

Tal Sessler

Levinas and Camus

Humanism for the Twenty-First Century



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Levinas and Camus

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To Joshua and Edith Sessler

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Introduction

I. Two Key Paradigms in Twentieth-Century Intellectual History: Intellectual Adherence and Resistance to Totalitarianism

The problem of evil will be the fundamental problem of postwar intellectual life in Europe – as death became the fundamental problem after the last war.

Hannah Arendt (1945)

The *raison d'être* of this book is to provide a systematic, comparative and critical analysis of two of the greatest exemplars of intellectual resistance to totalitarianism. Such an account is both lacking, despite the recent volume of work on intellectual adherence and resistance to totalitarianism, and crucially important, in so far as this is the first work which purports to offer an examination of Levinas and Camus, as there is no published work which strives to establish a political dialogue (or any other dialogue, for that matter) between Levinas and Camus.

Prima facie, Emmanuel Levinas and Albert Camus do not strike us as sharing a common intellectual and political vocabulary and agenda. Conversely, the *raison d'être* of this work is to shed light on the pervasive linkage between these two respective thinkers.

Biographically both were outsiders in the Parisian intellectual scene during the era of Sartrean hegemony. One was born in Algeria, the other was a Lithuanian Jew. For both the occurrences and upheavals of 1933–45 constituted a turning point in their *oeuvres*. Camus comes to realize the dangers of nihilism in a Nietzschean sense, whereas Levinas is shocked by his former teacher's adherence to Hitlerism (Martin Heidegger). From then on, I argue, their intellectual enterprise is by and large dedicated to an articulation of a moral and political call against totalitarianism.¹

Hence the political ramifications of their works are congruent, albeit they lean on different ontological prisms. For Levinas, the rationale for ethical inter-subjectivity is transcendent, *illegitimacy* being the term to which he resorts, in order to define complete otherness,

and the trace of God is manifested in the face of the human other, *l'autrui*, which embodies 'thou shall not kill' and also emanates infinity. Conversely, Camus is disinclined to adhere to any transcendent notions. His is a strictly immanent, secularly inclined mode of humanism. Nonetheless, the call for human solidarity is a recurrent theme throughout the bulk of his *oeuvre*, and his resistance to totalitarian projects, specifically Hitlerism and Stalinism, is just as persistent and consistent.

Focusing on a very specific time frame, spanning from the early 1930s and the rise of National Socialism to the late 1950s and the dispute in French intellectual circles over Stalinism and the ferocious debate vis-à-vis Middle Eastern politics (Camus was naturally concerned with the question of his native Algeria; Levinas with Zionism and the Palestinian Other), this project will strive to offer the first large-scale systematic comparative and critical analysis of two paradigmatic and complementary modes of intellectual resistance to totalitarianism and political violence.

Drawing extensively from early publications in philosophical reviews,² in conjunction with the canonical writings of Levinas and Camus published during the relevant time frame, this study will also strive to articulate a normative argument as to the appeal and validity of the respective ethical and political legacies of these two thinkers, given the current geo-political climate, and the global upheavals and regional conflicts we are grappling with today.

The choice to dedicate a work of this scope and magnitude to the intellectual resistance of Levinas and Camus stems largely from the fact that their respective *oeuvres* can be conceived of as a response to the upheavals of the zeitgeist and the acuity of their *Zeitdiagnose*, which culminated in a very novel philosophical and political outlook and approach to the ethical and the political during the previous century, a refreshing approach which was oftentimes met with scorn in certain quarters,³ and depicted as detached moralism and sheer sentimentalism.

In that respect, it is fair to say that Levinas and Camus were thereafter 'vindicated' in the sense that their pioneering stance and metaphysical insistence regarding the inescapable correlation between the age-old metaphysical addiction/obsession with totality⁴ and the debacles of the totalitarian misadventures of Europe's all-too-tragic twentieth century are by now recognized as the grave philosophical challenge which they are, to rethink the ethical and the political.

Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* and Camus's *The Rebel* were thereafter hailed as key anti-totalitarian *chefs-d'oeuvre* and intellectual legacies from which dissidents to the totalitarianism of the left drew inspiration in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵

We will also strive to argue in this work that the ethical and political heritage of Levinas and Camus can indeed be instrumental also in contending with the looming totalitarian threat of the current epoch, i.e. that of religious fundamentalism and its sadly rising hegemony among adherents to, and practitioners of, the three monotheistic religions.

The twentieth century was uniquely typified by unprecedented modes of political experimentations, and may well be remembered in Jungerian terms as the age of 'Total War'. In that respect, it was the century which also posthumously vindicated and rendered Nietzsche and Rousseau as prophets not only of the potentiality but also of the actuality of the fact that hitherto inconceivable technological and scientific breakthroughs are far from being synonymous and congruent with a corresponding amelioration of the socio-political and moral state of affairs.⁶

In that respect, we will show that Levinas and Camus share with the latter two seminal thinkers a common metaphysical disposition, i.e. a profound suspicion and antagonism towards the Hegelian and Comptean prejudices regarding the dialectical nature of progress, freedom and spirit.

The twentieth century is also the century in which the word 'genocide' was introduced to the human vocabulary as a sordid recurring mode of political violence and repression, a political 'measure' which entails utter annihilation of entire collectivities, and which Winston Churchill chillingly alluded to in 1942 as 'a crime that has no name'.⁷

Both Levinas and Camus deal extensively with the genocidal tendencies of their epoch, in particular in the aftermath of 1945. In the ensuing chapters we will also strive to obtain as our objective a more lucid and coherent narration of what precisely is, according to Levinas and Camus, this sordid correlation between the metaphysical inclination towards the concept of totality in the history of Western thought and totalitarian politics, and why exactly it is that Levinas regards it as a symptomatic and chronic intellectual tendency of towering thinkers and figures in the history of Western civilization, from the Presocratic Parmenides to Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.

Analogously, Camus is equally insistent in his exclamation that the ideational seeds of the totalitarian ideologies from both ends

of the political spectrum were sown by the political (mis)use of the Marxian and Hegelian messianic teleologies, as well as the National Socialists' infamous, Machiavellian and cynical incorporation and insertion of pseudo-Nietzschean themes into their vocabulary, and the fact that they shamelessly purported to portray their geo-politics as synonymous/harmonious with a veritable conceptual contradiction, i.e. 'Political Nietzscheanism'.⁸

We will also show that Camus is indeed inclined to regard Hegel as the last great 'theodician', if one may inverse Heidegger's celebrated depiction of Nietzsche as 'the last metaphysician' in his well-known Nietzsche lectures.⁹

The choice to focus on Levinas and Camus in the context of intellectual resistance to totalitarianism is a choice to focus on the hitherto overlooked 'Ethical Turn' of these two leading twentieth-century seminal intellectual figures.¹⁰

In comparison with other philosophical 'turns', e.g. the linguistic one, the ethical turn did not receive the recognition and acknowledgement it duly merits, to the extent that as of date this is the first work which purports to offer an examination of two of the greatest exemplars of the ethical turn in a political context, as there is no published work which attempts to establish a political dialogue (or any other dialogue, for that matter) between Levinas and Camus. The same holds with regard to the very complex and at first misleading rapport between the hermeneutical ingenuity and innovation of Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas, a rapport that we shall begin to examine in the context of the section of this work which pertains to Levinas's and Camus's analysis of Hitlerism and its perverted and intellectually fraudulent façade and pretence under the peculiar guise of 'Political Nietzscheanism'.

