

Article

Nietzsche and Levinas against Innocence

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Abstract: There cannot perhaps be two more polarly opposed philosophers than Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas, and yet when it comes to instituting moral ideals or establishing moral principles, they both paradoxically converge in suspecting them as pretenses to a false innocence. They do, however, differ concerning why such innocence is dangerous. Nietzsche sees innocence as a disguise covering violence, power, and an attempt at domination, crippling the self and destroying human relationships. For Levinas, innocence is claimed as a method of exempting oneself from responsibility. Each philosopher recommends ways of evading the pitfalls of innocence. Contrasts will be drawn between the two authors, inquiring how they might benefit from the other's critique of such pretenses to moral innocence and critically evaluating their strategies for escaping the dangers of such pretenses.

Keywords: religious violence; cultures of violence; philosophy of religion; phenomenology; intersubjectivity; spirit of revenge

1. Introduction

Both Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas mistrust the institution of moral ideals or norms to make possible a pretense of innocence that conceals violence and destructiveness. This paper explains their very different suspicions of moral normativity, or what Rosalyn Diprose calls “juridico-moral responsibility” (Diprose 2009, pp. 122–23), the concealment it can produce, and their diverse strategies for eluding such false innocence. The paper will demonstrate how each thinker could learn from the other's resistance to moral innocence and, in the end, it will critically evaluate, through a confrontation of their positions, their routes of escaping the perils of pretending to possess moral innocence.

It should be noted that in the 2009 book *Nietzsche and Levinas*, edited by Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo, there was extensive discussion about the philosophical relationship between our two authors. Although it would be easy to conceive the reconstructed debates between them as disputes between Nietzsche, the anti-moralist, and Levinas, the philosopher of morality (Stauffer 2009, p. 35), a wide variety of authors have pointed to many points of convergence regarding: the place of the body (Bergo 2009; Cohen 2009; Diprose 2009; Lingis 2009; Cohoon 2019); enjoyment (Lingis 2009; Cohen 2009; Longneaux 2009; Cohoon 2019); pedagogy (Katz 2009); the critique of the subject (Bergo 2009; Diprose 2009); the possibility of a path beyond the death of God and nihilism (Drabinski 2009; Llewellyn 2009; Schroeder 2009); and the critique of rationality and intellectualism (Bergo 2009; Cohen 2009). In addition, other authors have brought Nietzsche and Levinas into an *Auseinandersetzung*, inquiring, for instance, whether Levinas is just another ascetic priest (Benso 2009); arguing that both authors share a common *gaia scienza* (Messina 2009); or even just debating the value of ethics in general (Butler 2009; Cohen 2009). While profiting from these other discussions, this paper is unique in that it focuses on the establishment of moral normativity, Nietzsche's and Levinas's suspicions of the innocence that the upholders of such normativity claim for themselves and that serves purposes of concealment, their methods for escaping this morality/innocence intertwinement, and a critical reflection on those methods.



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2. Nietzsche and Innocence

In the reconstructive anthropology of his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche posits the existence of a warrior noble class characterized by a powerful, flourishing physicality and dedicated to war, adventure, hunting, and every type of free, joyful activity. The priestly caste, jealous to the point of hatred of these warriors but impotent and disadvantaged when it comes to warfare, resorts to a “most spiritual revenge” (Nietzsche 1967, p. 34, emphasis in the original) by instituting an inverted scheme of values in which the wretched, poor, impotent, and lowly are “good” and the powerful, the lustful, the insatiable, and the cruel, that is, those who espouse the values of the warrior class, are “evil.” Nietzsche dwells on the hatred, or *ressentiment*, that priests feel for the warriors, that gives birth to and sustains their revaluation of values, and that becomes manifest when the priests fixate first outside themselves on their enemies; generate their value scheme out of this fixation; caricature their enemies as monstrous; pursue vengeful tactics in ways that are passive, self-protective, and labyrinthine; and indulge in continuing rumination over the insults and “vile” actions done to them, which devour them (Nietzsche 1967, pp. 36–39). Instead of accepting that humans are the way they are by nature since “an individual is a piece of fate, from the front and the back” (Nietzsche 2005b, p. 175) determined by the “type-facts” that produce one as a personality type (Leiter 2019, p. 175), the priests insist that humans are free. Because of such freedom, the priests are then able to construe the weakness, which is essential to who they are and which they cannot do anything about, as a voluntary achievement. As a result of this reversal of values, weakness becomes something admirable; it “is lied into something meritorious” (Nietzsche 1967, p. 47). Likewise, the psychology of (free) will was designed by the priest-leaders of the ancient community “to establish their *right* to inflict punishment—or to assign the right to God” so that the warriors in particular “could be judged and punished—so that they could be *guilty*” (Nietzsche 2005b, p. 181, emphasis in the original; Leiter 2019, pp. 71–72). It is no wonder, then, that Nietzsche concludes the first essay of his *Genealogy* with citations from Aquinas and Tertullian, expressing joy over the torments of the damned. As Brian Leiter repeatedly suggests, this entire ideological edifice arises out of a conflict between groups into which the priestly caste develops as its most potent weapon moral/religious interpretation and introjects it into the conflict (Leiter 2019, pp. 76, 78, 80, 83, 89, 91), laboring in “the workshop where ideals are manufactured” (Nietzsche 1967, p. 47).

