

WHY LEVINAS?

To read Emmanuel Levinas is to encounter a new language. Levinas challenges the reader by investing a set of terms distinct to himself with particular ethical significance: ‘face’, ‘non-(in)difference’, ‘adequation’, ‘trace’, ‘proximity’, ‘the order of the Same’, ‘thematization’, ‘ab-solute’, ‘alterity’, ‘ipseity’ and ‘illeity’, ‘dis-inter-estedness’, ‘transcendence’, ‘height’, ‘totality’, ‘the Other’, ‘Saying’ and ‘Said’, “‘I am here!’”. This book charts a personal journey through that language, a journey that is also, hopefully, more broadly significant.

Levinas’s work has become increasingly influential across an array of academic fields. He was ‘the greatest ethical philosopher of our century’, the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman has unequivocally advised (2000: 5). However, the academic commentary also agrees that ‘Levinas does not read easily either in the original French or in translation’, and that it may be truer to say that ‘one does not read Levinas, one meditates on him’ (Cohen 2006: xxxvii–xxxviii). Levinas made little concession to public opinion or taste, and to read him is an exercise in ‘invocation’: a reaching for an otherness that will always resist translation into one’s own familiar discourse (Wyschogrod 2008: 188). At the same time, it is suggested, Levinas’s thought is not mystical in character. His central message may be an ancient Jewish and Biblical one – ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ – Richard Cohen explains, and faithful to a ‘monotheistic spirituality and wisdom’, but he is also writing ‘on the basis of the entirety of Western civilization, from Athens to Jerusalem to Rome, and writing with all of its greatest contributors and interlocutors in mind’ (2012: 235). Levinas’s philosophical engagement is ‘Western’ and rational (modern and scientific) and Judaic at once.

Consider, Simon Critchley offers (2015: 133), that Levinas’s thinking originates in a Lithuanian Jewish tradition that not only

eschews mysticism but is also highly textualist and given to the closest of readings. One should avoid reducing Levinas's work to a series of seemingly transparent slogans concerning the 'ethics of alterity', 'otherwise than being' and 'the incommensurable Other'. It is a matter of recognising that Levinas perfects a 'rhapsodic' style that constructs arguments not through a verifying of propositions so much as a repeated invocation of intensifying terms (Critchley 2015: 68). To recall Jacques Derrida's image (1978: 124), Levinas's writing resembles waves breaking over and again on a beach, pounding with repeating force and intensity on the same spot, each time with greater insistence.

The temptation I have found is that the struggle to decipher Levinas is accompanied by a corresponding lessening of critical judgement. Rather than assessing Levinas's ideas, one is swept along as a fellow traveller who trades critique for belonging. The intellectual *jouissance* becomes all. 'How original! How uncompromising! So esoteric an intellectual edifice, conveyed by so complex a rhetoric, surely contains fundamental truths.' But then why the appraisal at all, why the effort at understanding? This is as personal as it is professional. I write this book having recently retired. What does that working life signify? What insight has been vouchsafed? What now? Learning to read Levinas would seem to promise much. Philosophical wisdom, but also the mediation of 'Jewish' experience. And hence the possibility of my coming full circle: from Jewishness – as ethnicity and religion alike – largely discarded, through a passing as a 'British academic', to a rapprochement and reconciliation. What did Rebbe ('Learned') Levinas (1906–1995) come to know?

And again, the temptation. Even as I approach 'three-score years and ten', is there not intellectual and moral guidance to be found in someone older still who pursued similar paths? In reading Levinas as a social scientist, can I do justice to my own first principles concerning knowledge of the human condition and remain true to my own experiences of ethnographic reality? Doing justice to the project of a 'Levinasian Anthropology' surely entails retaining a critical independence.

