literally "standing over") to differentiate the initial act of self-consciousness from that of his philosophical adversary. *Hypostasis* acts as a platform from which the Ego transcends to assimilate substance from the exterior material world into the Self. Yet *hypostasis* is also confined by the Ego – the Ego is "riveted to itself."[44] Levinas writes, "… the existent's anonymous existing becomes an enchainment to the self."[45] Consciousness must be sustained through hypostasis through "work," which reduces the Ego to "pain and sorrow."[46] Pain and sorrow precipitate the Ego's recognition of the Self's mortality, but Levinas will intuit from the possibility of death the necessity of existence beyond the Self. "Death becomes the limit of the subject's virility, the virility made possible by the hypostasis at the heart of anonymous being…"[47] Because the Self dies when its consciousness ceases, the Self can never be conscious of its death. Therefore, death is "absolutely unknowable" to the Self. It proves "existence is pluralistic",[48] that something must exist beyond ourselves, "whose entire being is constituted by its exteriority."[49] This allows for the possibility of a future beyond the Self's mortality. Herein, Levinas asserts, "the other

[43] Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, 43n6. Richard Cohen references D.J. O'Connor's description of *hypostasis's* etymology in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Macmillan: 1972). On page 36, O'Connor writes that the Latin word *substantia* (Eng. substance) is a literal translation of the Greek word *hypostasis* (lit. "standing under"). O'Conner mentions that the term is a derivative of the Greek word *ousia* (property) which was first used by Aristotle, and the *hypostasis* was employed in later Greek philosophy and occurs in the early Christian theologians' discussions about "the real nature of Christ." Cohen goes on to clarify, *hypostasis* was first given a philosophical connotation by the late Greek philosopher Plotinus, the father of neo-Platonism. To that, I add that Levinas makes one of his rare references to Plotinus in his essay "Transcendence and Height" in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Readings* by mentioning that Plotinus used the term to describe the Soul's relationship with ideas while "for Plato, the soul is wedded to the Ideas." (p. 13) Still, it is clear that Levinas's own use of this term intends his specific innovative understanding.
[44] Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, 57.
[45] Ibid., 67.
[46] Ibid., 68.
[47] Ibid., 74.
[48] Ibid., 75.
[49] Ibid., 76.

is the future."[50] Even before encountering a human other, Levinas is able to demonstrate that the Other's existence is essential to Self in providing the means to escape a solitary existence and the possibility of a future. Thus, the Ego recognizes that protecting the existence of the Other is necessary to ensure its future.

These early writings of Levinas stake out his claim that an Other must exist. In "Is Ontology Fundamental?" he argues the necessity of the Other's existence based on the fact that engagement with the Other signifies its existence prior to comprehension. In *Time and the Other*, the possibility of death by must definition exist beyond consciousness, therefore something Other than consciousness must exist to allow for the possibility of a future beyond the Self's being. Following an argument for the existence of the Other, both works focus on what Levinas refers to as "the face of the (human) Other."

Levinas's philosophy inevitably ascribes onto the Self infinite responsibility for the Other. While the Other usually may be understood as another human, the Other more specifically means an object that I recognize as Being distinct from my own being to which I am ethically obligated to "let be"; namely, not to deprive it of its Being-ness. Contrary to Heidegger, Levinas asserted the Other must not be understood, but, moreover, cannot be understood. He writes, "A being is a human being and it is as a neighbor that a human being is accessible – as a face."[51] The face does not refer to physiognomy, a collection of physical features which allow it to be recognized as human. Rather, the face of the Other signifies Being which by its definition must remain independent of the Self – outside of comprehension. He writes, "Possession is the mode whereby a being, while existing, is partially denied." "A partial negation is violence." Moreover, "the (human) Other is the sole being whose negation can only announce itself as total: as *murder*."[52] One might question whether Levinas's

[50] Ibid., 77.
[51] Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 9.
[52] Ibid.

application of the terms "violence" and "murder" are meant literally or hyperbolically? In logical terms, comprehension of the Other reduces the Other to a set of features distillable to the Self's consciousness. By comprehending, it destroys the quality that makes the Other other. Thus, the comprehension of the Other could be understood as a murder of the "personhood" of the human Other; however, Levinas's choice of terms foreshadows the deeper ethical significance inherent in how he understands one's relation with the Other.

The face does not allow the Other to be generalized. It remains particular to the unique characteristics of every unique Other. Levinas explains, "The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, 'the widow and the orphan,' whereas I am rich and powerful."[53] His philosophy posits that the face of the Other presents itself as an infinite demand upon the Self. The infiniteness of the face of the Other's demand is a double *entendre*. It signifies both the fact that the Other's Being originates outside the totality of the Self, and also the inexhaustibility of the Self's obligation to ethically concern itself with sustaining the Other's alterity. As we saw, intentionality strips the Other of its exteriority by comprehending it as knowledge contained by our consciousness. Therefore, the moment the Other is understood it is no longer outside us and becomes a part of us. It is deprived of its alterity, the very quality that makes it other. Therefore, Levinas writes, "The first word of the face is the 'Thou shalt not kill.' "[54] Levinas explains, "The face is a living presence; it is expression … The face speaks."[55] The most paradigmatic manner whereby face-to-face presents itself to us is speech. In "Transcendence and Height," Levinas writes:

> The epiphany of the Absolutely Other is a face by which the Other challenges and commands me through his nakedness, through his destitution. He challenges me from his humility and from his height.[56]

---

[53] Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays,* 83.
[54] Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000), 89.
[55] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 66.
[56] Levinas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 17.

He describes the Other as commanding us "with humility," but from a "height." The Other does not threaten with its demands, but rather engenders empathy precisely because it is "naked" and vulnerable. In the essay "Substitution," Levinas writes, "It is through the condition of being a hostage that there can be pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity in the world…"[57] This relationship, face-to-face with the vulnerability of the Other, produces a responsibility so dramatic that the Self is taken "hostage" by the Other (*viz.* the Self is stripped of its identity); it substitutes its own needs for the needs of the Other. More than empathy, the result of the face-to-face relationship which Levinas describes is an imperative to act. In *Otherwise than Being*, Alphonso Lingis explains:

> To acknowledge the imperative force of the other is to put oneself in his place, not in order to appropriate one's objectivity, but in order to answer his need, to supply for his want with one's own substance. It is, materially, to give sustenance to the another, "to give to the other the bread from one's own mouth."[58]

The phenomenon of substitution produces an exact reversal of Heidegger's description of the Being of *Dasein*'s anxiety which causes him to comprehend objects according to their usefulness to him. For Levinas, our own vulnerability substitutes for the Other, and we are drawn into the ethical relation of the face-to-face. The Other must be respected for its particularity. It cannot be generalized. Levinas writes:

> In the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship … The Other as Other … is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity. The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, "the widow and the orphan," whereas I am the rich or the powerful.[59]

The force by which needs of the Other substitute for our own needs is the vulnerability from which the face of the Other calls to us. It commands us to respond because of its vulnerability. Herein, in Levinas's words, "The face presents itself, and demands justice."[60] The call of the face

---

[57] *Ibid.* 91.
[58] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000), xxii. The metaphor, "giving the bread from one's mouth," is common throughout the book. It occurs on pages, 64, 72, 74, 77, 79, 138, and 142.
[59] Levinas, *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*, 83.
[60] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 294.

issues a demand that we sacrifice our own substance in response to the Other's vulnerability. Therefore, the "first philosophy" of any call from the Other is ethics.

This philosophy of infinite responsibility for the Other, that making ethics present must be the first concern of any interpersonal interaction, influences every element of Levinas's work, both his philosophical and his non-philosophical work. As we shall see, even the conclusion of his Talmudic lecture, "The Temptation of Temptation," brings us back to this ethical principal.