In both these senses the present work will humbly attempt to be an overture, as it is pioneering, the first in its kind to offer a window into the philosophical commonalities and intellectual affinities of these thinkers, within the realm and confinements of a specific political context. We already mentioned that Levinas and Camus were both outsiders in the Parisian intellectual milieu during the era of virtually uncontested Sartrean hegemony,¹¹ and that they were first and foremost biographical outsiders given their respective Lithuanian and Algerian origins.

However, it is important to augment to this biographical element a more substantive layer, i.e. the fact that Levinas and Camus were also distinct outsiders from an ideational vantage point. As we narrate and seek to explicate and shed light upon the sheer essence

of their ethical turn, we will strive to exemplify through textually cogent and politically contextual elucidation the fact that Levinas and Camus indeed possessed a pioneering intellectual temperament and disposition, and that they had the courage to rethink their a-priori political, ethical and philosophical presuppositions *ex nihilo*, from a normative and ideational standpoint, at times at a considerable personal price and intellectual toll.¹²

II. Structure and Themes

The first part of the book constitutes an elucidation of Levinas's and Camus's anti-totalitarian critiques. We begin with two brief intellectual and biographical preludes entitled 'Emmanuel Levinas: A Brief Generic Biographical Overview / "Portrait of the Scholar as a Young Man"' and 'Albert Camus: From Solipsistic Nihilism to Immanent Humanism'. This is in order to situate us within the relevant time frame and intellectual and political climate for our first consideration of their respective anti-totalitarian stances, as the following chapter considers Levinas's and Camus's critiques of the totalitarian right ('Levinas and Camus Contra Hitlerism and "Political Nietzscheanism"').

In the chapter pertaining to Levinas's and Camus's critiques of Hitlerism and 'Political Nietzscheanism', we begin with pervasive analogies between Levinas's early and pioneering analysis and depiction of National Socialism as a civilizational rift, an attempt to overthrow and annul the moral and political achievements accumulated and amassed during two millennia of virtually uncontested Judaeo-Christian hegemony, and Camus's corresponding reflections in *The Rebel*. We show that this Levinasian early (1934) and acute diagnosis of Hitlerism in terms of philosophical anthropology is largely congruent with the one offered by Camus in *The Rebel*, as the latter contends with the uniqueness of this political experience, in comparison with the other authoritarian and totalitarian models which emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. After manifesting the similarities between Levinas's and Camus's analyses of Hitlerism in terms of philosophical anthropology, we show that both Levinas and Camus are inclined to critically depict Nazism as a debased mode of relapse into reactionary paganism. In that respect, we show that both these thinkers resort to theological terminology and rhetoric in their depiction of Hitlerism as an anti-Christian movement. At this stage we also introduce into the

equation the politicization and vulgarization of Friedrich Nietzsche. In a subsection pertaining to this saga of political misappropriation which has been hitherto haunting political theorists for the last seven decades, we examine Levinas's and Camus's respective stances vis-à-vis the dark (and at times farcical and macabre) riddle of 'Political Nietzscheanism'. This is the topic of the subsection entitled 'Levinas and Camus on "Political Nietzscheanism" / On the Problem and Inevitability of an Anachronistic Reading / "The Unbearable Lightness of Philosophical Vulgarization"'.

An additional subsection of this chapter discusses the shared historical analysis of Levinas and Nietzsche, i.e. the contention that there is a clear ideational and normative linkage between monotheism and liberalism, a notion that Camus is inclined to reject. In this context, we argue that there is, in this regard, an inescapable, though hitherto unobserved, striking parallel between the Levinasian and Nietzschean narratives, which run along one another, yet never converge, as they point to the same civilizational symptoms, yet advocate antithetical normative – a-normative – approaches. Both these towering thinkers conceive of the history of Western civilization as a monumental battle, an ontological and normative warfare, launched between two metanarratives in the history of ideas, i.e. the spirit of paganism and that of monotheism, which Nietzsche vividly unfolds in his seminal ethical excavations of the roots of Western morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and Levinas consistently alludes to throughout the bulk of his early writings during the 1930s. We will also compare and contrast the Nietzschean account of inter-subjectivity with that of Levinas and Camus, thereby also considering some of the political implications of Levinas's and Camus's stances vis-à-vis the human other.

We conclude our preoccupation with Nietzsche with a demonstration of the shared hermeneutical vocation of Levinas and Nietzsche. The chapter concludes with a consideration of Levinas's and Camus's meditations on genocide in the aftermath of 1945, and their mutual rejection of the 'theodical temptation', together with its corresponding implications for a humanistic outlook, both in its religious and secular versions.

In the next chapter we move on to consider Levinas's and Camus's critiques of left totalitarianism, i.e. Stalinism and Soviet Marxism, in conjunction with their philosophical critiques of Hegelian philosophy of history. Camus's analysis in *The Rebel* is considered in reference to a series of articles Levinas published in the 1950s, which pertain to these issues.¹³

We then move to explore and explicate the complex philosophical moves of Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* and show to what extent this seemingly esoteric critique of the history of Western metaphysics is closely intertwined with his corresponding critique of the Hegelian historical outlook, as well as Soviet praxis in the 1950s.

We will show the commonalities between Levinas's philo-political findings and Camus's call for a philosophy of limits and rebellion against the political dogmas of the time.