My intellectual and academic life as a social anthropologist has been an attempt to prove the autonomy, sovereignty and beauty of individual human being to a discipline whose ethos has been traditionally to assume the hegemony of social structure and cultural tradition. I

have celebrated the existential power of individual worldviews and life-projects – their ontic reality – in the context of a disciplinary orthodoxy assured of the foundational role played by the symbolic and structural power of Society and Culture, of Community and Class, Language and Discourse, Habitus and Environment. Why the project of a Levinasian Anthropology? Because of the foundations Levinas sought to prove for a philosophy that was humanistic and cosmopolitan. Levinas defended a conceptualisation of the irreducible dignity of individual human beings and of humanity as a whole, of human freedom, and of human responsibility for a just society (cf. Cohen 2006: ix–xiii). He spoke of the ‘supreme dignity of the unique’, of ‘each man [being] the only one of his kind’, ‘non-interchangeable, incomparable and unique’, and in possession of an identity that was ‘absolute’ and ‘inalienable’ (Levinas 1985a: 101; 1993: 117).

In seeking out these foundations, Levinas spoke of human reality as *a priori*. It existed prior to all sociocultural, theological, philosophical systems and traditions. Human reality could be conceived of ‘independently of any *conferall*’, and in ‘suspension of all *reference*’ (1993: 116). Individuality was not a matter of comparison or reference, then, of cultural conceptualisation and social classification. Individual uniqueness extended beyond the concept of ‘the individual’, ‘beyond the individuality of multiple individuals within their kind’ and concerned a reality that could be found ‘throughout history, ever since the first stirrings of consciousness, ever since Mankind’ (Levinas 1993: 116–17).

Why Levinas, finally? Because he mistrusted and feared the ‘myths’ of culture and the institutions of society for their ignorance and potentially ‘tyrannous’ hold in regard to human reality. ‘In society such as it functions, one cannot live without killing, or at least without taking the preliminary steps for the death of someone’ (Levinas 1985a: 120). ‘Politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself’, Levinas recognised (1969: 300), a violent and ‘totalitarian’ predisposition towards forcing difference into ‘the order of the Same’. One works therefore towards a philosophy that delivers the foundations of a just society where the ‘secrecy of subjectivity’, the uniqueness of each human life, was not subject to miscomprehension and misrepresentation through totalising efforts to classify, categorise and incorporate what was individual, and where it was recognised as the responsibility of each to cater to the human needs of all. As God is one – not numerical, one among other ones, but incomparable – so Ego is one and the Other is one. In a liberal society based on universal

humanism, one loves otherness as one loves God, however mysterious, irreducible and incomprehensible:

Between the one that I am and the Other for whom I answer gapes a bottomless difference, which is also the non-indifference of responsibility Non-in-difference, which is the very proximity of one's fellow, by which is profiled a base of community between one and other, unity of the human genre, owing to the fraternity of men. (Levinas 2006: 6)

My parsing of Levinas's vision of radical individuality – a reality and a life that exceeds the totality of culture, language and law, explodes such systemicism – would be to say that the world begins afresh with each human life. Each is uniquely constituted and uniquely precious. Each is responsible for its own worldviews and capable of formulating and effecting its own life-projects, and each deserves the space to inhabit these worldviews and fulfil these life-projects insofar as they do not treat others as means to their ends. To paraphrase the Talmudic saying: 'An individual life is a world entire'.

As an anthropologist, I find something both liberating and frustrating in philosophical discourse:

The loving person cares well for that which is most rational to care for: persons, their well-being, and one's proper bonds in relationship with them. Persons have the most objective value of anything in the empirical world. This claim is implicit even in Kant's famous principle that we should, 'Act in such a way you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end'. Implicitly, it is irrational to treat persons merely as a means to advance other values since everything else possesses less value than persons. ... There is no way to lose human dignity in a way that justifies a complete cessation of such love. (Silverman 2019: 12, 109)