The subtle trickery in erecting such a moral structure, though, is precisely that one gives expression to a moral code only in the language of goodness, virtue, and God so that Nietzsche can reflect, “These cellar rodents full of vengeance and hatred—what have they made of vengefulness and hatred? Have you ever heard these words uttered? If you trusted simply to their words, would you suspect you were among men of *ressentiment*?” (Nietzsche 1967, p. 48). Not only does the priestly morality permit the condemnation of the lustfulness, revenge, and hatred of the warriors, in contrast to whom the priests and their own followers appear as entirely innocent, but the very moral framework itself, within which such condemnations are considered and pronounced, appears to be utterly innocent, having nothing at all to do with domination or power since it is all about determining only what is good and godly. In this way, priestly morality ensures that its pretense of innocence is doubly protected and concealed. Hence, Nietzsche repeatedly inquires about the very nature of morality in his Preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, asking whether we might conceive morality “as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison” (Nietzsche 1967, p. 20, see pp. 17, 19).

While *On the Genealogy of Morals* diagnoses the subterfuge of morality after years of intense reflection, as Nietzsche (1967, pp. 16–18, 21) acknowledges, the *Twilight of the Idols* suggests a remedy. Hence, Nietzsche (2005b, p. 176) repeatedly defines his position as that of “we immoralists” (Nietzsche 2005b, pp. 176, 181) who discover that when we are

Trying as hard as we can to rid the world of concepts of guilt and punishment and cleanse psychology, history, nature, and social institutions and sanctions of

these concepts, the most radical opponents we face are the theologians who use the concept of the “moral world order” to keep infecting the innocence of becoming with “punishment” and “guilt”. Christianity is a hangman’s metaphysics (Nietzsche 2005b, pp. 181–82).

Given that morality was devised to suppress the economy of life and the naturalness of the warriors and therefore works as a kind of anti-nature (Nietzsche 2005b, pp. 171, 175–76), Leiter envisions the disentanglement of morality from nature that Nietzsche dreams of as parallel to what has already occurred insofar as we have learned to consider earthquakes and hurricanes, formerly moralized as punishments from God, as mere natural disasters, as “innocent disasters” (Leiter 2019, p. 84). To discard all notions of moral responsibility and God as enforcing the moral order, as Nietzsche recommends, one must begin to “restore the innocence of becoming” (Nietzsche 2005b, p. 182, emphasis in the original; Klapes 2018, p. 23). This “becoming” consists of the unfolding of an individual’s fate “from the front and the back,” and, insofar as such becoming happens without any intrusion of morality or its concomitant “freedom”, which can render the individual guilty and deserving of punishment, one’s becoming in this sense gives birth to a new (and healthy) innocence.

Nietzsche provides multiple examples of strategies, similar to this recovery of the innocence of becoming, by which to resist the spirit of revenge that motivates one’s embrace of ethics, asceticism, and the denunciation of others—all of which veil underlying hatred. For instance, he attacks Anaximander’s idea that whatever comes to be is an unjust intrusion upon what is, and it will require that whatever comes to be must pay the penalty by dying or being destroyed (Nietzsche 1962, p. 46). Instead, in defiance of this vengeful approach to becoming, Nietzsche defends a becoming without debt or “mortgage” (Shapiro 2017, pp. 92–94) an innocent becoming in which to immerse oneself. Gary Shapiro further comments on how Zarathustra’s rejection of a hunchback’s request to rectify his disability leads to the notion of *amor fati* and eternal recurrence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1966, pp. 137–42). Instead of looking at one’s history with regret or anger because it falls short of what one’s moral demands and expectations require under the influence of the spirit of revenge, one can learn to embrace joyfully without judgment all that has been in one’s life and even to will it over and over again. Eternal recurrence redeems “the will from its tendency toward revenge” (Stauffer 2009, p. 44). Similarly, in “The Three Metamorphoses” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the lion resists the subjugation that the camel endures from carrying the weight that morality imposes by uttering its “I will,” and yet the lion, in its vehement hatred of the camel’s submissive morality, is still captive to the spirit of revenge. Hence, the child is needed since “Innocence is the child, and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes’” (Nietzsche 1966, p. 27; Messina 2009, p. 206). Finally, commentators such as Lingis and Cohoon highlight instances in which Nietzsche recommends, as a move beyond the spirit of revenge, “an extravagant generosity” (Nietzsche 1966, pp. 74–79; Lingis 2009, p. 29) or a “gift-giving virtue” that is an overflowing of life without concern for reciprocation (Cohoon 2019, pp. 12–14; Nietzsche 1966, pp. 74–79). All these techniques are ordered toward overcoming the spirit of revenge through reclaiming a new kind of innocence, comparable to that “innocence of becoming”, beyond the false innocence that hid the violence of the priestly morality.