The final chapter of the book pertains to religious humanism and Middle Eastern geo-politics. Its first section is entitled 'Levinas and Camus Contra Religious Fundamentalism / Answer to the Question "What is Metaphysical Suicide?"' (Evidently, the subtitle purports to insinuate an inversion of Kant's classical and much celebrated explication of the gist of *Aufklärung*). In this section we strive to infer from the writings of Levinas and Camus their tacit and at times explicit negation of religious fundamentalism, specifically by alluding to their depiction of the authentic societal and socio-political role of religiosity as a *modus* of humanism that leans upon a transcendent premise. We spend a considerable part of this section deciphering and outlining the striking commonalities between two early works, i.e. Levinas's *De L'Évasion* (*On Escape*) and Camus's celebrated *The Myth of Sisyphus*. These two works, we argue, are works of labyrinth, which will ultimately lead to a breakthrough, from a philosophical, normative and political standpoint, culminating in two anti-totalitarian *chefs-d'oeuvre*, *The Rebel* and *Totality and Infinity*. We further show that during the 1930s the two thinkers are at odds, their work is incommensurate in as much as Camus's depiction of all types of religiosity is negative and highly dismissive. At this stage, we argue, the 'early' Camus is inclined to conceive of all types of metaphysical doctrines, an enlightened humanistic adherence to monotheism therein inclusive, as synonymous with and indicative of metaphysical suicide. We also show that for Levinas the very opposite is the case. That is to say, his lifelong vocation was to render possible a religious humanism, i.e. a reading of canonical monotheistic texts that seek to curtail and downplay anti-Enlightenment passages, and to consistently promote and encourage a humanistic-universalistic interpretative methodology. Thus for Levinas, not interpreting the scriptures and the bulk of the monotheistic heritage according to the liberal legacy of the Enlightenment in a spirit of constant intellectual and hermeneutical renewal, or conversely, giving up the normative baggage inherent in monotheism altogether, is indeed paramount to ethical-metaphysical suicide/defeatism in light of the

totalitarian threat; whereas for the 'early' Camus, the very choice to remain steadfast in one's adherence to monotheism constitutes metaphysical/philosophical suicide.

Thus we seek to confront the very essence of the Levinasian mode of religious humanism in this chapter, its Archimedean point, but also the manner in which Camus exemplifies what constitutes a normatively and epistemologically valid type of religiosity, i.e. the mode of religious humanism personified in the literary figure of Father Paneloux in Camus's literary anti-totalitarian allegory of *La Peste*, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. It is in this context that we take a closer examination of Camus's metamorphosis from his early solipsism (in *Caligula*, *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*) to his later humanistic stance (*The Rebel*, *The Plague* and *Letters to a German Friend*).

Moreover, we also take this opportunity to examine the much relevant, in this context, recurring political, existential, religious and ethical motifs pervasive in the slightly later work (1956) of *La Chute*. In *The Fall* we encounter a distinctly Levinasian *événement*, i.e. the Levinasian Moment of the face-to-face encounter and the existential ramifications of missing this encounter.

We conclude with an attempt at a parsimonious explication of the dualist nature of Israel and Algeria in the writings of Levinas and Camus under the title 'Visionary Politics / Dualist Political Ontology, Israel and Algeria in the Writings of Levinas and Camus'. We argue that Algeria and Israel, for Camus and Levinas, are case studies in which personal identity becomes intertwined with questions of moral boundaries vis-à-vis resistance to political oppression, and in addition to their (i.e. Israel and Algeria) being a concrete political reality in the form of a nation-state, they are also a place which constitutes, at least in potentiality, a metaphysical and moral alternative to the political atrocities and follies of Europe's all-too-tragic twentieth century. Camus, in the concluding segment of *The Rebel*, articulates the vision that the Mediterranean region, which for him entails first and foremost Algeria, constitutes an overture in potentiality to the possibility of the political, which is entrenched in the ethical. Sadly, a brief glance at the contemporary geo-political constellations in Israel and Algeria vividly exemplifies the tragic gulf/gap between the vision common to Levinas and Camus in this regard, and the sordid Middle Eastern reality at the commencement of the twenty-first century. This short exposition on the Mediterranean in Levinas and Camus is by no means exhaustive, and as it does not pertain directly to the specific political context

in which we examine the *oeuvres* of these two respective thinkers, the purpose of this laconic overview of the visionary aspect of their thought is to illuminate and highlight the fact that besides an acute and timely critique of the totalitarian upheavals, besides the fact that both these seminal figures had '20/20 political vision' in the critical sense,¹⁴ they had also envisaged a coherent alternative and remedy to the geo-political sordid state of affairs which Europe found itself in during the 1930s–50s, albeit not necessarily in a structural sense – more so in an ethical and anti-teleological sense.

The final subsection will stress once more Levinas's and Camus's heritage in the form of the 'ethical turn', and growingly and glowingly pervasive relevance for our own turbulent contention with a totalitarian spirit which falsely dresses itself in a theological façade. The fact that the looming totalitarian threat is still on the horizon even in the current epoch, half a century after the publication of *Totality and Infinity* and *The Rebel*, and a decade and a half following the demise of the Soviet Union, is testimony to the fact that the political and intellectual follies and atrocities with which Camus and Levinas contended transcend far beyond the constraints of a given time frame.

In fact, the political lessons to be deduced from their *oeuvres* are a-temporal, and will prove instrumental and imperative 'as long as eyes can see and man can breathe', as long as our human civilization perseveres and survives its sporadic suicidal attempts to annihilate itself, in our own epoch with a technology which carries an unprecedented devastating potential for collective annihilation.

The danger of tyranny indeed escorts mankind from the very dawn of human civilization, as Plato's lucid consideration of it in *The Republic* aptly reflects.¹⁵

Camus's realization of this a-temporal nature of the totalitarian temptation is masterfully captured in his ingenious tour de force which concludes his literary allegory of the Nazi occupation, for which he received the highest form of formal recognition and acknowledgement which humanity bestows upon its greatest minds and thinkers. *La Peste* concludes with the following paragraph:

And indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books; that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for the good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and

perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.¹⁶

Chapter 1

Biographical Segments

I. Emmanuel Levinas: A Brief Generic Biographical Overview / 'Portrait of the Scholar as a Young Man' (1906–33)

The year 1933 constitutes a milestone in the history of modern times, and also a watershed in the intellectual legacy of Emmanuel Levinas, who is contemporarily recognized as a towering twentieth-century thinker. Levinas, a Lithuanian Jew, was born in Kovno in 1906. He experienced the turmoil and upheaval of October 1917 and, prior to that, World War I, in the Russian periphery.

Following the occupation of Kovno by German forces in 1915, the family resituated in Kharkov, Ukraine, where Levinas attended the local Russian gymnasium. Russian culture, particularly its literary giants, constituted one primary, important pillar, out of four such cultural-philosophical-existential prisms through which Levinas contemplated the world and the human condition. Each of these respective four pillars would prove instrumental in the evolution of the Levinasian philosophical enterprise. Levinas conceived of the great Russian novelists, especially Tolstoy, Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoyevsky, as philosophers, in the sense of *Lebensphilosophie* and *Existenzphilosophie*. He admired the majesty of their prose and the audacious abundance of metaphysical turmoil, reflected in their quest to unveil 'the meaning of life'.¹ In that respect, it is this *rencontre littéraire* which later motivated Levinas to pursue philosophy as a lifelong vocation. For Levinas conceived of the Russian masters as philosophers who employ a distinctly epic methodology in their metaphysical quests.²

An even more decisive cultural prism, which was an integral part of Levinas's socialization and formative years, was Judaism. Hebrew was the first language in which he read, and the study of the Torah and Hebrew texts prepared him for the pivotal roles he would later on come to play in the spiritual renaissance and cultural-pedagogical rehabilitation of European Jewry in the post-1945 era,

and also played a significant role in his 'universalist' philosophical works.³ Indeed, once his family returned to Kovno in 1920, as the political turmoil somewhat subsided, Levinas resumed his studies in a Hebrew gymnasium.