The Temptation of Temptation

The priority of ethics permeates all of Levinas's thought, even his non-philosophical works. This is certainly true of the Talmudic lectures "The Temptation of Temptation" and "Model of the West" that are examined in this thesis. Although Levinas structures all of his Talmudic lectures around a selected passage of Talmud and describes his commentaries as "an attempt to translate Talmudic discourse into modern language,"[61] one should not doubt that Levinas's comments on each passage are guided and informed by his philosophy. The concepts Levinas develops through interpreting these passages are worthy of examination, and the insights contained in the two lectures I have selected have potential for application in contemporary American Judaism.

Levinas used the term of "the Temptation of Temptation," for which his lecture is named, to signify a condition which entices Western man toward a life which is absent of existential moral certitude.[62] Western culture is a common trope in Levinas's writing, but one which we have not directly addressed yet. Michael Morgan offers a comprehensive explanation:

> Throughout his career, Levinas understood Western culture and society as a combination of two worlds, the biblical and the Greek – what others have called Hebraism and Hellenism or Athens and Jerusalem. Levinas … has his own special way of interpreting this trope … and his own way of envisioning it in order to estimate the value of Jews and Judaism for Western culture (and world culture).[63]

Morgan's explanation intuits how Western culture is presented in Levinas's 1964 Talmudic lecture, "The Temptation of Temptation." In this lecture, Levinas draws a critique of Western culture to which he intends to propose a solution drawn from his commentary on the text of Shabbat 88a and 88b. His critique emerges from his exposition of Western culture without faith as being stricken by the ethical indeterminacy of the Temptation of Temptation. Levinas understands

[61] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 39.
[62] Ibid., 32.
[63] Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 336.

the Temptation of Temptation to be a product of the temptation experienced by Western man and an ill-conceived philosophy which demurs any action undertaken as "naïve spontaneity."[64]

Levinas characterizes the condition of Western man as pervaded by temptation. "He is for an open life, eager to try everything, to experience everything, 'in a hurry to live. Impatient to feel.' "[65] He defines temptation, not by the common understanding akin to moral taboos, but rather as the multiplicity of experiences modernity offers to derive pleasure. These drive Western man to continually search for novel ways of life; the ego "assures itself a continual disengagement."[66] – it jumps from one thing to the other without being entirely committed. Levinas further states, "In the whole as a totality, evil is added to good. To traverse the whole, to touch the depth of being, is to awaken the ambiguity coiled inside it."[67] To avoid evil, Western culture offers two strategies. The first strategy is to adopt the moral precepts stipulated by a faith, but one would then be naïvely accepting those precepts without knowing their veracity. The second strategy is to follow a course of philosophical inquiry so that the merit of any action may be weighed, but as we shall see, the path of philosophical inquiry degenerates into an interminable vicious cycle without a precept to anchor it.

Levinas understood this condition of being tempted to characterize both modern Jews and Christians. Christianity offers a "dramatic" intimation of temptation as a struggle and ultimately a triumph over temptation through embracing Jesus.[68] On the other hand, Jews have no easy way to escape temptation. In fact, they are drawn more to the temptation of Western culture as they are bored by Judaism's "flat calm," experienced as the dispassionate observance of religious

[64] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings,* 35.
[65] Ibid., 32.
[66] Ibid., 34.
[67] Ibid., 33.
[68] Ibid.

regulations.[69] They find themselves in a situation not dissimilar from the one who chooses the path of philosophical inquiry.

Western culture (including Christianity) idealizes knowledge (namely, investigation and examination) as a means to discern good from evil temptations. Yet, knowledge has its limitations. Levinas explains:

> Philosophy … can be defined as the subordination of any act to the knowledge that one may have of that act, knowledge being precisely this merciless demand to bypass nothing, to surmount the congenital narrowness of the pure act, making up in this manner for its dangerous generosity. The priority of knowledge is the Temptation of Temptation.[70]

Levinas criticizes philosophy for valuing the knowledge of an act over the experience of that act. Every act is subjected to the scrutiny of philosophical investigation to avoid the danger of acting naïvely, yet "the congenital narrowness of the pure act" – the impossibility of perfectly capturing everything about a phenomenon with the use of philosophical inquiry, leads the one tempted by temptation to a dead end. Real actions cannot be perfectly translated into theoretical constructs. Inevitably, this obsessive insistence on foreknowledge results in a vicious cycle where no action is taken, and Levinas will argue that the interminability of pure philosophical investigation has ethical consequences. He alludes to Heidegger's flawed reduction of the Other, which we examined in the previous section. He states, "From this stems the inability to recognize the other person as [an] other person…"[71] Just as the Other is irreducible to the same, so too are actions irreducible to a set of consequences. Therefore, the Temptation of Temptation also leads to ethical indeterminacy. Levinas writes, "The temptation of temptation is philosophy, in contrast to a wisdom which knows everything without experiencing it."[72] The wisdom Levinas refers to is the wisdom of the Talmudic Rabbis. Levinas will draw from the Talmud an alternative for escaping the Temptation of Temptation. He suggests, "Perhaps the demand for truth which legitimates this temptation of

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 35.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

curiosity can find purer paths."[73] The alternative provided will neither turn its back on reason nor demand a naïve adherence to faith.

Levinas draws upon a passage from Shabbat 88a and 88b for his commentary. The Talmudic text revolves around an important traditional religious teaching of the Jewish religion: the interpretation of the Hebrew phrase, "we will do and we will hear" ("*na'aseh v'nishma*"), which is the Israelites' response at the moment they are called upon to accept the Torah.[74] The pledge reverses the normal sequence of entering a contract. Should not a contract's contents be understood before one agrees to them? Levinas will read the rabbis' discussion so as to interpret this text so that it responds to Western man's situation and offers a way forward.

Levinas begins his commentary with Rav Abdimi's teaching that God lifted Mount Sinai off the ground, suspended it over the Israelites, and threatened to crush them beneath it at the moment of revelation, stating "If you accept the Torah, all is well, if not here will be your grave."[75] Although Levinas preserves the term Torah which appears in the Talmudic commentary, his use of Torah may be understood as an example of universal truth. Thus, the discussion of Torah throughout this lecture and its acceptance through non-freedom will ultimately provide an analogy to overcome the Temptation of Temptation.

Levinas explains that Torah, the content of revelation, confers freedom of choice upon the Israelites; namely, the freedom to act prior to knowledge. Levinas interprets Rav Abdimi's teaching to mean, "Torah … cannot come to the human being as a result of choice. That which must be received in order to make freedom of choice possible cannot have been chosen, unless after the

[73] Ibid.
[74] Exodus 24:7.
[75] Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Shabbat 88a. The Talmudic text is arranged like a dialogue. Statements are frequently voiced in the name of specific early rabbis. This thesis includes the names of those rabbis without bibliographical information as a device to reference the passage.

fact."[76] Rav Abdimi describes the Jews as being coerced at Mount Sinai to accept the Torah. Levinas will use this fact to teach that just as they were able to accept the Torah without foreknowledge of its contents, so too, choosing to act prior to knowledge is possible. Moreover, Levinas writes, "Adherence to it would not coexist side by side with the internal adherence which works through evidence. The first, Revelation, would condition the Second."[77] Although Torah itself could not be freely chosen, its contents legitimate its acceptance. Similarly, when one engages the Other in dialogue, one has no choice but to legitimate the Other's existence, yet it is being forced into dialogue which makes one free to acknowledge the Other – an acknowledgement which would otherwise be impossible on the basis of philosophical investigation. Although the Talmudic passage confines Levinas to speaking about the Torah, Levinas intends to develop universal inferences out of this text. Nevertheless, Levinas suggests the impetus to act may be deduced regardless of the presence of literal coercion – regardless of whether the Other imposes it existence through dialogue. He argues, whether or not the Torah was imposed on the Israelites under literal threat of death or a figurate threat such as "outside the Torah Judaism sees nothing but desolation," Israel is led to a "rational and free" decision to accept the Torah; in both cases; "the free choice of the Torah was made without any possibility of temptation."[78] So too, one may choose to act, and do so sensibly, prior to knowledge.