Nietzsche embodies his hope for liberation in this new idea of innocence, this authentic innocence of becoming uninfected by morality, which thoroughly contrasts with and indicts the false innocence that the enterprise of morality contrives and through which it achieves concealment. Nietzsche’s strategy of ousting from the picture morality, God, freedom, and responsibility and yielding to becoming a process we might call “de-moralization” not only frees the individual, but it removes *ressentiment* from relationships with others. Hence, Zarathustra, the spokesperson for liberation, urges, “‘Enemy’ you should say, but not ‘villain’; ‘sick man’ you should say, but not ‘scoundrel’; ‘fool’ you should say, but not ‘sinner’” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 26). One can find this vision of better relationships already in the way the *ressentiment*-free warriors treated each other according to the *Genealogy*, insofar

as they forgive insults and vile actions because they forget them, shake off with a shrug what might eat deeply into others, and even have much reverence for such noble enemies (which is a bridge to love) (Nietzsche 1967, p. 39). Such seemingly “ethical” treatment of others only works, though, if it is not instituted as a moral ideal.

3. Levinas and Innocence

Like Nietzsche, Levinas’s misgivings about innocence are fundamental to his thought. In the important section on “substitution” in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas opposes “the limited and egoist fate of him who is only for himself and washes his hands of the faults and misfortunes that do not begin in his own freedom or his own present” (Levinas 1997, p. 116). Those claiming such innocence for themselves think that if they in their own freedom and present are innocent of the faults that characterize others or if they have done nothing to produce misfortunes in others, they are not responsible for these others: they can wash their hands of them. Their innocence, then, exempts them from any responsibility to or for others. Such claimants to innocence resemble Job and his false friends, who cannot understand why the innocent Job suffers since “in a meaningful world one cannot be held to answer when one has not done anything” (Levinas 1997, p. 122). This pretense to innocence, along with the exemption from responsibility to or for the Other that it is taken to imply, runs counter to Levinas’s central concept of responsibility, in which “This exigency with regard to oneself . . . beyond all equity, is produced in the form of an accusation preceding the fault, borne against oneself despite one’s innocence” (Levinas 1997, p. 113). In the face of being obligated to responsibility to another before one even responds or even if one has not done anything hurtful, one cries out in bewilderment, “I have not done anything, and I have always been under accusation—persecuted” (Levinas 1997, p. 114).

When those insisting on their innocence understand it as dispensing them from any responsibility to and for the Other, they, in effect, take issue with two foundations on which the Levinas framework rests: the origin of my moral responsibility (in the Other and not the I) and the non-reciprocity of this relationship (the Other is not at first responsible to and for me as I am to the Other). Clearly, for those claiming innocence in Levinas’s depiction, they owe the Other nothing and consequently, whatever responsibility they may have to the Other depends on whether they have done or not done something to the Other; the origin-point of responsibility lies in the “I”, and not the Other. Gilbert Harmon (2013, p. 39), in an essay entitled “Moral Relativism Defended”, depicts a version of what an ethics that begins with the I might look like when he observes how rich and poor, strong and weak, would agree to a moral principle of avoiding harming each other. However, the rich and strong would not agree with trying to do as much as possible to help those in need since they fear that they would do most of the helping and receive little in return and so would be reluctant to agree to a strong principle of mutual aid. As is common in contract views of ethics, one’s obligations to the Other depend on one considering first of all how undertaking such an obligation would affect one’s self and if one decides not to freely enter into an agreement or contract with the Other, one is simply not obligated to that Other.