Three years later, Levinas decided to pursue his academic studies in Strasbourg, with a great, quasi-messianic faith in the universalist ethos of 1789. As he would later on recount, France was the country in which 'for Eastern European Jewry, the [biblical] prophecies were realized'.⁴ Levinas described France as 'a nation that one can attach oneself to by way of spirit and heart, as much as by roots',⁵ and became a French citizen in 1930 out of a patriotism more induced by spiritual and cultural affection than by territorial/ultra-nationalist zeal. In that respect, this Levinasian mode of patriotism is reminiscent of pre-1933 German-Jewish patriotism, which manifested itself in a quasi-religious fervour and thirst for *Bildung*, an intellectualized mode of cultural nationalism striving to attain constant self-amelioration, perfectibility and growth, via the instrumentality of high culture and complete immersion in the canonical texts of a given culture. In a word, a mode of cultural nationalism stemming from 'a proprietary feeling for a civilization that had produced decent cosmopolitans . . . and ornaments to humanism'.⁶

Levinas focused on the study of philosophy in Strasbourg, chiefly Bergson and Husserl, and was exhilarated once one of his teachers, Maurice Pradines, presented the Dreyfus Affair as an example of a triumph of the ethical over the political. Consistently, as the evolution of his own *oeuvre* would progress, Levinas himself would overtly call for the precedence of the ethical, the 'face-to-face' encounter, over the political. Hence French civilization and republicanism constitute the third pillar/ontological and cultural reference point for Levinas.

In 1928–9 Levinas studied a semester in Freiburg, Germany, and attended Heidegger's seminar.⁷ Levinas came to Freiburg in order to expand and further explore Husserlian phenomenology, yet rapidly found himself immersed in Heidegger's *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Sein und Zeit*. He would later on summarize the unfolding of these events by stating, 'I had gone to Freiburg to study Husserl, and I found Heidegger'.⁸

Until 1933, Levinas dedicates his intellectual energies to the somewhat modest and serene vocation of a philosophical interpreter and scholar, and there are very little biographical or intellectual indications to suggest that he was inclined to develop an autonomous philosophy and become an original thinker of stature marked by an

independent and pioneering intellectual temperament. Levinas takes it upon himself to introduce to the French-speaking world German phenomenology, the 'Husserlian Revolution' of 'returning to the things themselves',⁹ as well as the early Heidegger.¹⁰ His doctoral dissertation *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* is published in 1930.¹¹ In 1931 he co-translates Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* with a colleague from Strasbourg University, Gabrielle Pfeiffer.¹² Hence German phenomenology constitutes the fourth central pillar in Levinas's intellectual evolution.

II. Albert Camus: From Solipsistic Nihilism to Immanent Humanism

As David Ohana's splendid introduction to the Hebrew edition of *Letters to a German Friend* indicates, Camus fought against both the totalitarianism of the right and the totalitarianism of the left. In his essays, articles, works of prose and plays he strove consistently to unveil the injustice of tyranny. Camus was among the first and most consistent French intellectuals to have fought both Nazism and Stalinism. With *L'Etranger*, *Caligula* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus establishes himself as the philosopher of the absurd. The 'death of God' constitutes the birth of the absurd. In the absence of religious life, the world becomes meaningless.¹³

The *raison d'être* of Camus's later writings (*L'Homme Révolté*, *La Peste*, *Lettres à un ami allemand*) is to demonstrate the way out of the murderous paradox inherent in the political messianisms of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Camus's sound political instincts realized the pervasive utopian nature of these projects, and consequently that they will launch an ideological crusade against all political infidels.

The play *Caligula* can be read as a political sketch of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* in the form of the totalitarian individual. The play was written on the eve of the Munich Accords (1938), yet was first staged in 1945 with its all-pervasive critique of *Führerprinzip*.

The ethical void in terms of guiding ethical and socio-political values lies at the very heart of the philosophical writings of the earlier Camus.¹⁵ Consistently, Camus proclaims that for him the absurd is solely a developmental phase, which he needs to surpass. In 1944 he writes in *Combat*, 'we must first posit negation and absurdity because they are what our generation has encountered and what we must take into account.'¹⁶ Hence, describing the absurd in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, *L'Etranger* and *Caligula* was not an intrinsic existential

vocation, but rather solely the beginning of a new humanism, which can contend with the atrocities committed in the name of *Volksgeist*, on one side of the political spectrum, and universal redemption, on the other side of the political spectrum.

Camus fought vehemently against the religious and political churches, which turn towards eternity, and asked to return from the universal to the particular, from the eternal to the temporal, from the metaphysical to the concrete and to collective responsibility, from nihilism to humanism. While *Caligula* depicts the totalitarian individual, *La Peste* allegorically describes the nihilist praxis of totalitarianism, the mass killings and the choice to resist and persevere, to maintain human solidarity and fidelity to universalistic notions of human dignity and responsibility, precisely in an epoch utterly devoid of metaphysical, moral and political boundaries.¹⁷

Such is the very essence of a humanism which remains steadfast and resolute in a nihilist zeitgeist, while at the same time maintains intellectual honesty as it resists all forms and types of metaphysical solaces and consolations, be they in the form of the traditional monotheistic religions, or conversely the false political messianisms of the totalitarian churches from the political right and left alike.

The atrocious occurrences taking place in *La Peste* are depicted as a 'monstrous abstraction' which takes over the city of humanity (Oran), annuls all distinctions, annihilates all values in the face of sheer military might and a Darwinian social ontology that effaces all traces of human dignity. Camus deplores the call to establish an elitist humanity in a political sense (alluding chiefly to the posthumous politicization of Nietzsche in Germany of 1933-45), which ended in the systematic production of subhumans. Never before had a political force been thus organized for the purpose of dehumanization and complete annihilation of millions of individuals and entire communities and collectivities.

The totalitarian ideologies offered an all-engulfing systematic doctrinal explication of human history and the human condition, the human vocation, and with this explication mass programmes for social transformation, known on the totalitarian left as social engineering. The chief thesis in *Letters to a German Friend* revolts against the dark side of modernity, as the Promethean endeavour of humanity to determine its own fate had also taken a distinctly anti-Enlightenment barbaric and monstrous turn.