I find it liberating that the human condition – humanity, persons, value, rationality, dignity – is treated as a phenomenological foundation, without need of further legitimation. For Eric Silverman, socialisation and enculturation may be bracketed off as playing an epiphenomenal role; human nature is foundational. Again, in the work of Fredrik Westerlund, human understanding and concern for the individual Other are seen as essentially different in nature (and also in value) to desire for cultural belonging and social affirmation:

We, prior to and irrespective of every historical context of meaning, encounter the other human being – and, in a way both similar and

different, the animal – as someone who matters to me and addresses me personally, and whom I can either relate to in an open and loving way or whom I can turn away from and grasp solely in terms of the social role or meaning I ascribe to her. This primary access to the other as someone to love and care for is, I will argue, nothing but our basic source of moral and existential significance. As such, it is also the origin of whatever possible moral relevance our historical concepts and values can have in our lives. (2014: 446)

We are concerned to *love* others, Westerlund claims, to ‘care for them as individual persons’ and not ‘as a means to some external purpose’, and to engage with them in ‘open contact’ not wearing ‘social masks’ (2019: 313–14). Even though repressive and dehumanising cultural conceptions might govern the understandings and values and norms of societies for centuries, ‘we are always and essentially open to understanding others and caring about them’ (Westerlund 2022a: 75). Different motives underlie our desire for social affirmation and our love for others, for Westerlund, and they fuel different kinds of emotion. Shame, embarrassment and pride arise from a concern for affirmation and social worth; remorse, sorrow and joy arise from a conscientious concern for the Other. Nevertheless, ‘we always have an understanding of the irreducible significance of others’, even if this understanding is obstructed and distorted by our desire for social affirmation (Westerlund 2022a: 75). Moral normativity and motivation essentially conflict with the nonmoral normativity of cultural belonging and of social pressure and authority, Westerlund concludes, but human beings always have access to a ‘genuine moral normativity that springs from a basic understanding of other persons as in themselves irreducibly weighty and important’ (2022a: 73).

I respect and can accept – admire – the forthrightness of such philosophical discourse. At the same time, difficult issues can be too summarily passed over:

A plausible account of ethics must be culturally flexible enough to avoid cultural imperialism and simplistic ethnocentricity. However, it must also offer prescriptive cross-cultural truths that can be employed to critique cultures A culture ought to be structured in a way that is compatible with the flourishing of all and for relational structures to allow for love of all. (Silverman 2019: 132)

Levinas is an appropriate focus for an anthropological project also because of his sensitivity to the complex relations between human behaviour and sociocultural situation in formulating an ethical programme.

To return to the commentary of Simon Critchley (2015), a way to model Levinas's oeuvre might be to consider Greek tragedy: Levinas writes the *drama* of human ethical relations. While the 'action' of social reality largely takes place offstage, the 'theatre' of the text considers the fundamentals and the ambiguities of adequate ethical responses when encountering others whose nature, being and identity remain intrinsically secret, unknown and unknowable. Since our being is tied inextricably to our inhabiting of absolutely discrete individual bodies, and since our mode of expression is a language of cultural convention, there is no way either to know or to articulate an 'otherwise-than-being' such as is represented by other individual human bodies. And yet there exists '*un rapport sans rapport*', Levinas insists (1969: 80). There is an 'immediate' – unmediated, transcendent – relation to the Other, due to Ego's identity being *always already* coincident with otherness and the plurality of existence (of reality, of Nature, of Creation). Admittedly there is no way to express this relation in a philosophical text – in any text – because as soon as its 'Saying' becomes 'Said', as soon as the practice of a moral rapport becomes a matter of conscious reflection – as soon as ethics becomes ontology – it is corrupted, betrayed, enculturated. And so Levinas must write dramatically and rhapsodically, ambiguously and evocatively – like waves crashing into sand – so as to endeavour to conjure up an ethical reality that amounts to an escape from consciousness and intentionality.