By contrast, Levinas (1997, pp. 105, 161) insists that my responsibility to and for the Other “could not have begun in me”; that “the responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision” (Levinas 1997, pp. 10, 76, 109, 138, 141); and that “the responsibility for the other commands me before . . . any deliberation” (Levinas 1997, p. 166), including any reflection on whether I have done or not done something that would require me to be responsible or whether my costs outweigh my benefits. Through a series of images throughout *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas attempts to capture descriptively the view that responsibility for the Other begins with the Other. For instance, I have been designated as responsible to and obligated by the Other from an immemorial, irrecoverable time that cannot be assembled into my present time, as I might do by pulling together my personal memories; responsibility is experienced as a diachrony that I cannot pull into synchronization (Levinas 1997, pp. 49, 57, 88, 104–5, 125, 150). When encountering the obligating Other, I am always late (Levinas 1997, pp. 87, 150). Levinas

presents this experience of being obligated before I commit myself by the metaphor of finding the Other's call and order in my response (Levinas 1997, pp. 148, 150) or in the image of a creation *ex nihilo*, in which, when the creation did not exist and of itself was nothing, it still obeyed the order to come into being (which could not have come out of itself because it did not exist, see Levinas 1997, pp. 113–14, 148). Like the Jewish people, the I is chosen without first choosing the election (Levinas 1997, p. 57), or it is called into question prior to questioning (Levinas 1997, p. 102). Levinas goes to pains to dismiss any idea that the origin of my responsibility might commence with some property inherent in me, such as a guilt complex, my natural benevolence, a divine instinct, some love or tendency to sacrifice, or some acquired virtue (Levinas 1997, p. 124). He acknowledges that the idea of an accusation preceding the fault, borne against one in spite of one's innocence, appears "demented" (Levinas 1997, p. 113) for the order of contemplation; but, if one recognizes this prior responsibility, it will preempt the questions "Where did he get his right to command? What have I done to be from the start in debt?" (Levinas 1997, p. 87). Such questions raised by those who conceive themselves as innocent and free of any responsibility to the Other unless they decide to be responsible (Levinas 1997, pp. 86, 103, 109, 113, 161) run contrary, of course, to Levinas's deepest conviction on the origin of moral responsibility.

In addition, implicit in this conception that one is innocent and so not responsible, a calculus of reciprocity is at work; that is, the innocent one thinks that each should receive their due depending on what they have done; if I did nothing to you, I owe you nothing, or if I did harm you in some way, I should have to compensate in proportion to what I have done. Such an innocent person seeks a "balance of accounts in an order where responsibilities correspond to liberties taken, where they compensate for them" (Levinas 1997, p. 125). Such strict book-keeping resembles essence that "fills every interval of nothingness that would interrupt it" (Levinas 1997, p. 125), and such an "interval of nothingness" appears when one posits, as did the Greeks, a principle of non-being that threatens the full system of being. However, the critic of such a disruptive possibility from "non-being", simply upholds the uninterrupted order of being and essence by pointing out that non-being, for all its resistance, must nevertheless exist. As a result, Levinas seeks to avoid entirely the speculative dialectic between being and non-being by conceiving ethics as the realm of *otherwise than Being* (Levinas 1997, p. 3). Even from *Totality and Infinity* onward, Levinas (1979, p. 36) resists the idea of ethics being a matter of reciprocity in which one steps outside the I facing the Other to see a correlation between them in which one records the correspondence or non-correspondence of the going unto the other with the return. One can only calculate whether one's giving is sufficiently compensated by what one will receive only by stepping outside that initial moment of being asymmetrically summoned to responsibility. In addition, after the appearance of the Third, which establishes a degree of reciprocity, socio-political organizations still remain under pressure from the asymmetric responsibility of the I for the Other in which "the equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights" (Levinas 1997, p. 159). Levinas reiterates the lack of reciprocity typical of the ethical relationship since "over and above all the reciprocal relations", one always has one step more to give, to take responsibility for the Other's responsibility (Levinas 1997, pp. 84, 117). This lack of reciprocity that the self-proclaimed innocent one neglects is stressed in a comment by Dostoyevsky that Levinas quotes (Levinas 1997, p. 146), "Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone and I more than the others". The limitless asymmetry of responsibility for the Other finds its most striking image perhaps precisely in maternity, the groaning of wounded entrails, "bearing par excellence" (Levinas 1997, p. 75), in accordance with which one "bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor" (Levinas 1997, p. 75).

The figure of maternity not only represents the asymmetry intrinsic to responsibility, to which the supposedly innocent one in search of a measure is oblivious, but it also betokens the anguished and bodily affect that accompanies ethical response, which is also lost upon the one making pretense to innocence. This may be because the self-designated innocent ones, in fact, engage in an intellectualistic weighing and estimating of how to balance

their rights and duties against others' much like what happens after the appearance of the third person, who requires that many claims be adjudicated. However, for Levinas, such a quest for equilibrium is never "outside of the control of the responsibility of the one for the other" (Levinas 1997, p. 159). Likewise, reasoning at a distance from the ethical summons of the Other appears in the "said" that absorbs, betrays, and mollifies the disturbing and discomfiting saying relationship (Levinas 1997, pp. 45–47, 156, 162), at least until one's interlocutor, as one's master or as a hostile interlocutor disrupts the final and absolute vision articulated, synchronized, and synthesized in Levinas's book (Levinas 1979, pp. 80–81). Those who start with their innocence and seek to determine an equilibrium engage in theorizing and thereby participate in the equality and serenity of consciousness out of touch with the "extreme urgency of assignation" (Levinas 1997, p. 87) or "obsession" (Levinas 1997, p. 88, see also p. 82).