Throughout his commentary, the truth of Torah parallels the truth of an ethical order that underlies all existence. Rav Ahha bar Jacob teaches that Rav Abdimi's teaching warns of dire consequences should one reject the Torah. Levinas concurs with the warning, explaining the Torah's rejection to be equivalent to giving in to the Temptation of Temptation. Refusing to accept Torah amounts to "giving oneself over to the infinite and irresistible temptations of irresponsibility."

[76] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings,* 37.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 39.

Therefore, the refusal of the temptation "should not be defined negatively," but rather as an affirmation of Torah.[79] The continuation of the Talmudic passage recalls just such a moment in the Book of Esther where the Jews' affirmation of the Torah amounts to a rejection of violence. Edith Wyschogrod explains Levinas, "Exposed to the perils of violence that belong to ontology as such, only Torah has the power to resist violence."[80] Thus Levinas interprets the continuation of the Talmud to teach, "The world is here so that the ethical order has the possibility of being fulfilled. The act by which the Israelites accept the Torah is the act which gives meaning to reality."[81] Only a pre-ontological affirmation of truth can give purpose to reality. Such an affirmation transcends subjectivity in revealing that the entire universe is subordinated "to the ethical order."[82] Herein, Levinas explains Rav Simai's comment to mean that one is rewarded to the extent that he accepts and abides by that order, whereas failure to abide by that order "does not question the certainty of good and evil" unless that failure stems from an outright rejection which returns one to the Temptation of Temptation.[83] Nevertheless, redemption, the refusal of temptation, remains available to individuals who currently deny the ethical order, because the truth of that order endures regardless of whether anyone accepts it. Subsequently, Levinas argues, even during "those times in which Judaism is practiced or studied only by a tiny minority;"[84] even though the ethical order may be ignored by all but a few, the truth which gives order to the universe remains true. One need not be Jewish to be redeemed from temptation, but Levinas sees Torah as a means to the ethical order for escaping it.

The next portion of Levinas's commentary responds to the criticism that accepting a principal without knowing its veracity amounts to dangerous childish naivety. Contrary to this

[79] Ibid., 38.
[80] Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 211.
[81] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings,* 41.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 42-4.
[84] Ibid., 44.

assertion, Levinas asserts that the act of adhering to an ethical order must precede understanding is on the level of a "secret of angels" rather than "the consciousness of children."[85] Levinas interprets the continuation of the commentary to emphasize this point. Not only did the Israelites accede to accepting the Torah prior to understanding it, the merit of accepting it could be intuited based on the manner in which its truth presents itself. Insofar as it offers itself as a "ripe fruit," "outside any gradual development," it avoids "history and dialectics." Because the Torah is presented without gradual development, it is beyond the grasp of a child who goes through a process of "groping and exploring," as with increasing responsibilities. Moreover, Levinas states that Torah's content must be good; insofar as its acceptance conveys an urgent "undeniable responsibility," it must be good. This responsibly presents itself because "The Torah is given in the Light of the face." "Integral knowledge or Revelation (the receiving of the Torah) is ethical behavior."[86] Integral, meaning that acceptance prior to Torah is essential for completeness. Thus, Levinas explains Rav's response to the Saducee in the final segment of the passage as a warning to the one tempted by temptation:

> The structure of a subjectivity clinging to the absolute: the knowledge which takes its distance, the knowledge without faith, is *logically* tortuous; examining prior to adherence – excluding adherence, indulging in temptation – is, above all a degeneration of reason, and only as a result of this, the corruption of morality.[87]

Levinas arranges the Temptation of Temptation in logical opposition to the manner in which the Israelites accept the Torah; namely, "*na'aseh v'nishma."* The Temptation of Temptation contorts knowledge by holding it up to a logically impossible standard. By distancing itself from the idea that ethics is possible, the Temptation of Temptation itself is what corrupts morality. As a "subjectivity clinging to the absolute" it succumbs to moral relativism. Likewise, denying the existence of integral knowledge "is to close one's eyes to the secret of the ego," and "a destruction of the crust of being." Levinas goes so far as to say that "all the suffering of the world" results from

[85] Ibid., 45.
[86] Ibid., 46-7.
[87] Ibid., 48.

"this impossibility of escaping" the moral relativism of the Temptation of Temptation, which "brings about the very separation"[88] – of the one tempted by temptation from engaging in an ethical relationship with the Other.

Equal and opposite to the distortion brought about by the Temptation of Temptation is the "uprightness" *(temimut)* of that which affirms the truth contained within the essence of Being. Levinas suggests Torah to be paradigmatic of this uprightness as "an order to which the ego adheres, without having had to enter it, an order beyond being and choice." Adhering to this order confers responsibility to "a being of which the ego was not the author": [89] a being whose alterity places it outside the confines the self, namely the Other.

Just as Levinas's argument for the existence of an Other in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" (pages 15-17) pivots on a transcendental principal that engaging with the Other in dialogue presupposes our commitment to the existence of the Other, an escape from the Temptation of Temptation requires one to select and adhere to a principle unknowable through ordinary reason whose metaphysical truth is evident in the manner of its presentation. The Talmudic commentary traces the same themes which can be found in Levinas's philosophy, even as they extend to the structure of his argument. Nevertheless, Levinas's "The Temptation of Temptation" deepens our grasp of the possibility and manner of action by which the truth contained in integral knowledge may be embraced prior to temptation.

[88] Ibid., 49.
[89] Ibid.

Model of the West

Levinas interpreted Shabbat 88 in "The Temptation of Temptation" to mean that the Israelites' acceptance of Torah demonstrated that Western man could soundly adopt an integral principal without permitting the Temptation of Temptation. Levinas argued that the acceptance of Torah affirmed that the world is good because the Torah was received absent of any gradual development. In this section, Levinas will take this insight further by arguing the Other's existence also cannot be called into question by the historicism which dominates Western thought.

Historicism may generally be understood as a theory that significances of social and cultural phenomena are limited to the historical moment of their existence. As opposed to inquiries into universal truth, historicism limits truth to historical facts about those phenomena. All truths become relative truths – true merely to specific groups at specific times and places – and historicism denies the judgment of any value claim. It is this later aspect of historicism that Levinas as especially problematic "false Messianisms."[90]

Levinas's rejection of historicism will be a central theme of this section. Just as Levinas argued the Israelites' moment of revelation made possible an alternative to the Temptation of Temptation, he will argue that the holy permanence Israel established through its priestly service proposes an alternative to the concepts of historicism, which prevent an ethical response to the call of the Other.

In "Model of the West," Levinas explains that historicism "relativizes and devalues every moment." It attributes to history the privilege of evaluating the significance of moments. Historicism may be able to produce "a mathematically perfect science," but it is incapable of conveying the "permanence in time," the eternal significance of the bond Israel forged in that

[90] Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (London: Continuum, 2007), 17.

"moment of holiness," which escapes all relativity by giving structure to the whole of "concrete human reality."[91] Levinas's lecture interprets the text of Tractate Menachot, pages 99b and 100a of the Babylonian Talmud, to explain how Israel's preparation and presentation of the shewbread (*lechem ha-panim*) ritually conferred a permanent value on those moments. Levinas will extract features of this act which suggest the possibility of an alternative to historicism.