What more, however, might an anthropologist advocate and claim to *know*? Even for Levinas's philosophical adherents (such as Critchley), there is more to be said. Between the two major works, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (1961) and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974), concepts are given different prominence by Levinas and analytical emphases change. Moreover, it may be argued that he fails to give an adequate account of moral motivation and moral agency, while the depictions of ethical sensibility and subjectivity are unconvincingly masochistic and ascetic (Critchley 2015: 136). Levinas criticised the anti-humanism that took root in French social science after 1968, the structuralism and poststructuralism, and insisted on absolutes such as God, Death and Infinity in the construction of transcendental arguments, yet he also claimed to respect a French cultural anthropology that relativised the absolute claims of the West and critiqued Western triumphalism (Bernasconi

2008: 247). I take it to be an open question the ways and extents to which Levinas's ethical metaphysic might be reconciled with an anthropological science of human being.

What do I mean, moreover, by an anthropological 'science'. Historically, definitions of science have tended to centre on questions of prediction. Social science must ever be an 'inexact science', John Stuart Mill ([1843] 2012) asserted, because the thoughts, feelings and actions of human beings – as unique aggregates of circumstance and character – cannot be predicted with the accuracy of physical sciences, such as astronomy and chemistry. Nearer our own time, Donald Davidson has concurred (2001: 239): the beliefs and desires, intentions and actions of human beings can never be incorporated into the perfectly 'closed systems' of physical science since they are not 'amenable to precise prediction or subsumption under deterministic laws'. As canonised by Karl Popper, *all* science must be concerned to deliver explanations that include testing and prediction, and, presupposing the immutability of natural processes, deploy commensurate systematic (rational, logical) and critical methodologies:

The method of the social sciences, like that of the natural sciences, consists in trying out tentative solutions to those problems from which our investigations start. Solutions are proposed and criticized. If a proposed solution is not open to objective criticism, then it is excluded as unscientific. (1996: 66)

In contradistinction, I would assert the archetypal question concerning a science of anthropology as being: How is it to live a human life – as, say, John Stuart Mill or Donald Davidson or Karl Popper? The key concepts are *capacity* and *substance*. Anthropology would ascertain the universal capacities of human beings as members of a single species; and anthropology would know how these capacities are wilfully deployed, operationalised, effected, as the substance of individual human lives (Rapport 2023). The knowledge to be gained, the 'explanation', is descriptive rather than predictive and a matter of retrospection rather than testing; the analysis centres on the nature and development of particular individual worldviews and life-projects, and how these abut against the otherness that exists beyond an individual integument. Notwithstanding the descriptive and retrospective nature of its interpretations, a scientific anthropology claims universal and objective truths concerning humanity as a species and individual human beings as its living expression.

This book follows one in which I ventured an anthropological engagement with love, love understood not as domestic or erotic, private or intimate but as a civic virtue: desirous and emotional but not necessarily intimate. 'Cosmopolitan love' was an attention directed outward to the world such as to recognise its variety and particularity: to recognise the individuality of life. Cosmopolitan love was a respectful engagement with the world such that, universally, Anyone might be assured the space to lead a life according to individual lights. As Iris Murdoch urged, 'love is knowledge of the individual', 'an exercise of justice and realism and *really* looking': 'love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality' (1999: 215, 321, 375). 'Discovering' the individuality of being was a kind of epiphany: recognising the fellow humanity of those individually embodied lives by which one was surrounded. The ethical undertaking was to routinise the personal moment of 'surprised' looking at the world of human strangers encountered in modern complex society into the civic virtue of engagement, succour and inclusion. In *Cosmopolitan Love and Individuality: Ethical Engagement beyond Culture* (2019), in sum, I explored the proposition of love serving as a kind of global social inclusivity.