In a word, drawing from Nietzsche, Camus is also well attuned to the plights of the individual, the 'wound of existence' in a nihilist era that is utterly devoid of any valid metaphysical, political and

moral underlying guidelines. However, in contrast to the advocates and proponents of political Nietzscheanism, modernity for Camus also constitutes a humanistic mode of self-fulfilment. Taking responsibility for the humanization of the socio-political order takes precedence over the Nietzschean assertion that existence is solely justifiable as an aesthetic vocation.

Chapter 2

Levinas and Camus Contra Hitlerism and 'Political Nietzscheanism'

I. Levinas's and Camus's Analysis of Nazism in Terms of Philosophical Anthropology

Levinas regarded the occurrences and calamities unleashed on 30 January 1933¹ as first and foremost a metaphysical event. In his fascinating and pioneering article 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', he contributed to the world one of the earliest, most profound and original analyses of the essence of the Hitlerian Revolution.² Levinas regarded the emergence of National Socialism as a civilizational rift, an attempt to overthrow and annul the moral and political achievements accumulated and amassed during two millennia of virtually uncontested Judaeo-Christian hegemony. A hegemony which, according to Levinas, paved the road to democratic liberalism, universal human rights and the universalist revolutionary ethos of 1789. In harmony with the historian of ideas Jacob Talmon, whose lifelong enterprise, decades later, was to unveil the ideological genealogy of right and left twentieth-century totalitarianism,³ Levinas realized, as early as 1934, how profoundly, disastrously and indeed catastrophically distinct was the National Socialist endeavour and political experiment from other analogous modes of experimentation with ultra-nationalist enterprises which typified the zeitgeist, e.g. Italian and Spanish fascism.

Nazism, realized Levinas, half a decade prior to the commencement of World War II, was a novel ontological approach to the human condition in its entirety, and in that respect its all-pervasive ramifications extended well beyond the realm of the political. Hence his quasi-prophetic analysis of the essence of the Third Reich in terms of philosophical anthropology, at a time when the Western powers regarded the German threat as somewhat subsidiary in comparison to Stalinist Russia.

Levinas writes: '[National Socialism] is not only opposed to this or that particular detail of ... liberal culture. It does not challenge this or that dogma of democracy, parliamentarism, dictatorship, or religious policy. It contests the very humanity of man.'⁴

In harmony with Levinas, Camus also takes care constantly to stress the dehumanizing streak inherent in the philosophy of Hitlerism. Indeed, echoes of the Levinasian analysis of the gist of the ontological essence of the Hitlerian worldview are all-pervasive in Camus's depiction of right-wing totalitarianism. Thus for Camus as well, the ramifications of the Third Reich are an objectification of the human condition, and

the result is that man, if he is a member of the party, is no more than a tool in the hands of the *Führer*, a waste product of the machine. The impetus towards irrationality of this movement, born of rebellion, now even goes so far as to propose subjugating all that makes man [into no] more than a cog in the machine; in other words ... the romantic individualism of the German Revolution finally peters out in the world of inanimate objects. Irrational terror transforms men into matter, 'planetary bacilli,' according to Hitler's formula. This formula proposes the destruction, not only of the individual, but of the universal possibilities of the individual, of reflection, solidarity, and the urge to absolute love.⁵

Moreover, Camus, in his seminal *L'Homme Révolté* of 1951, one of the leading anti-totalitarian works of the twentieth century, is also inclined to regard the Nazi regime as an historical moment in which all values collapsed, in which the moral capital of the Enlightenment enterprise gave way to gangster morality and the unchecked admiration of the dark powers of blood and instinct:

For Hitler ... in his Revolution of Nihilism ... [in] the Hitlerian Revolution ... values no longer existed ... [for] to those who despair of everything reason cannot provide a faith ... there was no longer any standard of values ... The Germany of 1933 thus agreed to adopt the degraded values of a mere handful of men and tried to impose them on an entire civilisation. Deprived of morality, Germany chose, and submitted to, the ethics of the gang.⁶

The opening remarks of Levinas's 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' can be read as a confirmation of Friedrich Nietzsche's words in *On the Genealogy of Morals* regarding the subterranean,

Dionysian overwhelming desire to break free and undo the heavy burdens and shackles of Judaeo-Christian morality. Nietzsche alludes to the 'blond beast' that 'needs to erupt from time to time, the animal which needs to get out again and go back to the wilderness'.⁷ Analogously, Levinas speaks of 'an elementary force [which] is more than contagion or folly ... [For] it is an awakening of elementary emotions'.⁸

Camus's diagnosis is identical. He is also most attentive to the fact that one is grappling here with "the elementary forces of the individual" ... the exaltation of the dark powers of blood and instinct, the biological justification of all the worst things produced by the instincts of domination'.⁹

Levinas implies that one is indeed grappling here with a radical 're-evaluation of all values', despite the sordid fact that one is also dealing here with a vulgarized and politicized popular perversion and manipulation of Nietzsche's existential sermon, for 'the philosophy of Hitlerism ... casts doubt on the very principles of [Judaeo-Christian] civilization. This is not limited to a conflict between liberalism and Hitlerism. Christianity itself is endangered'.¹⁰

In the same spirit, Camus goes so far as to proclaim that the radical political experimentations that the twentieth century had known from the right side of the political spectrum, brown authoritarianism and totalitarianism, constitute an attempt to initiate an existentially degenerate and falsified politicized version of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*: 'the over-inspired predictions of ... Nietzsche ended up by conjuring up ... an irrational state ... one which ... was founded on terror'.¹¹ Camus goes so far as to suggest that 'fascism wants to establish the advent of the Nietzschean superman'.¹²

II. On the Linkage between Monotheism and Liberalism (Levinas and Nietzsche) / On Levinas's and Camus's Utilization of Theological Rhetoric in Their Depiction of Hitlerism / On the Normative Monotheistic Roots of the Enlightenment (or Lack Thereof)

Levinas strives to demonstrate that monotheism anticipated and facilitated the metaphysical foundations and ideological infrastructure of the Enlightenment and the liberal *esprit*. According to Levinas, the Judaeo-Christian concept of temporality constitutes a revolution in the manner in which human life is experienced. One is dealing here with the theological notion of redemptive time. In paganism, argues Levinas, one is enslaved to the tragedy of

unmovable, ineffaceable time, whereas religious remorse/repentance rectifies time, in the sense that time loses its quasi-anarchical, uncontrollable, ever-changing streak, typified by Heraclitus's simile of the forever-changing river. Camus, loyal to an immanent pantheistic streak which several commentators detect in his *oeuvre*,¹³ exclaims in a manner congruent with this Levinasian notion of temporality that 'Hitler ... preaches complete identification with the stream of life, on the lowest level and in defiance of all superior reality.'¹⁴

According to Levinas, one finds in the monotheistic notion of time 'an infinite liberty with respect to all attachments',¹⁵ in addition to 'the equal dignity of all souls, without regard to a person's material or social condition'.¹⁶ One finds here already two out of the three celebrated ingredients of the modernist metaphysical recipe of 1789, i.e. liberty and equality. Together with an implied notion of universal fraternity in light of the infinite demand for responsibility, which would become an integral part of his subsequent work in the post-1945 era, Levinas builds the case for an internal and continuous linkage between monotheism and liberal republicanism.