The Talmudic text Levinas comments on begins with the *mishna* that describes the priestly procedure for replacing the loaves of shewbread in the sanctuary, which the Torah decreed must be atop the golden table in God's sacred space always (*tamid*) (Ex. 25:30). Before commenting on the actual Talmudic passage, Levinas proposes that the shewbread symbolically signifies the king's responsibility for "feeding the people." He explains, "Men's hunger is the first function of politics."[92] The bread's name reinforces the significance of this political responsibility. The literal translation of *lechem ha-panim* is "bread of faces," which Rabbi Ibn Ezra explains as "bread which is always before the face of God." Levinas comments that the bread thus signifies a "horizontal" dimension of man's responsibility to feed each other and a "vertical" dimension of giving divine value to the act. Thus, actions which attribute permanent value "originate in the same movement" to establish "the relation between the Spirit and the food of men."[93] The encounter with the face of the Other, which is also an encounter with God, gives meaning to human existence.

As Levinas begins to comment on the Talmud, he draws out the features by which the ritual of the shewbread gains its significance as a moment to which permanent value, immune to the relativizing forces of history, is established. In the *mishna* which begins the passage, the rabbis add details to the biblical account of the shewbread which expand the scope of the ritual's permanence. They describe two additional tables, one of gold and one of marble, which sit on the portico at the

[91] Ibid., 17.
[92] Ibid., 18.
[93] Ibid., 19.

entry of the Tent of Meeting, and explain that once the shewbread had been transferred from the marble table outside to the gold table inside, it cannot be returned to the marble table because of the principle that "what is holy we must raise (in honor) but not bring down." Levinas explains that the principle is intended to "never vulgarize" the ahistorical value "sublimated from an ageing value."[94] He asserts that "the elevation is the proper signification of a value's duration."[95] Levinas explains that "duration" signifies that "the life of value is a holy history." It resists being captured by "the historical relativity of values and their questioning" which leads to "an incessant collapse of values … a history without permanence or a history without holiness."[96] Levinas proposed that permanent valuation was the alternative to historicism.

The continuation of the Talmudic passage offers Levinas the opportunity to comment on additional features of the ritual which signify its permanence. The priests' procedure for replacing the old shewbread with fresh shewbread is explained as a coordination which ensures the bread is always before God – "there was no moment when the table was uncovered" – and the priests face each other as they carry in the new shewbread and carry out the old. Levinas explains, "The continuity is ensured by the solidarity constituted around" the communal objective of establishing the permanent significance of the ritual.[97] Levinas connects the concepts of permanence and community to engagement in holy work. Here, the interpersonal is not a single face-to-face encounter, but involves the dedication in that moment to pursue a shared goal.

The next section of the Talmudic passage expands the notion of permanence. It begins by recalling a *baraita* in which Rabbi Jose teaches that although there was no harm in allowing the table of the shewbread to remain empty overnight, the statement "before me continually" directs the

---

[94] Ibid., 20.
[95] Levinas and Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 27. Levinas considered "duration" which Bergson introduces in Chapter 2 of *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, to be his "principal contribution to philosophy."
[96] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, 21.
[97] Ibid., 22-23.

priests to keep bread on it continuously. Levinas intuits from this teaching the possibility of "permanence without temporal continuity."[98] This permanence is not a historical notion; rather it is timeless. So long as community members remain committed in solidarity to the community, the value they confer is retained. He explains the significance that this absence not be permitted overnight – the night threatens the "economic solidarity" of society with "disintegration and individualism." It a "warning" to modern States of the danger that "anarchy" poses.[99] Just as the shewbread symbolized the king was responsible for feeding the people, modern times require states to commit to caring for their most vulnerable citizens to make ethics a permanent value.

The passage continues by explaining how the Rabbis maintained this permanence after the functioning Temple and priesthood ceased to exist. The two Talmudic passages which follow discuss permanence as it pertains to the statements that even if a man learns but one chapter [of Torah] in the morning and one chapter in the evening…, and even if a man but reads the Shema morning and evening, he has thereby fulfilled the precept of "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth."[100] Levinas explains that these teachings signify that the "permanence of daily regularity and the permanence of study" ensure continuity regardless of an interruption.[101] In Judaism, regular study and liturgical rituals maintain the permanence originally established by the priestly cult. Levinas comments, "Intellectual life can become cult and the supreme form of spiritual life." Levinas explains that rabbinic Judaism replaced the priestly rituals, such as that of the shewbread, with prayer and Torah study. Those activities secure the permanent holiness of the Jewish tradition once imparted by the priestly rituals. He explains that these activities evoke "the permanence of a truth." Participation in these rituals ensures the fidelity of individuals even when they are physically separated.

---

[98] Ibid., 23.
[99] Ibid., 24.
[100] Joshua 1:8.
[101] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, 24.

The continuation of the Talmudic passage discusses the threat that "Greek Wisdom" poses to the permanence of the community. The passage includes a story wherein Rabbi Ishmael's nephew asks him if he may study Greek wisdom given that he has "studied the whole of the Torah." Rabbi Ishmael answers quoting Joshua, "*This book of law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.*[102] Go then and find a time that is neither day nor night and learn then Greek wisdom." Levinas explains Ishmael's response that the "culture of the Torah" exceeds the limits of time as "the continuity forbidding all interruption." But what exactly does the forbidden "Greek wisdom" include? Levinas refers to the text of a parallel Talmudic passage, Sotah 49b, which makes a distinction between Greek *wisdom,* which is forbidden, and Greek *language,* which is allowed. Greek language, to the extent that it conveys "clarity of reasoning," is permissible, but Greek wisdom, which entails "purely human knowledge without Torah" to "invert itself into lie and ideology," is not."[103] In previous discussions, Levinas gives examples, such as the reduction of the Other into the Same, or the denial of an integral principle (revelation) which the rabbis would consider Greek wisdom; however, the text will offer yet another way of understanding this concept.

Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani teaches that (contrary to how the Joshua verse "it shall not depart your mouth" has been presented) "This verse is neither duty nor command, but a blessing." Levinas explains a new concept of continuity that emerges from this teaching. "The Torah is the blessing of all that comes from elsewhere." Similar to his comments in the "Temptation of Temptation," Levinas maintains that Torah is "a reason given beyond reason." Its truth is permanently established outside the confines of history. Its permanence "must not be understood in the sense of temporal continuity." Most importantly, Torah contains "the formula on the elevation of 'holy things' "; the formula which is necessary for overcoming historical relativism. Thus, it

[102] Joshua 1:8.
[103] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures,* 27-28.

imparts "the overabundance of blessing."[104] The permanence of Torah has less to do with temporal continuity and more to do with a continuity of consciousness. Therefore, Rabbi Ishmael's statement that there is no time in the day when it is acceptable to abandon Torah may be rephrased to teach that the values conferred in Torah accompany one continually wherever one goes. Levinas explains:

> The Torah that man has learnt takes care of him and asks the Master of the Torah to reveal to man the "whys" of the Torah and its internal organization. The more in the less! A beyond reason given to reason …[105]

Just as in the "Temptation of Temptation," Levinas explained the goodness of revelation to be inherent within its content, here too revelation is a blessing as it protects one steeped in it from the dangers of uncertainty, yet Levinas adds even greater significance to the permanent *non*-historical value conferred by Torah in the continuation of his commentary. He says:

> The Torah is a permanence because it is a debt that cannot be paid. The more you pay your debt, the more in debt you become; in other words, the better you see the extent of what remains to be discovered and done. A category that is to be transposed into the relation with the other man that the Torah teaches: the closer you get to the other, the greater your responsibility towards him becomes. The infinite of duty – which is perhaps the very modality of the relation to the infinite.[106]

Once again, Levinas understands Torah to offer a direct analogy to the Other and the social justice of responsibility to the Other. At this point, there is hardly any doubt that he sees the Torah as a life code which, just as his philosophy, demands infinite concern and care for the Other.