One can see, then, how those whose theoretical fulcrum is innocence run counter to three essential features of ethical relationships for Levinas: responsibility does not begin with me, is not a matter of reciprocity, and plunges one into affective turmoil. For Levinas to accept as legitimate the idea that one could wash one's hands of the faults and misfortunes that do not begin in their freedom and present would be tantamount to endorsing the collapse of his whole position.

Levinas, like Nietzsche, proposes a way out of innocence. The escape involves replacing the thought that one is suffering *by* the fault of the Other with suffering *for* the fault of the Other. In suffering *by* the fault of the Other, one thinks that the Other is at fault, but there is no mention or sense on one's own part of having done anything wrong. Further, one experiences being weighed down by that Other whose burdensomeness, that is, the Other's "wretchedness and bankruptcy" (Levinas 1997, p. 117), as Levinas describes it elsewhere, one shoulders. However, the lack of any mention of one's own fault suggests that one has done nothing to deserve being so encumbered and that one is innocent. It is as though one, thinking of oneself as suffering *by* the fault of the Other, has carved out a little reserve in which one maintains one's innocence, and by holding on to that little reserve, it might be possible to condescend ("I am doing this out of the goodness of my heart, but you do not deserve it") or it might even lead the way to a full-fledged abandonment of one's responsibility (if I have done nothing wrong, I owe you nothing). However, by contrast, Levinas adds that suffering *for* the fault of the Other keeps all the patience of undergoing imposed by the Other from the beginning; that is, one remains consistent with the starting point mentioned above namely, my responsibility begins with the Other summoning me through the Other's suffering. To take my eye off this Other's appeal and to revert to myself is to take the first step down the road toward perhaps locating the origin of my responsibility in myself and exempting me from responsibility to the Other insofar as I think myself to be innocent.

It is to lose sight of the patience of undergoing imposed by the Other that lies at the commencement of the ethical relationship and at the root of Levinas's whole inquiry into the origin of one's responsibility. For one ethically attuned to the Other, it is irrelevant and even dangerous to cast one's glance back on oneself, to inquire about what is going on within oneself, about whether one is guilty or innocent, and eventually, about whether one should even be obligated at all. In the passivity of being called to responsibility by the Other, the distinction is erased between being accused, that is, being called to account by the Other, and accusing oneself, that is, knowing within oneself that one is innocent and it is therefore not incumbent on one to be responsible. In suffering for the Other, I have dropped any claim to innocence, and all that is left is that I am accused, responsible.

4. Convergence and Confrontation

It is of significance that Nietzsche and Levinas both converge in their criticism of different versions of moral normativity, the ideals of the priestly morality exalting the weak and disparaging the powerful and of the ideal of moral reciprocity such that if one has not harmed another one owes the Other nothing. This convergence, of course, is

accompanied by their differences, with Nietzsche seeking to dispense with the morality that masks an endeavor to dominate others—in other words, to “de-moralize”. Levinas, by contrast, appeals to the asymmetrical demand of the Other more ethically stringent than the symmetry and balancing of rights with obligations of those who feel excused from responsibility because they are innocent. Levinas’s critique could be said to be one of “supra-moralization”.

The encounter with Nietzsche’s critique of normativity, though, could be beneficial for the Levinasian stance. For one thing, Nietzsche’s stress on the deception of the institution of a moral ideal, a theme not touched on that much in the literature on both authors, might illuminate Levinas’s stance. After all, the assertions that “responsibilities correspond exactly to liberties taken” (Levinas 1997, p. 125) and that one only owes something to another only if one has hurt that other have about them the veneer of being completely fair and rational, a condition of living in a “meaningful world” (Levinas 1997, p. 122). However, this apparently high moral principle displaces the horizon and renders invisible the deeper obligation that asymmetrically binds one. The moral normativity of those who think themselves to be innocent and not responsible disguises and makes disappear another ethics that would undermine that normativity; one can shine a light on that veiling mechanism when one views Levinas through a Nietzschean lens.