Yet in order to redeem oneself from enslavement to irreparable time, in order no longer to be in search of lost time, one must struggle hard, for 're-conquest [of time] is not easy, but [requires] ... strenuous effort'.¹⁷

Political liberalism, by crowning the sovereign liberty of reason, continues and perpetuates the essence of monotheism, which also implies a rational demystification of the world, argues Levinas.¹⁸

The essence of the monotheistic message, professes Levinas, includes the proclamation that there is a higher essence beyond that of the sensory world, and in the same token, he adds, liberalism 'tends to place the human mind on a plane higher than the real, creating an abyss between man and the world ... liberation by grace is replaced by autonomy, but it is pervaded by the Judeo-Christian leitmotiv of freedom'.¹⁹

In a sense, the monotheistic spirit culminates in the Enlightenment enterprise, and both share a rejection of radical materialism ('what is left of materialism when matter is completely pervaded with reason'²⁰).

According to Camus, democracy is by no means a normative offspring of the monotheistic heritage. On the contrary, it is an emancipatory force that rids humanity of the metaphysical constraints and exigencies of any theological doctrine, the Judaeo-Christian legacy inclusive. By way of contrast, Levinas and Nietzsche regard modern-day democracy as deriving from Judaeo-Christianity.

Camus's stance in this regard is more congruent with the Kantian conception of the Enlightenment enterprise, particularly as articulated in the latter's seminal *What is Enlightenment?*

Paradoxically perhaps, both Nietzsche and Levinas allude to an intrinsic correlation between biblical prophetic morality and the monumental political upheavals of 1789, which paved the path to liberal democracy. For both thinkers, paganism is virtually synonymous with a despotic regime in which the many are subjected to the whims of the few, whereas democracy with its normative baggage of universal suffrage and universal human rights constitutes the historical, ideational and normative derivative of the Judaeo-Christian heritage.

However, in contrast to Levinas, the Nietzsche of *On the Genealogy of Morals* is inclined to lament the fact that the spirit of Judaea (which Christianity perpetuates, according to the latter's narrative) has the upper hand in modern times (in lieu of the pagan legacy of Rome). Nietzsche writes:

The two opposing values 'good and bad,' 'good and evil' have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years ... The symbol of this struggle, inscribed in letters legible across all human history, is 'Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome': there has hitherto been no greater event than this struggle, this question, this deadly contradiction ... Which of them has won for the present, Rome or Judea? But there can be no doubt ... With the French Revolution, Judea once again triumphed ... and this time in an even more profound and decisive sense.²¹

Both Levinas and Nietzsche observe the peripheral status of the body in monotheistic ontology. Levinas writes:

What does it mean to have a body? It means bearing the body like an object from the outside world. The body weighs on Socrates like the chains that bind him in the Athenian prison ... This sentiment of the eternal strangeness of the body with regard to ourselves was nourished by both Christianity and modern liberalism.²²

In this context, one may regard the 'Reflections on Hitlerism' as an implicit polemical response to those who purported to implement 'Political Nietzscheanism' (a veritable conceptual contradiction), crowned Nietzsche as the philosopher of the Third Reich, and politicized the critique inherent in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In a similar

vein to the Nietzsche of the *Genealogy*,²³ Levinas notes 'the decline of the ascetic ideal in the Renaissance'.²⁴

There is, in this regard, an inescapable, though hitherto unobserved, striking parallel between the Levinasian and Nietzschean narratives, which run along one another, yet never converge, as they point to the same civilizational symptoms, yet advocate antithetical normative/a-normative approaches.

Both these towering thinkers conceive of the history of Western civilization as a monumental battle, an ontological and normative warfare, launched between two metanarratives in the history of ideas, i.e. the spirit of paganism and that of monotheism, which Nietzsche vividly unfolds in his seminal ethical excavations of the roots of Western morality in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and Levinas consistently alludes to throughout the bulk of his writings from the 1930s onwards.

The Levinasian normative dichotomy of Judaeo-Christianity contra paganism, Nietzsche depicts as Judaea contra Rome, in conjunction with the all-pervasive analogies in terms of political regimes. While Nietzsche resorts to this dichotomy in order to deplore both the ascent of ultra-nationalism and democratic liberalism, Levinas leans on these paradigms in order to offer an analysis of both Hitlerism and liberal democracy in terms of philosophical anthropology.

While Levinas conceives of the mythological saga of the exodus of the ancient Hebrews from Egypt as a metaphysical event replete with universal significance and relevance for the bulk of mankind,²⁵ Nazism constitutes a relapse back to paganism, typified by enslavement to the physical realm, particularly the body.²⁶

Camus also makes use of theological terminology in his condemnation of the Hitlerian folly and writes of 'the fascistic mystics' who 'thought that they were free [yet did not] know that no one escapes from Hitlerism ... nor did they know that the negation of everything is itself a form of servitude'.²⁷

Camus, despite his being in vehement metaphysical opposition to all notions of the transcendent, also laments the inherent spirit of utter submission and enslavement, which typifies the fascistic mysticism, and exclaims, 'There is no liberation from Hitlerism'.²⁸

Hitlerism, implies Levinas, is a novel ontological approach to the human condition in modern times, according to which the central attributes are biological-Darwinian-hereditary. The pivotal human traits are not the transcendental yearnings to Infinity,²⁹ nor liberty or a life being led according to the Cartesian paradigm of the natural light of reason and the veracity of God, but rather a voluntary

submission and enslavement to a-priori racist criteria, which renders the Kantian notion of an autonomous human volition null and void.

Levinas summarizes proficiently and parsimoniously the gist of the Hitlerian philosophical anthropology as follows:

The importance attributed to this sentiment of the body ... is the basis of a new notion of man. The biological ... becomes more than an object of spiritual life; it becomes its heart ... the mysterious voices of the blood, the calls of heredity and the past ... The essence of man lies no longer in his freedom but in a sort of enslavement. To be truly oneself is not to rise above contingencies ... it is to become aware of the ineluctable original enslavement unique to our bodies; it is, above all, to accept this enslavement ... Chained to his body, man is denied the power to escape from himself.³⁰

Camus, in harmony with the latter Levinasian exposition, conceives of the National Socialist ethos as synonymous with the perdition of liberty, the perpetual reign of violence and spiritual slavery: 'such a revolution ... has nothing to do with liberation ... it is "the death of freedom", the triumph of violence, and the enslavement of the mind. Fascism is an act of contempt.'³¹

Consequently, in Nazism, each universalist/enlightened secular or theological doctrine which purports to emancipate the human condition from being determined and contingent upon the 'physiological' is vehemently negated.