Levinas offers one more important lesson about one way in which Israel brings permanence to the Torah: through the art of persuasion. The Talmudic text moves on to explain Job 36:16. Of this verse, Levinas finds most significant the word, *hasitcha*, which could be translated as "he allures you" or even "he seduces you" but is understood by Levinas to mean "he persuades you." Levinas comments:

> Here is God not teaching you by speaking to your reason, but teaching you and leading you to this 'table full of fatness' by seducing you … This beyond reason would not be just a crude opinion, or an element of faith, but a beyond reason in rational truth itself: a personal relation in the universal and truth. It is in the Torah that you draw near to him who speaks to you personally. Get rid of ideas of malice, of ill will, of deception! The Torah appears here as pure truth, as universal truth, like a thing

[104] Ibid., 28-29.
[105] Ibid., 29.
[106] Ibid., 30.

> unique of its kind, unique to the world. It outlines the irreducible category of a teaching which leads beyond philosophy towards personal presence, towards the personal which perhaps can appear in its originary [meaning: causing existence, original] purity only though the text.[107]

The notion that the face of the Other commands us to act ethically is precisely the same as the concept that Torah persuades us to ethical behavior. Just as Torah overwhelms rational forces, so too the encounter with the Other overwhelms our ability to relate to him rationally. Both persuade us to ethical action, and for that reason Levinas interprets the rabbis' comments to imply that Israel accept Torah as a permanent consciousness.

Three guiding principles have emerged from the study of Levinas in the preceding sections. Through various philosophical texts of Levinas we saw him argue for the primacy of caring for the Other. He describes ethical action as a recognition of the face of the Other which is evident in dialogue and commands us to treat it justly. In "The Temptation of Temptation," we learned the necessity of accepting responsibility for the Other prior to foreknowledge, and the inherent danger of flouting this responsibility. Finally, in "Model of the West," Levinas applies the lessons of the Talmud to escape the relativizing forces of historicism. He teaches that one can escape historicism by instilling permanence to one's values – a permanence that can be instilled through regular commitment to those values, through human solidarity, and through a continual commitment to living according to the ideals one insists upon. In the sections which follow, we apply these lessons to three examples of tensions emerging from congregational life in contemporary American Reform Judaism.

[107] Ibid., 32.

The Other in Contemporary Jewish Congregational Life: Case Studies

The ethical content of this case study and those which follows may be understood through applying Levinasian concepts. The first study seeks primarily to apply Levinas's concept that the Other demands that one respond to its needs to Rabbi Volkman's encounter with Jonah. Levinas articulates the concept of the response to the Other in great detail throughout his philosophy, but we will specifically connect it to the tension found between it and the Temptation of Temptation, which prioritizes philosophical understanding and insight of universal truths over the proper application of those truths as ethical precepts.

Case Study 1: Jonah

Jonah grew up as an only child in a Midwestern Reform Jewish family. Although his parents were not religious – his father Ben considered himself agnostic and his mother Marjorie was an atheist – they were nevertheless involved in the Jewish community. Marjorie, a high school art teacher and weaver, was active in their temple's Sisterhood; Ben, a creative and hard-working businessman who had become wealthy importing goods to the United States from Asia, made generous contributions to the Jewish community in the family's name. Ben traveled frequently, and when Jonah was ten his parents divorced when Marjorie discovered that Ben was having an affair. Ben remained active in Jonah's life, teaching him photography and taking him on overseas business trips and a safari in Africa.

Jonah majored in film studies in college and eventually became a critically acclaimed screenwriter in California. He dated but never married, and made little effort to involve himself in Judaism. When he was 36, Jonah received a phone call from his mother with the news that his father had suffered a fatal heart attack at the age of 63. Jonah flew home, devastated and heartbroken.

Before the funeral, Rabbi Volkman, the current rabbi of the congregation Jonah grew up in, sat with Jonah and spoke with him about his father's life. He explained what would occur during the funeral and described a few of the Jewish customs of mourning. Jonah's father was highly respected in the community and his funeral was well attended. That evening, Rabbi Volkman officiated at a *shivah* service at his father's home. At the conclusion of the service, he approached Jonah to offer his condolences, and Jonah asked if he could speak with him for a moment. As the two of them walked outside, the Rabbi said to Jonah, "With how close you were to your father, it is important for your emotional well-being that you mourn his loss properly."

Jonah began to tear up as he confessed, "Rabbi Volkman, I see you and I realize how little I know about Judaism . Will you help me connect to Judaism?"

"Jonah, it takes a long time to learn how to connect to Judaism, but I would be happy to put you in touch with some of my colleagues in California," Rabbi Volkman replied.

Jonah's tears turned to sobs as he said, "But Rabbi, I need help. I don't even know where to begin mourning."

At that moment Rabbi Volkman recognized that his attempt to quickly refer Jonah to a colleague had not treated Jonah's request with the respect it deserved. He reflected and understood he had been strongly inclined to pre-judge Jonah as a troubled soul. The rabbi gently placed his hands on Jonah's shoulders and said, "Take a deep breath, Jonah. I will teach you something you can start with when you go to services to say the mourner's *qaddish*." He continued, "The last sentence of the *qaddish*, which you recite for eleven months when mourning for a parent, is about 'shalom.' Shalom, as you know, means 'peace,' but its root has additional meanings of wholeness and completeness. When you say the *qaddish*, concentrate on that last word. If you would like to give me a call this week, I would be happy to set up a time to speak more."

"Thank you, Rabbi," said Jonah.

"It's my honor," Rabbi Volkman responded with a smile and a hug.

In this scenario, a tension emerges between Rabbi Volkman's desire to protect his time – he offers to put Jonah in touch with rabbis in California – and to observe the precepts of Emmanuel Levinas to respond to the needs of the Other. Just as Levinas describes, it is Rabbi Volkman's recognition of Jonah's vulnerability that compels him to redirect his response so that he is more present to the infinite demands of the Other.

As was explained in previous sections, Levinas's ethical philosophy revolves around hearing a call to respond to the Face of the Other by sacrificing our own needs. While the Face of the Other cannot be identified as a discrete entity of physiognomy or any other feature of a person, the Face of the Other exerts its strongest influences upon us at moments when the Other is vulnerable. Jonah is vulnerable in this situation. He has just lost his father and the effect of that loss upon him detracts from the confidence he displays in his professional career as a screenwriter. On the other hand, Jonah is vulnerable on many levels in his family life due to his parents' divorce when he was ten and the stress that develops around any divorce, which he experienced during his childhood. One might attribute the reason that he never married to the divorce, just as Rabbi Volkman's preconceptions of Jonah as "troubled" led him to disregard Jonah initially, but Levinas would object to these kinds of judgments as a reduction of the Other into typologies which we impose upon the Other. We cannot deduce from any amount of knowledge we have about Jonah why he never married unless we are able to access his consciousness, which of course is impossible. Instead, Levinas mandates that we serve the Other by accepting the Other's situation for what it is and by reserving judgment.