In fact, the underlying premise of the pretense of innocence that Levinas withstands consists of an attempt to balance accounts, a “strict book-keeping where nothing is lost nor created” (Levinas 1997, p. 125) in which the liberties given must correlate with responsibilities undertaken and, so, if I have not hurt you I have contracted no responsibility toward you, and so my freedom is correspondingly unrestrained. It is on precisely this premise that the spirit of revenge feeds, that is, the idea that the other is taking or has taken advantage of one or unjustifiably occupies a higher rank than one breeds *ressentiment* and motivates one to bring that other low, preferably, behind a screen of moral virtue. Hence, so much of the venom in contemporary political discourse derives from a sense of *ressentiment* because one thinks that some other group has taken advantage of one’s own group, that one, for instance, pays taxes to enable the luxurious lifestyle of “free-loaders”. For such *ressentiment*, the accounts are out of balance, and so the strategy of one who washes his “hands of the faults and misfortunes that do not begin in his own freedom or in his present” (Levinas 1997, p. 116) can be seen as a pre-emptive tactic to avoid ever being imposed on by another, to ever allow oneself to be put in a situation that might breed a spirit of revenge. In this strategy’s very preemption, in its very striving to fend off any ascendancy of the other over oneself and to subjugate potential enemies, it itself already belongs to the spirit of revenge. Reading Levinas through Nietzsche, it is possible to see how Levinas’s ethics shares Nietzsche’s own resistance to *ressentiment*.

This pretense of innocence also underlies Levinas’s distinction between suffering “by the Other” and “for the Other”. In suffering “by the Other”, one clings to a sense of one’s innocence, conceiving the Other as having imposed upon one an undeserved burden (by which one suffers at their hands), a situation likely to foster a sense of *ressentiment*. Nevertheless, it is still possible to suffer for the Other, to erase the distinction between being accused by the Other and accusing oneself, that is, to feel oneself being accused by the Other, but all the while refusing to accuse oneself because one knows oneself to be innocent. In suffering for the Other, one simply lets go of any insistence on one’s innocence to plunge into suffering for the Other, simply giving up any sense of the kind of innocence that engenders *ressentiment*.

One might wonder whether this abandoning of one’s own pretense of innocence in order to suffer “for the Other” might, in turn, find any counterpart in Nietzsche’s project of escaping revenge and recovering the innocence of becoming. In fact, commentators (Longneaux 2009, p. 63; Lingis 2009, p. 29; Cohoon 2019, pp. 7, 16, 18, 20, 25) have pointed to parallels between Levinas’s concept of a bodily generosity evoked by the Other at the pre-egoic level of recurrence and Nietzsche’s account of “gift-giving virtue” (Nietzsche 1966, pp. 74–79). Nietzsche characterizes this virtue as an overflowing

movement of the body toward others which resembles the movement of neoplatonic emanationism and is unstingy, self-sacrificing, self-forgetful, and independent of any vengeful requirement for reciprocation. Both Levinas and Nietzsche, then, recognize a bodily generosity toward the Other that can break free of a demanding reciprocation and of the spirit of revenge, despite the fact that, as Cohoon observes, Levinas's generosity contrasts with Nietzsche's in that it is not passionate but passive, that is, evoked by the Other. Insofar as abandoning the "by the Other" for the "for the Other" represents a way beyond the spirit of revenge reminiscent of Nietzsche's bodily love for the Other that helps one recover the innocence of becoming, one can find a reason to support Aicha's Messina's (2009, pp. 206–7) attribution of a *Gaia Scienza*, or joyful wisdom, to both.

However, if one shifts from convergence to confrontation, the Nietzschean recommendation for surpassing the spirit of revenge exhibited in the institution of moral ideals, namely to embrace a new innocence, that of becoming, would not be satisfactory to Levinas, who relies on the summons of the Other, from beyond oneself and yet discoverable within that self, hearing the other's call within oneself (Levinas 1997, p. 150). To be sure, the Nietzschean critique of the spirit of revenge reconfigures how one relates to other, as is found in "gift-giving virtue" or in the magnanimous treatment resentment-free nobles offer each other insofar as they forget and forgive past injuries and hold each other in reverence (Nietzsche 1967, p. 39). While Nietzsche is not the individualist that some commentators accuse him of being, other commentators do assert that he is "at least suspicious of dependence" (Katz 2009, p. 90) on others; that his "ethics" always involves relationships at "a respectful distance" (Bergo 2009, p. 107); that his notion of responsibility arises only from the self's corporeal subjectivity rather than from the Other's elicitation, as Levinas believes (Diprose 2009, pp. 119, 128); and that Nietzsche dissolves the self without its being taken up into engagement in a saying relationship to an Other (Messina 2009, p. 203). As Longneaux (2009, p. 66) rightly comments, for Nietzsche, there is no "one-for-the-other" but rather only "one-with-the-other" or "one-beside-the-other".