'Cosmopolitanism' I have come to understand as an epistemological, ethical and aesthetic programme that attempts to overcome the accident of specific conditions of that human being's birth, so that as far as possible history, culture and society are not allowed to imprint their own extraneous definitions and limitations on individual self-formation and self-expression (Rapport 2012b). As Martha Nussbaum (1996: 7) expressed it, 'the accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation'. What is important, she concludes, is to 'recognise humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect' (1996: 7). An individual's 'birthright', one might say, is to be afforded the liberty of bringing into being their own life-project, as manifestation of the distinctiveness of their worldviews, the freedom of their consciousness (Rapport 2017a). A cosmopolitan love represented the ideal social inclusion of Anyone: all the human strangers who accompanied the individual through life admitted to a civil society of universal liberty and respect.

And here too I find Levinas. 'Love aims at the Other', Levinas asserted (1969: 256): 'to love is to fear for another, to come to the

assistance of his frailty'. Love did not aim to reduce the distance to the Other, to subsume difference and neutralise alterity, but nor did love leave the Other alone in its destitution, poverty and vulnerability. Love afforded a kind of 'pure experience' as if inhabiting a gulf or abyss beyond being: a 'no man's land' where one engaged 'authentically' with the Other – the neighbour, the stranger, naked and needy – and fulfilled obligations in that Other's regard (Levinas 1969: 261). Specifically, a non-concupiscent, non-erotic love represented the highest virtue whereby an individual operated beyond the bounds of personal being to treat justly the rights of other individual beings.

If, in the introduction of a book that hopes in its course to do justice to the subtlety and complexity of Levinas's thought, one were to offer a distillation of the ideal ethical relation, then the following steps towards 'loving' otherness might be identified:

- a. In culture, society and language as they are everyday inhabited, Ego and the Other operate as monads, enclosed in a personal consciousness and a cultural mythology that negate the reality of difference;
- b. Nevertheless, Ego can *feel* difference, become aware of it as a sensation. This occurs whenever another human being comes face-to-face with Ego. The Other's proximity to Ego is the occasion of an affective encounter, anterior to culture and its signs, whereby Ego senses the Other's 'nakedness', its nature as an individual thing-in-itself;
- c. Ego is innately vulnerable to such sensation, intrinsically susceptible to the Other's approach. This is due to the fact that Ego and the Other are primordially conjoined as aspects of the same (created) universe;
- d. The Other's proximity leads Ego to the further awareness of its own nakedness and individuality. Ego undergoes a 'spiritual' epiphany, becoming aware of the true specificity of its own identity: as irreducibly distinct as that of the Other;
- e. The epiphany is astonishing to Ego but also traumatic. For now it is as if Ego were taken hostage by the Other. Ego is persecuted by the recognition of a responsibility to ensure the Other's security – even to the extent of sacrificing its own interests. It is as if Ego hears a call for help – a summons that is also a commandment – and recognises that it is directed at itself alone;
- f. Ego 'returns' to language, culture and society from the rarefied atmosphere of the epiphanic, enigmatic encounter with the Other

- but now imbued with a conscience: with a fuller, ethical consciousness, an ability and desire to think *for* otherness;
- g. In the fullness of this new capacity, Ego emancipates itself from the hegemony of cultural myths and from its personal appetite for worldly knowledge. Ego recognises an intrinsically plural universe and accepts its individual responsibility for the Other's welfare;
 - h. Engaging ethically with difference in this way, Ego works towards the universal promulgation of human rights to life and liberty. Mundanely, Ego practises forms of interactional politeness whereby all are included, 'loved', as neighbours without a usurpation of their identity or a domination of their nature. Eschewing claims to *know* otherness – to share communion or even reciprocate with an Other – Ego endeavours to admit the absolute and infinite non-adequation of reality, humbly, passively and respectfully.