III. Levinas and Camus on 'Political Nietzscheanism' / On the Problem and Inevitability of an Anachronistic Reading / 'The Unbearable Lightness of Philosophical Vulgarization'

Levinas argues for a direct intrinsic link between Nietzsche's 'philosophizing with a hammer' and his anti-metaphysical devastation of the modern political ideas exemplified in 1789, democracy, universal suffrage and universal human rights, and the politicization of the latter's sermon in Germany of the 1930s, whereby the regime did not adhere to the supra-human heroism which Nietzsche envisaged for the few in the form of the 'sovereign individual', and sought to recruit Nietzsche posthumously in the service of a 'human, all too human' collectivist-herdish enterprise typified by the very same metaphysical ingredients and prejudices which Nietzsche

himself had so forcefully detested and deplored, i.e. German ultra-nationalism and racist anti-Semitism.

It is in this context that Levinas contends that 'an idea that propagates is essentially detached from its starting point. Despite the unique accent given by its creator, it becomes a common heritage ... Whoever accepts it becomes its master, no less than the person who proposed it. So the propagation of an idea creates a community of "masters"'.³²

'Political Nietzscheanism', argue Levinas and Camus, constitutes a collectivist farcical and grotesque ideological caricature of a vision designed for 'none and all'.³³

Political Nietzscheanism renounces the individualist calling to achieve 'self-overcoming' by virtue of achieving artistic, intellectual and overall existential excellence. It renounces the *amor fati* of the *Übermensch* who strives to divorce the suffocating mediocrity of the *zeitgeist* in order to fulfil his potential genius, and replaces the Nietzschean ethics of virtues³⁴ with the idol worshipping of *Führerprinzip*, the 'aestheticization of the political',³⁵ and a popular mode of militarism with its chauvinistic zeal overtaking the artistic grandeur inherent in the call to adhere to an autonomous 'will to power'.³⁶

Camus proficiently summarizes the existential inversion inherent in the politicization of Nietzsche, i.e. from Zarathustrian superhuman self-mastery in *amor fati* to Hitlerian dehumanizing self-effacement in *Führerprinzip*. According to Camus, in Hitlerism 'all problems are thus military, posed in terms of power and efficiency. One leader, one people, signifies one master and millions of slaves ... the first and sole principle of this degraded form of mysticism is born, the *Führerprinzip*, which restores idolatry and a debased deity to the world of nihilism'.³⁷

Seeing eye to eye with Levinas's *Zeitdiagnose* of Hitlerism as a twentieth-century mode of relapse into barbaric idolatry, Camus goes on to proclaim that 'the origins of this are to be found in a primitive baying to the moon. Who is the god in question? An official party declaration answers that "all of us, here below, believe in Adolph Hitler, our Führer ... and (we confess) that National Socialism is the only faith which can lead our people to salvation"'.³⁸

Levinas was among the first to articulate the premise that Nazi Germany did not live up to the grandeur of the Nietzschean imperative, inherent therein one finds an unequivocal call to all persons of competence to live up to the superhuman maxim of 'becoming the one you are', in lieu of which the universal call to

excel existentially is 'modified' to pertain to an ethnocentric urge to conquer and expand by way of sheer military might. Levinas writes:

Not content with his transfiguration alone, Zarathustra comes down from the mountain and brings the gospel. How can universality be compatible with racism? That is where ... the very idea of universality is fundamentally modified. It has to give way to the idea of expansion, because the structure of expansion of a force is altogether different from the propagation of an idea.³⁹

For Camus also, 'the Fascistic revolutions of the 20th century ... lacked the ambition of universality ... Hitler ... chose to deify the irrational, and the irrational alone ... in this way [he] renounced [his] claim to universality.'⁴⁰

Camus, remaining loyal to Nietzsche's original celebrated anti-Hitlerian, anti-Schmittian maxim (anachronistically speaking), i.e. Nietzsche's well-known assertion that 'a good European should always work actively for the merging of nations',⁴¹ publishes during the occupation his *Letters to a German Friend* under a pseudonym, and therein envisages an alternative vision for the European continent. A vision that is congruent with the Levinasian one, and aptly reflects the original spirit of Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie* prior to its politicization; a vision in which the idea of universality does not cede ground to forceful military expansion.

Hitlerism, argues Levinas, is a revolutionary metaphysical doctrine, with all-pervasive ramifications and manifestations in all domains of life: political, military, socio-economic, moral and psychological, as it 'contests the very humanity of man'.⁴²

Hitlerism is 'Political Nietzscheanism', asserts Levinas, for 'the Nietzschean will to power, which modern Germany recuperates and glorifies, is not only a new ideal, it is an ideal that at the same time, carries its own form of universalization: war, conquest'.⁴³

Camus's forceful critique of the politicization of Nietzsche in the 1930s is strikingly analogous to the Levinasian one. Indeed, Camus dedicated a segment of his anti-totalitarian *chef-d'oeuvre* to a thorough, complex and highly ambivalent examination of the dark riddle which continued to haunt thinkers for the remainder of the century, i.e. the rapport, or lack thereof, between Nietzsche and right-wing totalitarianism.⁴⁴

The section of *L'Homme Révolté* entitled 'Nietzsche and Nihilism' vividly captures the gist of the highly nuanced, ambivalent and at

times almost contradictory manner in which Camus struggled as he continuously shifted from articulating his wholehearted unswerving admiration for Nietzsche's artistic and existential grandeur, and the posthumous vulgarization and politicization of the latter which was solely rendered possible given Nietzsche's own vehement anti-Enlightenment, anti-1789 rhetorical stances.

Nietzsche's 'democratic error'

Most importantly, Camus and Levinas reject 'Nietzsche's democratic error'. That is to say, they adhere to Nietzsche's depiction of the authoritarian and totalitarian political models as modern idols, yet at the same time they remain partisans and proponents of representative democracy, universal suffrage and universal human rights, in opposition to Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's views vis-à-vis the democratic model are 'erroneous'/flawed under the premises and guidelines of his own aesthetic agenda. For democratic negative liberty⁴⁵ enables a mode of cultural-existential experimentation that is undoubtedly less foreseeable under a non-democratic regime which constantly seeks to curtail individual liberties, the right to artistic freedom inclusive.

Nietzsche, who dreaded the cultural ramifications of the democratic order, i.e. mass culture, ought to have realized, from the vantage point of his own existential approach and temperament, that it is precisely this political system that would enable the virtuous few to achieve cultural and existential elevation with minimal state intervention in comparison with alternative and competing political doctrines. In a word, paradoxically perhaps, it is democracy that offers the competent aspiring few a more fertile soil to implement and realize their will to power, in comparison with all other political remedies.