For Nietzsche, the path out from under the spirit of revenge to the innocence of becoming after the unmasking of moral ideals depends on techniques, practices, or movements that take their origin from the bodily self, an overflowing urge to generosity, the forgetting of self, or the immersion in becoming and enjoyment. For Levinas (1997, p. 124, 197n. 27), however, the "for the Other" that abolishes innocence does not originate in oneself, "in a guilt complex, a natural benevolence" (as in the moral philosophies of feeling), a divine instinct, some feeling of love, a tendency to self-sacrifice, or even as Nietzsche proposes, some technique, such as willing the eternal return. No wonder Richard Cohen (2009, pp. 174, 179) worries about Nietzsche's vitalism, and Diprose (2009, p. 119) comments on Nietzsche's pursuit of the privilege of self-responsibility that breaks with history and the social order, but "without assuming responsibility for the effects of that privilege on others".

In fact, if the spirit of revenge depends on the acute awareness one has of others who threaten one, highlight one's inadequacies, are superior to one, and so induce hatred toward them, then it is not a surprise that those under its spell are usually beset by narcissism. Those who recognize and seek to break from the other-negating spirit of revenge to turn to new practices and ways of thinking of others and themselves could still succumb to that spirit by excoriating themselves whenever they slip again under its influence, directing against themselves the hatred formerly aimed at their enemies. Nietzsche (1967, pp. 32–33) repeatedly resists the self-negation that revenge generates. A similar pattern of self-entrapment appears in examples from critical race theory in which white people, once they discover how they have benefited from white privilege, repeatedly disparage themselves for their seemingly inescapable privileges, which their attitudes and actions continue to manifest—to the point that finally even those who pressed them to recognize their privilege have to urge them to let go of the guilt and self-paralysis that make it impossible for them to do anything to undo racial hierarchies (Yancy and Butler 2018, p. 580; Scott 2017, p. 417; Sullivan 2017, p. 334). As a consequence, it is particularly

difficult for the narcissistic self, enthralled by the spirit of revenge, to avoid afflicting itself by that very spirit for the ways in which it has not yet overcome that spirit. It would seem that there would be a more robust potential for liberation of this self-entrapped self in the Levinasian Other, who generates “a responsibility that cannot be declined” (Levinas 1997, p. 92) and who invites the subject insisting on innocence and indulging in the resentful mistrust that underlies the “by the Other” into living self-forgetfully “for the Other”. The Other might facilitate freedom from the spirit of revenge that would be much more difficult to attain if one is a narcissistic individual striving to escape that spirit but left to one’s own devices and capable of only being at best “with” or “alongside” others who could provide a challenge.

If Levinas challenges Nietzsche’s paradigm for overcoming the spirit of revenge, Nietzsche’s account also poses questions about Levinas’s conception of giving up one’s pretense of innocence to yield to the “for the Other”. Many would take this way of proceeding to exemplify the self-hating self-effacement that they take all previous morality to have called for. Silvia Benso addresses just this criticism of Levinas in her essay, “Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?” She contends that the self is never denied in Levinas but always remains separate, an atheist not consumed and surpassed, as happens within Hegelian theism (Benso 2009, p. 227); that for Levinas, self-denial is not the supreme goal of life (Benso 2009, p. 227); and that Levinas’s hetero-directedness avoids self-negation. Following Benso, one could agree that to subordinate the Other to one’s project of self-denial or hateful domination certainly runs counter to the entire Levinasian framework. In addition, one can think of numerous texts that confirm Benso’s interpretation, for instance, Levinas’s portrayal of the moral hero at the end of *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1979, p. 246), who takes the mortal leap of fearing the murder of others more than her own death, as did moral giants such as King, Gandhi, or Romero. Such heroes manifested just the kind of fearlessness and courage, undeterred in their care for others by threats to their life that Nietzsche admires in noble warriors and bold thinkers (including himself). In addition, after the appearance of the Third in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas remarks on how the reverence the Other evokes ought to be transferred to oneself, who can be called upon then to limit one’s responsibility and be concerned for oneself (Levinas 1997, p. 128). However, perhaps more significantly: if one is claiming innocence because of one’s fear of others seeking to dominate oneself or if one is brooding over the unfair advantage the Other has taken (or will take) of oneself in the mindset of the “by the Other”, then to drop one’s pretenses to innocence and venture into suffering for the Other, would be to wrest oneself free of the spirit of revenge, to abandon fear and suspicion, to run the risk bravely of the joyful, powerful self to which the Nietzschean noble morality aspired.