Levinas's love is a kind of spiritual bond, then. As God loves humanity, so Ego is enjoined to love the neighbour, however strange and inscrutable. Loving otherness in this way is then 'to go to Eternity, to redeem the World and prepare the Kingdom of God' (Levinas 1993: 58). Love admits an infinitude where selfhood disappears. It is this capacity and proclivity, indeed, that distinguishes humanity from animality: Ego's essential humanity is evinced in its embracing a duty of loving self-abnegation. Ego discovers the Other in its nakedness and vulnerability, Levinas asserts, and therein discovers its own conscientious desire to sacrifice its own interests in hospitality to the Other's needs – even unto death. By contrast, I would envisage a cosmopolitan love as a love of the 'I', of individual human selfhood. A cosmopolitan love is the civic virtue of Ego succouring and supporting itself and Other alike, each being ensconced in a secret and personal subjectivity, but fellow members nevertheless of a global civil society.

This book supposes that such divergences might be details only within a broader proposition for loving recognition: for the precious beauty of an individual life as being the source of human morality. 'Love consists in this', Rainer Maria Rilke resolved, 'that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other' (2002: 35). How beautiful to imagine closing the circle. Love for Ego as love for the Other: Ego and the Other recognised and respected alike in their infinitude of difference. How precious to consider a reconciliation

between Levinasian ethics and a cosmopolitan anthropology: discovering otherness *and* discovering the human condition; admitting the 'infinite' secrecy of subjectivity *and* documenting the life of individual human being.

I am not the first to ponder relations between Levinas and anthropology and to find inspiration and challenge in his words (cf. Scheper-Hughes 1995; Benson and O'Neill 2007; Throop 2010a; Simpson 2011; Rasanayagam 2018; Stade 2018; Alvi 2019; O'Neill 2020; Jelinek 2020; Toji 2023). If it is the case that to read Levinas is necessarily to 'meditate' on him, to undertake an exercise in 'invocation', then any engagement is a personal one. Certainly, this book plots a course of discovery, its chapters comprising two main sections. Part I is a setting of the scene, a providing of context and purpose. Here is an exercise in a humanistic, 'non-cultural' anthropology that focuses on the effects that individual human beings, distinct, unique, precious, energetic, have upon one another and upon their wider environments (Rapport 2003). Part II then contains five chapters that assay an exposition of Levinas's thought in its complexity and richness. Each chapter reflects on the challenge of that thought: the possible compatibility of Levinas's philosophy with an anthropology of the human condition, and of individual human being, that would reckon itself scientific.

Recalling Derrida's image of Levinas's project as resembling waves that pound repeatedly on a shore, attempting deeper and deeper insight into the same fundamental strata of existence, the chapters in Part II have something of a repeating quality. Each approaches Levinas's work – the Levinasian shore – by way of a particular question that an anthropologist – or this anthropologist – might ask. Might an ethics of ignorance be reconciled with a science of human being that would 'know' otherness through *love*? Or through *corporeality*? Or through *imagination*? Or through *materiality*? Or through *transience*? Or through *affect*? Taken together, the chapters and questions treat the fecundity and also the difficulty of Levinas's oeuvre from an anthropological perspective.

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In more detail, 'Cosmopolitan Anthropology: A Moral Vision of Human Being and Individual Love' outlines certain premises that a 'cosmopolitan anthropology' might avow. It asks whether the

terms of a 'cosmopolitan' love, a universal ethic of individual recognition and inclusion in a global civil society, might find support in Levinasian notions of ethical human engagement. The chapter introduces a system of social relations based on an appreciation of a common humanity rather than the 'fictional' constructions of symbolic classes and categories: culture, nationality, ethnicity, religiosity. One recognises 'Anyone', the individual human being, the embodiment of our common humanity, as distinct from the collectivity to which s/he might happen to be assigned and the social and cultural labels that come to be imposed. Love, here, is a mechanism of emancipation: the perception of individuals, 'the non-violent apprehension of difference' and 'the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness' (Murdoch 1999: 216–18).

A civil society might care for its individual members by enshrining codes of social interaction that acknowledge Anyone. Civic virtue is to practise forms of social solidarity that transcend category-thinking and remain true to individual human being.