Rabbi Volkman's failure initially to recognize the urgency of Jonah's plea might be evaluated on the basis that it is attributable to the Temptation of Temptation. Rabbis occasionally limit their

engagement with congregants to dictating answers to questions of Jewish practice. As important as it is for a rabbi to possess knowledge of Jewish practice, to limit one's role as rabbi to being a font of knowledge is a mistake. Rabbi Volkman appears to make this mistake by interpreting Jonah's desire for a connection to Judaism to a desire for understanding Judaism, whereas what Judah actually wants is for the rabbi to address the pain he is feeling at the loss of his father. Jonah's rejection of Rabbi Volkman's offer of knowledge pushes the Rabbi toward a deep experience of *teshuvah* (the Jewish concept involving repentance and improved future action), that knowledge is simply a tool for achieving something of greater importance; that knowledge leads rabbis to demonstrate and conduct their lives according to Jewish values. As Levinas argues, the primary purpose of knowledge must be to inform ethical action. This issue could be understood in other words: If the knowledge a rabbi has acquired through his or her study is not instantiated for the purpose of informing the rabbi's conduct, the rabbi has succumbed to the Temptation of Temptation by pursuing knowledge only for knowledge's sake. Thus, it is inappropriate for Rabbi Volkman's first comment to be to implore Jonah to learn. Such a statement prioritizes knowledge over actions and reflects the Temptation of Temptation. He suggests to Jonah that knowing how to mourn properly will help him overcome his loss, rather than recognizing that it is he who must respond to Jonah.

One might find it surprising that a rabbi would be tempted by the Temptation of Temptation. Yet, it is precisely a person burdened with enormous professional responsibility, such as a rabbi, who would need to be receptive to the ethical imperatives contained in Levinas's thought. Rabbis, especially, must maintain a balance between being conscientious pastors to the seemingly infinite needs of their congregants, not to mention their own families. While Levinas recognizes this challenge in his discussion of the third party and politics, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. If we confine ourselves to the encounter between Jonah and Rabbi Volkman, it is Jonah's call and Rabbi Volkman's struggle to first recognize and then respond to that call which is the principle issue of

consideration. To that extent, it is not until Jonah begins to sob that Rabbi Volkman is compelled to offer what Levinas would deem an ethical response. It is fitting that the rabbi should be forced to respond to Jonah's needs through dialogue, as dialogue, in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" is the primary mode in which the face of the Other presents itself to us. When Rabbi Volkman recognizes that his capacity to respond to Jonah's pain in that moment is beyond the totality of what he understands, he yields himself to responding to the other beyond his understanding. The rabbi's reduction of Jonah's capacity to overcome his loss to a dichotomy of knowledge or no knowledge sharpens Jonah's agony. When he witnesses Jonah's suffering, Rabbi Volkman has an epiphany of the face of the Other. It presents him with a choice: respond ethically to Jonah's urgent cry for help or risk ignoring and therefore "killing" Jonah.

Jonah's sobs compel Rabbi Volkman to physically console him, placing his hands upon his shoulders, along with other gestures of comfort, but it also provides him with the impetus to offer the first piece of information in a way which can help Jonah take the first step toward processing the loss of his father. The lesson the Rabbi offers Jonah on the mourner's *qaddish* is simple enough to impart in a brief moment and profound enough to help Jonah begin working on filling in the gaps in his Jewish knowledge. One might recognize that the lesson offered by this rabbi is somewhat traditional, and rabbis certainly vary in temperament and traditionalism. This lesson on the *qaddish* may not be meaningful to every rabbi; however, it is important for every rabbi to have simple lessons, comforting statements, and other strategies to draw from in different circumstances. Jonah has already expressed his desire to understand Jewish practice, and so it would seem appropriate for any rabbi to share a Jewish lesson in this moment. Rabbi Volkman's lesson is timely and appropriate as it relates to the process of mourning, which Jonah has a need to understand in his circumstances, and he ends the conversation by emphasizing his availability to continue the conversation according to Jonah's desires.

Levinas, too, undoubtedly was influenced by the multiple valances of the Hebrew word *shalom* in his writing. The entire purpose of the surrender of one's own needs to the Face of the Other is to give to the Other what the Other requires to be whole. Therefore, Rabbi Volkman's inevitable response in this interaction with Jonah is representative of the Rabbi's *teshuvah* as it responds to the needs of the Face of the Other by respecting the Other's irreducibility.

The next case study offers an additional scenario where lessons from Levinas's theory of the Other can be applied to congregational settings. Here, the Levinasian application is connected most directly to lessons learned through our reading of "Model of the West." The scenario examines the consequences a community experiences by improperly associating its value with its ability to attract new members rather than associating its value with its ability to convey the holiness of the Jewish tradition through the maintenance of permanent ideals, in this case, permitting the casual newcomer to sufficiently experience the congregation without being implored to make a commitment to become a member.

Case Study 2: Hannah

Temple Shaarei Simcha, a small Reform Jewish congregation, prided itself on its friendliness and inclusivity, but for many years had been struggling to grow and, indeed, had lost members. Rarely did visitors attend their services, but the culture of the congregation was to do everything possible to make visitors feel welcome. One rare Shabbat, a young woman whom no one recognized entered the sanctuary midway through the service and sat quietly in the last row. After services, two women on the membership committee, Rachel and Leah, approached the young woman, whose name was Hannah, at the Oneg reception. They told Hannah how happy it made them she had come. Rabbi Arje also stopped by and introduced herself to Hannah, who told the rabbi that she

was Jewish and that she had just moved to the area. Rabbi Arje welcomed her to the area and told her she was welcome at Shaarei Simcha any time.

The following Shabbat, Hannah appeared at services again and Rachel and Leah again approached her at the Oneg. They eagerly said how happy they were to see her and asked her if she enjoyed the service. Hannah affirmed she enjoyed it. They then told her the congregation was looking for new members and asked her if she was interested in becoming a member. Hannah politely answered saying that she would think about it. As soon as their conversation ended, Hannah left. For weeks Rachel and Leah – and the rabbi – hoped Hannah would appear again at Shabbat services, but she never did.

Unfortunately, Temple Shaarei Simcha appears not to gained a new member in Hannah. Initially, one may analyze the situation and develop a hypothesis about the outcome, yet this analysis will have its limitations. Something went awry during Hannah's second visit to the congregation. As we also saw in the analysis of Rabbi Volkman's interaction with Jonah, Levinas finds one imperative of an ethical encounter with the Face of the Other to be that the Other is not objectified and remains irreducible in its alterity. Rachel and Leah's behavior toward Hannah in their second interaction appears unethical. They pressured her to join the congregation to serve its interest in reversing its declining membership. They failed to see that Hannah in time may have indeed joined Shaarei Simcha had they permitted the holiness created within the context of their congregation to attract new members rather than force new members to join their ranks. Levinas would point out that Rachel and Leah subsumed Hannah's interests into their own and those of the congregation and therefore it is only natural that Hannah would stop attending Shaarei Simcha's services.

Just as in the previous example, a tension prevents the congregants and rabbi from responding ethically to the call of the Other. This tension is one that is real and experienced

frequently by congregations – unaffiliated Jews sometimes attempt to take advantage of a temple's resources without becoming members – unfortunately, this tension distances those congregations from their primary mission of instilling holiness in the lives of their congregants.

While every congregation must define its position regarding how much access non-members are given to their community and how they ensure that membership has enough perceived value to encourage people to join and encourage members to pay dues, these defensive interests must not be permitted to detract from the overall mission of the congregation. Many congregations like Temple Shaarei Simcha have assumed a culture of friendliness and inclusivity as a strategy for attracting new members, and in these cases it is natural for a tension to emerge between attracting new members through being *hamish*, and protecting the congregation from those looking to exploit it without ever joining. While the merit of this or other strategies is debatable, Levinas conveys an issue with this approach in "Model of the West." In that lecture, he posited that a community is maintained by the solidarity of its members (page 35). Thus, he would object to basing a congregation's health on the size of its membership. A congregation's health is better measured by the effectiveness with which it responds to the needs of its community through the solidarity of its congregants.