One can, though, question whether one can ever be sure that the spirit of revenge has not infiltrated one’s motivations even as one embraces the innocence of becoming or if one can ever be purely for the Other, no longer mindful of the violations of reciprocity one has suffered or might suffer. The intellectual strategies of Levinas and Nietzsche to delve beneath the level of rationality and intellectualism and to locate the workings of revenge or ethical summons in the body that reflection only later clarifies make them particularly open to questions about others and about whether we can ever be sure that we are aware of what is taking place beneath the control of the rational ego. In some ways, pointing to hidden motives and movements of ethical solicitation as a point of critique of Levinas and Nietzsche is, in effect, to acknowledge the rightness of their whole approach that gives priority to the consideration and dissection of embodiment. In addition, such a critique suggests that Levinasian and Nietzschean investigations are never finished, continually in need of being undertaken. Jill Stauffer (2009, p. 45) captures just this point when she writes:

Both thinkers want to bring ideas back to the material conditions in which they must be lived. In order to do that, both thinkers must interrupt our habits of thought. What underwrites the deepest thought of each philosophy is something imperfect: already begun, never finished, and relying on something as frail and unpredictable as a human being for its success. But that is also the point: for both

of these thinkers, what matters is what we do—even though much of what we do is undergone passively.

5. Conclusions

Recent discussions on Nietzsche and Levinas have marked the differences between them but, surprisingly, have irradiated the points where they seem to meet. This paper has followed this pattern of mutual comparison and contrast, but it has concentrated on an area not explicitly addressed by other investigators who focus on such topics as embodiment, the subversion of intellectualism, nihilism and the death of God, and the critique of the subject. It has thematized Nietzsche's and Levinas's criticisms of the institution of moral ideals, the priestly morality in Nietzsche's case or the norm of reciprocity underpinning the appeal to innocence to decline moral responsibility and the "by the Other" for Levinas. We have examined the deeper motivations of such norms, the spirit of revenge and the evasion of asymmetrical responsibility, and also described the bodily and actional methods by which Nietzsche and Levinas endeavor to correct these motivations. By bringing these analyses into opposition, novel insights are gained, and convergences noted: that the Levinasian appeal to innocence can function as a mechanism of concealment, that one can find in Nietzsche a kind of gift-giving with no regard for reciprocation, that Levinas's opening out to the provocation of the Other exceeds in its liberating potential Nietzsche's self-managed embrace of the innocence of becoming (and its variants), and that Levinas's move beyond reciprocity and the "by the Other" to a daring disregard of reciprocation in "for the Other", far from being a manifestation of asceticism, actually represents a brave breaking free from the spirit of revenge.

Finally, one might wonder about what the future might be for any kind of principled ethics or religion after the criticisms of Nietzsche and Levinas, and yet each of them envisions different future possibilities about which we might speculate.

For example, Levinas (1997, p. 161) in Chapter 5 of *Otherwise than Being* appears to reinstate a kind of moral universalism insofar as he calls for the "search for a principle", the measure of rights and duties (Levinas 1997, p. 160), and an equal footing as before a court of justice (Levinas 1997, p. 157). Such a seeming restoration seems possible, though, as long as it is not "outside of the control of the responsibility of the one for the other" (Levinas 1997, p. 159; Young 1997, pp. 38–59). Similarly, Nietzsche himself leaves open the possibility of future normative stands (though he, like Levinas, is quite vague on what they might be) insofar as for him what is of utmost concern are the motives, the purposes underlying the usage of moral principles:

It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or many called moral ought to be done and encouraged—but I think one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto* (Nietzsche 1982, p. 103; Nehemas 1985, p. 203).

Likewise, Nietzsche, in a rather remarkable passage in "The Anti-Christ", observes how the concept of God has become a tool for priestly agitators, who see all happiness as a reward and all unhappiness as punishment for sinfully disobeying God, that most mendacious interpretative device. These priests advocate for "A god who *demand*s—in place of a god who helps and gives advice and is basically a term for every lucky inspiration of courage and self-confidence" (Nietzsche 2005a, p. 22). Additionally, one might speculate about the possibility that a renovated religion might contribute positively if a vindictive God of *ressentiment* were replaced by a God who might inspire courage and self-confidence, especially helping those whose impotence tempts them to the hatred of their enemies to come to terms with or even joyfully accept that impotence. Or perhaps, the God to whom Levinas gives thanks in *Otherwise than Being* for the fact that "I am another for the others" (Levinas 1997, p. 158) points to a new significance of religion. This God, who seems to be part of Levinas's wonder over the fact that one's asymmetrical service of the Other ends up, through the Third, unexpectedly affirming one's own value as a self, might provide

one with sufficient self-confidence and courage to embrace asymmetry without fear. Surely, though, such reconstructive efforts would never be able to ignore the incisive questions that we have already raised and that we can never cease to raise again and again.

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