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An anthropological commonplace has been that ethnographic subjects will have their rationality circumscribed by the discursive opportunities made available by a culture. Individual 'members' will think and act within certain culture-symbolic horizons. The relativist nature of this conclusion accords with Wittgensteinian propositions that all language is public and that 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (1922: #5.6). 'Language', here, extends to the 'textual' nature of behaviour per se, to words and acts comprising set 'language-games' or 'forms of life'. There exists, in short, a determining cultural habituation of embodiment and dwelling as well as talking, reasoning and believing. Beginning Part II of the book, the chapter 'At Home in the Integument of the Body: Perceiving beyond Language and Culture' contests such assertions and considers the nature of a non-textual or pre-textual sphere that exists beyond conventional – 'cultural' – languages.

A route beyond cultural habitus is found in precepts of Levinas's as well as those of Max Stirner. Both state that knowledge can be derived – knowledge, indeed, of a fundamental even absolute nature – by way of a transcending of taken-for-granted symbolic, conceptual, textual and doctrinal language-worlds. What is key is the attention one pays to corporeality: to Ego's 'flesh' and 'mind' (Stirner); to the Other's 'body' and 'face' (Levinas). The chapter

explores the kind of embodied rationality that predisposes human beings to perceive beyond the limits of a cultural habitus or conventional life-world – and paradoxically beyond the limits of their subjective phenomenology.

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'Being Inspired to Practise an Acultural Ethical Relationality: Testifying' then outlines some of the main tenets in a Levinasian metaphysic. It traces their biographical origin in Levinas's experience of the Holocaust, and their intellectual origin in a reading of the Old Testament where Abraham answers 'Here I am' or 'I am here' (אֲנִי־הֵנָּה) to a divine presence that he acknowledges – by which he is 'inspired' – but of which he has no comprehension. Analogously, the 'secrecy of subjectivity', the absolute incomprehensibility of one individual to another, is the fundamental characteristic of the human condition: the foundation of morality and an ethical system that respects the irreducible mystery and integrity of individuality as preceding any claim to knowledge, any cultural 'legislation'. For Levinas, each owes to the human Other the same inspired response as to the incomprehensibility of God. One responds to the 'face' of the Other as to a divine call that is undeniable and thus provides testimony to a plural universe.

What might the social-scientific equivalent be to Levinasian notions of providing testimony: of having otherness enter into language while eschewing claims to incorporation or unicity? Might a cosmopolitan anthropology allow itself an *imaginative* account of an individual life alongside a *systematic* writing of the human species?

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To 'say what is human nature', Levinas writes (1996: 8), is perforce to 'liberate human beings from the categories adapted uniquely for things' and to occupy a standpoint where the human 'no longer offers itself to our powers'. One liberates oneself from the category-thinking of cultural construction and legislation of the world so as to transcend what one consciously and habitually supposes. This liberation is a sensory process that does not have the structure of intentionality but rather the character of inspiration. It is impossible for Ego to know the Other – including its humanity, its human being – since identity is 'invisible', but otherness can nevertheless inspire loving recognition and respect through the sensing of its physical proximity. Such proximity is a 'concrete' event for Ego, Levinas asserts; there

is a 'weight' of human being, a 'density', such that individual lives come to impact upon one another physically in social milieux. Traces of otherness remain, in short, and the concrete density of corporal existence possesses a 'transcendental function' (Levinas 2006: 20).

'Tracing the Density of Human Being and Loving the Invisible, Silent Other' pays particular attention to the traces of otherness that Ego might become sensorially aware of. Practising an epistemological humility in regard to the invisibility of human nature, might an anthropological science of the universally human nevertheless take advantage of the weight of being and the density of social environments? The chapter posits an anthropology whose loving artistry is sufficient to identify the *outlines* of individual identities even while their substance remains invisible. What might be revealed in tracing human lives as silhouettes?