One might object that Levinas's understanding contradicts common sense that a congregation's future is ensured by a stable multi-generational membership. Without a sufficient threshold of members, a congregation will face budgetary constraints or programmatic slashes because of insufficient funding. Unlike Levinas, the members of Temple Shaarei Simcha likely view their congregation's shrinking membership with concern that the congregation's future is insecure; yet, their concern is precisely the reason they objectify potential new members such as Hannah according to how they can serve their needs. Whereas Rabbi Volkman's experience of Jonah's vulnerability led him to respond appropriately to the face of the Other, in this scenario, Rachel and Leah's concern for the vulnerability of their synagogue led them – inappropriately and prematurely –

to solicit Hannah for the benefit of the congregation instead of inquiring to learn how the congregation might be able to help Hannah by supplying her with a (presumably) needed source of holiness in her life. Despite the inconclusivity of this analysis, there are helpful insights that can be deduced from this scenario using the lens of Levinas, and the remainder of this commentary is devoted to exploring them.

Levinas's philosophy provides a helpful insight in this scenario. Just as the ethical virtue of two individuals who engage in a relationship can be evaluated based on whether they engage in a face-to-face relationship that subjugates their own needs to one and the Other, the ethical virtue of a congregation can be evaluated on the basis of whether or not its members engage in a face-to-face relationship with each other. Based on the description of the permanence achieved through the solidarity of the priests in "Model of the West," the relationship of those within the congregation to each other can be understood as primary to the relationship of those within to outsiders. The healthy functioning and long-term viability of the congregation is a prerequisite to any engagement with the outside. Nevertheless, members of the congregation are obligated to Levinas's same standards of ethical interactions when they engage with the Other, regardless of whether that Other is a member. To this extent, it may be said that Rabbi Arje's welcoming Hannah to the area and inviting her to participate in Temple Shaarei Simcha without mentioning membership was superior to Rachel and Leah's attempt to initiate Hannah into the group before she was ready. As such, Rabbi Arje's demeanor better reflects the congregation's values of being friendly and welcoming. Perhaps based on this scenario, the leadership of Temple Shaarei Simcha might consider training its members, especially those who fill a vital role on the membership committee, on how they can better demonstrate the values of the congregation through their interactions with non-members.

Congregational issues, like those of any organization, are complex, yet there is potential for guiding the ethical conduct of congregations through identifying goals, through training, and by

setting policy standards. To the extent that ethics is involved, the application of Levinas's thought provides a helpful lens for understanding the ideals of a congregation's ethical interactions to the extent that it contributes to the congregation's mission.

The final scenario expands upon Levinas's theory significantly in its interaction between a rabbi and a congregant. In this last case study, the rabbi will initially struggle to respond to an ethical situation, and eventually become a conduit for presenting the Other to a congregant as the rabbi intervenes in a sensitive situation. The rabbi will use the characteristics of the Other, connected to Levinas's understanding of the height and humility within which the Other presents itself, as well as additional concepts from "Model of the West," to offer an opportunity for redemption to his congregant.

Case Study 3: Harold

Everyone at Congregation Rodef Tzedek loved Harold Schiller. He was an affable and active member of the congregation. His family had been members of the congregation for three generations and he gave generously of his money and time. As a result, Rabbi Cooper was in disbelief when he learned that Harold had the reputation of being a slum landlord. Harold owned Town Rentals, a large apartment management company. A front page article in the local newspaper listed the city's worst landlords, and Town Rentals was ranked in the number one spot.

The situation troubled Rabbi Cooper. He had spent his career arguing for the importance of caring for the vulnerable members of the congregational and larger community; in fact, he usually was the first one to defend them, yet he could not bring himself to confront Harold about his company's newfound infamy because he also believed in the importance of treating every member of his congregation with dignity. Besides, Harold was so well liked the thought of confronting him

seemed politically unwise. What if Harold withdrew his financial support of the congregation? What if he used his popularity to build alliances against Rabbi Cooper? It was not an easy situation, and Rabbi Cooper felt trapped, so, for the time being he did nothing.

One Monday a month later, a woman who said her name was "Sally" left a message on his voicemail asking to speak to him. When he called back, she asked if Harold was a member of the congregation, and when the Rabbi affirmed that he was, she told him she was a tenant of Town Rentals and started to tell her story.

"There was a leak in the apartment above us. For two days, water had dripped from the ceiling above our kitchen. I left a message for Mr. Schiller to ask him to fix the leak, but he didn't pick up. The next day, I called back. He told me he knew about the leak and that it had been fixed, but the next week, the ceiling started to drip water again. Last week, it collapsed. He said someone would be out to fix it but it's been a week and no one has come. I've tried calling and I've tried leaving messages, but he won't pick up at all now." She begged. "Can't you do something? Can't you talk to him?" There was a long silence. Guilt flooded Rabbi Cooper. "Please, Rabbi. Please help," she pleaded.

Suddenly, Rabbi Cooper felt overwhelmed and every attempt to rationalize his hesitancy broke down. He felt he had no choice but to side with this woman whom he had never met. Suddenly he was sure that Harold must be held accountable. Emphatically, he replied, "Sally, I am sorry for your troubles. Please call me again if it is not fixed within a week."

Rabbi Cooper called Harold immediately. He explained calmly, "Harold, a tenant of yours named Sally just called me. She said her ceiling collapsed and you have not fixed it when she asked."

"How did she get your number?" he asked. "I am so sorry, Rabbi. I will tell her not to bother you any more."

"No," the Rabbi said firmly. "What I want is for you to fix her ceiling. Look, I saw that article last month in the newspaper listing Town Rentals among the city's worst slumlords. Don't you feel ashamed?"

Harold was silent.

"Look," explained the Rabbi, "Your business practices are unacceptable. If you don't become a responsible landlord by next Rosh Hashanah, I will dedicate my sermon to this topic, and I will not hesitate to mention your name." With those words Rabbi Cooper hung up the phone.

His mind was spinning, and yet he felt a rush of purpose. He knew how dangerous what he had just done was, but somehow it didn't matter. It seemed as though a weight he had felt for the past month was lifted. It was not long after that Rabbi Cooper learned that Harold had gotten the message.

The next day, Sally called back. She thanked Rabbi Cooper profusely, telling him the repairmen had come. A week later, a contrite letter by Harold appeared in the newspaper. Rabbi Cooper called Harold to congratulate him – and encourage him that there was more work to be done. Over the next year, Harold took it upon himself to change completely the nature of how he managed his business. Through all of this, Rabbi Cooper and Harold's relationship remained among the closest in the congregation.

Not infrequently are rabbis, such as Rabbi Cooper, forced to struggle with consistently applying their ideals and showing fidelity to their members. Rabbi Cooper knew he desired to see Harold hurt no less than Sally, yet it was Sally's phone call that pushed him beyond knowing to action. This is an example of the dichotomy between knowledge and action that Levinas discusses in "The Temptation of Temptation." Moreover, when he finally assumed a position consistent with what he had considered to be the ethics of the Judaism, he felt as though a weight had been lifted.

