

Some excerpts from Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics as First Philosophy (From Existence to Ethics)* in *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford UK & Cambridge USA, 1989; translation by Séan Hand and Michael Temple.

p. 82: One has to respond to one's right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one's fear for the Other. My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? Pascal's 'my place in the sun' marks the beginning of the image of the usurpation of the whole earth. A fear for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence. A fear which reaches back past my 'self-consciousness' in spite of whatever moves are made towards a *bonne conscience* by a pure perseverance in being. It is the fear of occupying someone else's place with the *Da* of my *Dasein*; it is the inability to occupy a place, a profound utopia.

[...]

p. 84-85: Fear for the Other, fear for the other man's death, is *my* fear, but is in no way an *individual's* taking fright. It thus stands out against the admirable phenomenological analysis of *Befindlichkeit* found in *Sein und Zeit*: a reflective structure expressed by a pronominal verb, in which emotion is always emotion for something moving you, but also emotion for oneself. Emotion therefore consists in being moved – being scared by something, overjoyed by something, saddened by something, but also in feeling joy or sadness for oneself. All affectivity therefore has repercussions for my being-for-death. There is a double intentionality in the *by* and the *for* and so there is a turning back on oneself and a return to anguish for oneself, for one's finitude: in the fear inspired *by* the wolf, an anguish *for* my death. Fear for the other man's death does not turn back into anguish for my death. It extends beyond the ontology of the Heideggerian *Dasein* and the *bonne conscience* of being in the sight of that being itself. There is ethical awareness and vigilance in this emotional unease. Certainly, Heidegger's being-for-death marks, for the being (*étant*), the end of his being-in-the-sight-of-that-being as well as the scandal provoked by that ending, but in that ending no scruple of being (*être*) is awakened.

This is the hidden human face behind perseverance in being! Hidden behind the affirmation of being persisting analytically – or animally – in its being, and in which the ideal vigour of identity identifying and affirming and strengthening itself in the life of human individuals and in their struggle for vital existence, whether conscious or unconscious or rational, the miracle of the ego (*moi*) which has got rid of self (*soi*) and instead fears for the Other – is thus like the suspension, or epochè, of the eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself and of the intangible nature of its logical and ontological privilege. What is suspended is its ideal priority, which wipes out all otherness by murder or by all-encompassing and totalizing thought; or war and politics which pass themselves off as the relation of the Same to the Other (*l'Autre*). It is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its 'hateful' modality),

that we find ethics and also probably the very spirituality of the soul, but most certainly the question of the meaning of being, that is, its appeal for justification.

[...]

The ego is the very crisis of the being of a being (*de l'être de l'étant*) in the human domain. A crisis of being, not because the sense of this verb might still need to be understood in its semantic secret and might call on the powers of ontology, but because I begin to ask myself if my being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place.

p.86: To be or not to be – is that the question? Is it the first and final question? Does being human consist in forcing oneself to be and does the understanding of the meaning of being – the semantics of the verb to be – represent the first philosophy required by a consciousness which from the first would be knowledge and representation conserving its assurance in being-for-death, asserting itself as lucidity of a thought thinking itself right through, even unto death and which, even in its finitude – already or still an unquestioned *mauvaise conscience* as regards its right to be – is either anguished or heroic in the precariousness of its finitude? Or does the first question arise rather in the *mauvaise conscience*, an instability which is different from that threatened by my death and suffering? It poses the question of my right to be which is already my responsibility for the death of the Other, interrupting the carefree spontaneity of my naïve perseverance. The right to be and the legitimacy of this right are not finally referred to the abstraction of the universal rules of the Law – but in the last resort are referred, like that law itself and justice – or for the other of my non-indifference, to death, to which the face of the Other – beyond my ending – in its very rectitude is exposed. Whether he regards me or not, he 'regards' me. In this question being and life are awakened to the human dimension. This is the question of the meaning of being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice. The question *par excellence* or the question of philosophy. Not 'Why being rather than nothing?', but how being justifies itself.