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"'Jews Belong to Eternity": Attending Selflessly to the Dimension of Homeless Humankind' considers how Levinas discerned humankind to be a valid object of ethical concern if the only certainty is what the senses reveal to individual bodies. The quotation in the chapter title comes from the Talmudist, Solomon Schechter. Levinas, also a Talmudic scholar, found that Judaism and a belief in the God of the Old Testament vouchsafed a 'cosmic' wholeness to which the individual human being – the personal world of the I – belonged. More precisely, Levinas could argue that Jewishness – historical Judaism and also the contemporary State of Israel – embodies a state of being outside history and outside politics which provides a moral exemplar: a light to the Nations. The *Torah*, the Jewish Bible, inscribes universal laws of human neighbourliness and justice, and a universal recognition of humankind. The history of Jewish exceptionalism, denied and denying the structural normalcy of national sovereignty (and the suffering this has engendered), has then confirmed this Jewish insight.

In what ways might Levinas's personal asseverations of Jewishness offer anthropological purchase? By what route might anthropology claim a 'non-confessional' knowledge of a human-species wholeness – a *cosmos* of impersonal otherness – given the experiential limits of the *polis*, of personal phenomenologies and individually embodied lives? An answer might lie in the 'Jewish' characteristics of transience, marginality and irony: an appreciation of the seemingly infinite and eternal scales of time and space that both dwarf

human existence and effort and show humankind in a true light. Transience and marginality offer insight into a ‘cosmic’ perspective on human being that exceeds what is personally guaranteed by a self-centred Ego inhabiting a sovereign space; an ironic detachment ensures that this new ‘dimension’ of knowledge does not become totalising or totalitarian in its application. The chapter explores the possibility that by adhering to the scales of Deep Time and Deep Space, anthropology might venture scientific claims concerning the *cosmos* of humankind.

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Levinas did not intend his philosophy to be unworldly or quietist. Indeed, he wished for the reverse: for human beings universally to be sober about their personal responsibility. At the same time, it is apparent the extent to which Levinas’s terms of reference are Biblical, ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’. Much seems to be sourced in those episodes when a Biblical Patriarch responds ‘*Hineni*’ (‘I am here’) – accepting the call to duty of an otherworldly presence that he cannot see or fathom – and how this acceptance is the birth of this-worldly ethical relations and individual identity. Levinas’s passion is the discerning of a human sociality imbued with ‘moral perfection’ (Critchley 2008). Concluding the book, the chapter ‘Another Phenomenology: Ego and Other Always and Already Conjoined in Creation’ rehearses the possible rapprochement between a philosophical project whose universalism is ‘spiritually’ framed and that of a secular, scientific anthropology built on rational principles. Is Levinas’s refusal of epistemology and his insistence on the ethical not only before all else but in place of all else too absolute a position, too purist – ascetic, sceptical – for anthropology to accommodate?

The answer would seem to depend on two aspects of Levinas’s philosophy in particular: the precise nature of Ego’s encounter with the Other, and what properly issues from such an encounter. Ego’s ethical encounter with the Other ‘interrupts’ phenomenology for Levinas, but he also suggests that ‘another phenomenology’, beyond existing appearances and knowledge, affords an ‘intelligibility of the alterity of the Other’ (Levinas 1996: 153). Through the ‘miracle’ of subjectivity, Ego might achieve an affective being-with the Other that amounts to a ‘fuller consciousness’. Is this ‘other’, ‘miraculous’ phenomenology – a mix of the transcendent and the egoistic – something that an anthropologist might hope to achieve with his or her research subjects? An anthropological science might deem

it an advance to accrue a kind of knowledge sourced in a subjective consciousness of Self seen through the eyes of the Other.

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These chapters amount to a series of forays onto a Levinasian shore, to discover distinct challenges and to explore productive conciliations with an anthropological science.