That Rabbi Cooper ended up doing nothing while he reflected on the situation has additional analogies in Emmanuel Levinas's thought. In "Model of the West," Levinas interpreted the difference between permitted Greek language and forbidden Greek wisdom through his commentary. He described Greek wisdom as being characterized by "rhetoric" and "deceit." Greek wisdom is that which allows one to rationalize away the universal truth of communally held values from the perspective of historicism. It is Greek wisdom that leads Rabbi Cooper to rationalize his tolerance of Harold's business practices – that what the community gains by not risking Harold's membership is greater than what is potentially lost by holding him to a moral standard. Rabbi Cooper's lack of solidarity with the economic ideals of the congregation allowed those values to break down. They became irrelevant, and so he did nothing. It is not until Sally, the desperate tenant, calls that Rabbi Cooper finally comprehends the cost of inaction, but it is Rabbi Cooper's feeling of relief after he confronts Harold that reveals an even greater insight. Levinas describes the forces of historical relativism in "Model of the West" as devaluing. This experience of devaluation is analogous to the weight Rabbi Cooper feels because of his inaction. It is a reminder of the importance of being consistently committed to one's values, and that inaction is unacceptable when an Other requires help.

Another interesting feature of this case study is that it sees Rabbi Cooper transformed into a conduit for presenting Sally's face to Harold. In a sense, Sally is channeled through Rabbi Cooper. Rabbis are responsible for standing up for the rights of the weak and the vulnerable – the proverbial biblical "orphan, widow and stranger" whom Levinas identifies with the Other. In responding to those Others, the rabbi confronts Harold, a congregant of high status who has been observed acting unethically. In doing so, the rabbi too is vulnerable. He risks creating an influential enemy who could withdraw his support from the community, or possibly even use his influence to attack the Rabbi politically. Thus, although Rabbi Cooper positions himself as though it is he who has the power in

the relationship when he confronts Harold, he is actually most vulnerable, and, thus, also presenting himself as the Other. Offering reproach is one of the most challenging things to do, yet Judaism teaches that it is among the most essential features of true friendship. The Torah teaches "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him."[108] In bearing witness to the pain Harold was causing Others, Rabbi Cooper in being an Other to Harold sought to respond to his tenants' needs. Herein, Rabbi Cooper can be seen to be imposing himself as Levinas's Other to provoke a positive change in Harold.

How exactly can we come to understand Rabbi Cooper's imposing himself as the Other as we have in this analysis? To realize this, we must initially recognize that just as the face of the Other is not understood by Levinas to refer to an Other's actual physical features, so too the face of the Other need not be physically present. In this story, I would suggest that the primary Other(s) are those harmed by Harold's business practices. The rabbi reads a story about Harold's mistreatment of his tenants and hears personal testimony. He risks sacrificing his relationship to Harold – not to mention the possibility of Harold's withdrawing financial support from the synagogue – on their behalf. Levinas writes that proximity amplifies the demand of the face of the Other, and for Rabbi Cooper in this scenario, that proximity is first experienced through a newspaper.

Moreover, Levinas offers a means for understanding the ethical significance of Rabbi Cooper's confrontation. In "Model of the West," Levinas also explains that we are commanded to perpetually exhibit holy values in every aspect of our lives. "What is holy must always be raised in holiness and never lowered." This is an important lesson for our communities as many Jews make artificial divisions between their private lives and their religious lives. They understand being Jewish as participating in Jewish religious rituals in a synagogue, but they, like Harold, misconceive that Jewish practice extends to how they live professionally and personally. Even the rabbi makes the

[108] Leviticus 19:17.

mistake of forgetting his values when he identifies himself more as a professional, responsible for remaining in his "clients' " political favor, than as a rabbi. Levinas teaches that Jewish communities are secured when Jews constantly practice elevating their lives to higher levels of holiness.

Just as Levinas used the word *epiphany* when describing recognition of the Other, Rabbi Cooper has an epiphany when speaking to Sally, which leads him to confront Harold. Harold, too, experiences an epiphany when confronted by the rabbi. Just as Levinas argues that people are persuaded to ethical behavior through the presentation of a face rather than through critical thinking, Rabbi Cooper does not attempt to reason with Harold about why his business practices are "unacceptable." He confronts him by telling him they are. Levinas writes that pure truth "outlines the irreducible category of a teaching which leads beyond philosophy towards personal presence."[109] This means a rabbi's responsibility is not merely to teach Jewish knowledge to his or her congregants and not merely to serve his or her congregants. Rather, Levinas teaches, a rabbi's responsibility is in being present and in solidarity with his congregants in order to make the holiness of the knowledge Judaism contains resonate within their congregants in the deepest, most personal way possible. In this way, observing Torah is not only something that defines how Jews ought to live. Ethics and giving oneself to the face of the Other is not something that one ought to do. These are things which we are blessed through doing with a meaningful life.

[109] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures,* 31.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented several aspects Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy of the encounter with the Other as well as analysis of his Talmudic lectures, "the Temptation of Temptation" and "Model of the West," for the purpose of illustrating applications of Levians's theory to the contemporary rabbinate. These applications demonstrate the significant value that Levinas's thought offers to guiding engagement with the Other as it occurs within congregational settings through permitting the Other to infinitely exceed our capacity to understand it, while ensuring ones commitment to that infinite ideal and ensuring knowledge of it is not conflated with action taken to further it.

Despite the significance of these insights, this thesis represents yet a small fraction of the enormous potential a more comprehensive application of Levinas's theory could offer. Just as comments on the passage in "Model of the West" that teaches we must devote ourselves at all times to studying Torah, so too, there are not enough hours in a year to examine all that has been written about Levinas. A considerable array of secondary literature of interest to the author has applied Levinas's thought to vast number of disciplines. Levinas has gained admirers in a broad range of disciplines such as ethics, social justice, feminism, medicine, education, and religion.[110] These works likely contain more insights as to how Levinas's theory may be further applied to Judaism and warrant further study.

Additionally, aspects of Levinas's later philosophy contained in primary sources, in particular, those found in his work *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*,[111] as well as Levinas's

[110] Protestant theologians were the first to take a liking to Levinas's philosophy. Moreover, it should be noted, the author of this thesis is not the first person to attempt to introduce people in Jewish circles to Levinas. For example, Rabbi Ira Stone has sought to emulate Levinas's style of commenting on Talmud to original passages. See: Ira F. Stone, *Reading Levinas/Reading Talmud An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998).
[111] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*.

essays on Judaism, such as those found within his work *Difficult Freedom*,[112] likely offer additional insights as to how Levinas's thought might be further applied. Thus, it can be said unequivocally, so long as I remain interested in deepening my understanding of Levinas's thought, opportunities abound.

I have been most inspired by my study of Levinas to recognize the profound potential his philosophy offers to instruct and inform future rabbis' conduct. To that end, I strongly believe that Levinas's philosophy deserves to be studied in rabbinical school alongside other modern philosophers such as Buber, Rosenzweig, Cohen, Soloveitchik, and Borowitz, not merely based on Levinas's significance, but based on the crux of his argument for "Ethics is first philosophy." I have done my best to argue Levinas's genius within the practical constraints I have faced, and I hope my reader will be persuaded of his value.

[112] Emmanuel Levinas. *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

Bibliography

Burggraeve, Roger. *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002.

Cohen, Richard A. *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation After Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Critchley, Simon, and Robert Bernasconi. *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Emmanuel Levinas." Accessed April 8, 2013. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/#TraResBey.

Gordon, Peter Eli. *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Thought, 2008.

Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Sean Hand. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other: And Additional Essays*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2002.

Levinas, Emmanuel, and Philippe Nemo. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh. PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Levinas, Emmanuel. "Ethics as First Philosophy." In *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand, 75-87. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*. translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Translated by Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Beyond the verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Translated by Gary D. Mole. London: Continuum, 2007.

Morgan, Michael L. *Discovering Levinas*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Purcell, Michael. "On Escape." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 5, no. 3 (2004): 35-38 PURL: http://www.jcrt.org/archives/05.3/purcell.pdf.

Robbins, Jill, ed. *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Stone, Ira F. Reading Levinas/Reading Talmud An Introduction. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

Wolin, Richard. *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2003.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Emmanuel Levinas The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.