The fact that Nietzsche rejected the democratic possibility as an electoral-procedural arrangement and as a normative rationale, due to his detestation of its perceived cultural ramifications, constitutes the Achilles heel of his thought, the 'weakest link' upon which German ultra-nationalists capitalized.⁴⁶

Camus realized the vulnerability of Nietzsche's philosophical enterprise in this regard. This sheds light and explicates one of his most astounding post-1945 proclamations, which in a sense offers in the form of a conversational anecdote the gist of the metamorphosis Camus underwent from a solipsistically inclined mode of nihilism as exemplified in the literary character of Mersault, the hero of his pre-war *chef-d'oeuvre* *L'Etranger* (who murders with

no apparent rational reason or motive, in a manner reminiscent of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*⁴⁷), to an immanent mode of humanism inherent therein one finds an unequivocal appeal to universalist solidarity in light of the political churches of Right and Left totalitarianism. We are alluding here to the following existential and philosophical misgivings that Camus expressed to Jean-Paul Sartre, Arthur Koestler and Andre Malraux, in 1946, not too long after the global bloodbath initiated by the proponents of 'Political Nietzscheanism' had come to an end:

Don't you agree, that we are all responsible for the absence of values? What if we, who all come out of Nietzscheanism, nihilism, and historical realism, what if we announced publicly that we were wrong; that there are moral values and that henceforth we shall do what has to be done to establish and illustrate them. Don't you agree that this might be the beginning of hope?⁴⁸

Six years later, these nocturnal conjectures which Camus shared with some of the leading French thinkers and intellectuals of the epoch came to full intellectual fruition and culmination in his *L'Homme Révolté*, in which Camus writes with much characteristic intellectual courage and honesty that 'the revolutionary spirit in Europe [should] ... also ... reflect upon its principles [and] ask itself what the deviation is which leads it from its path into terror and into war'.⁴⁹

IV. Levinas and Camus Contra the Nietzschean Antagonistic Mode of Inter-Subjectivity and Its Politicization

With regard to inter-subjectivity, Nietzsche professes in the second essay of his seminal *On the Genealogy of Morals* that not every human being is worthy of being respected by another. For Nietzsche, treating others with dignity is not a universal imperative, but rather a possibility which is contingent upon one being a 'sovereign individual'. Thus solely 'the strong and the reliable' are to be respected; yet the bulk of mankind deserves nothing but 'a kick and a rod'.⁵⁰

By way of contrast, for Levinas the human face constitutes a universal moral command. The face 'exclaims' dignity, the face is the physical embodiment of 'thou shall not commit murder', and 'the tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility ... whether accepted or refused, whether knowing or not knowing how to assume it,

whether able or unable to do something for the Other. To give. To be a human spirit, that's it.⁵¹

Furthermore, 'the other is not initially a fact, is not an obstacle [nor a potential rival in the existential armament race for the attainment of "the will to power"]', does not threaten me with death ... one must not ... consider the Other as an object ... the Other presents himself as an interlocutor, as him over whom I cannot have power, whom I cannot kill ... where I am not innocent spontaneity.⁵²

In the words of Camus, the rebel, the one who says no to the 'murderousness' inherent in the totalitarian enterprises,

puts his conviction and passion to work at diminishing the chances of murder around him. His only virtue will lie in never yielding to the impulse to allow himself to be engulfed in the shadows which surround him and in ... dragging the chains of evil ... towards the light of good ... the rebel ... achieves honour in metaphysical terms.⁵³

For Camus, political violence constitutes a murderous acknowledgement of the inevitable need for a rapport with the other, i.e. inter-subjectivity:

terror and concentration camps are the drastic means used by man to escape solitude. If men kill one another ... they prove, at the same time, that they cannot dispense with mankind; they satisfy a terrible hunger for fraternity ... For thousands of solitary people the suffering of others bears witness to the need for others. Terror is the homage that the malignant recluse finally pays to the brotherhood of man.⁵⁴

Camus is also attentive to the Levinasian notion of a metaphysical desire, and asserts that for the totalitarian individual 'the power to kill and degrade saves the servile soul from utter emptiness'.⁵⁵

Levinas seeks to articulate the relevance of Judaeo-Christian morality, which he is disinclined to regard as anachronistic. Rather he conceives of it as redemptive and eternal. While adhering to the cause of cultural and civilizational regeneration, he categorically dismisses radical interpretations of the 'will to power' which overlook the face of the other, be it a 'collective' or individual other. Here is Levinas's laconic and forceful tacit response to the Nietzschean critique of 'morality of *moeurs*':

Morality accomplishes human society ... It is something other than the co-existence of a multitude of humans, or a participation in new

and complex laws imposed by the masses. Society is the miracle of moving out of oneself. The violent man does not move out of himself. He takes, he possesses. Possession denies independent existence. To have is to refuse to be. Violence is a sovereignty, but also a solitude.⁵⁶

V. Nietzschean Streaks in the 'Early' Camus and the Levinas of the Post-1945 Era

It is important to emphasize that both Levinas and Camus distinguish between political Nietzscheanism, a posthumous geo-political constellation over which Friedrich Nietzsche had no control, and Nietzsche's own overt call to promote cultural and civilizational regeneration. In due course, Levinas would be inclined to resort rhetorically to explicit Nietzschean terminology in order to render his own sermon more lucid. As an illustration, Levinas urges his readers to approach the Talmud with a 'vivacious' way of reading and interpreting, i.e. to employ a hermeneutical approach which is energetic, contemporary, pertaining to the complexities and subtleties of our modernist zeitgeist – in a word, to promote a useful and 'life enhancing' textual approach. The gist of this audacious quasi-Nietzschean appeal is captured in Levinas's definition of the Talmud as a 'Gay Science'.⁵⁷

Under the possible inspiration of Nietzsche's 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', Levinas calls upon us to engage intellectually and existentially when approaching the scriptures in a manner that is incongruent with orthodox historicism:

Objective science ... tries to reduce the exception to the rule ... Spinoza ... inaugurates a critical reading of the Scriptures ... [yet] we may nonetheless ask whether the scientific categorization of a spiritual movement can ever reveal its real contribution and significance. Can wisdom ever bare its soul and reveal its secret without displaying a power that imposes itself on us as a message or appeals to us as a vocation?⁵⁸

All the more, Levinas alludes to the well-known Nietzschean proclamation regarding 'the death of God', and interprets it as indicative of an epoch 'in which a certain discourse on God became increasingly impossible'.⁵⁹

Hence, once more, the Levinasian imperative to strive to attain ever more novel hermeneutical ingenuity and innovation with

regard to the scriptures is congruent with the Nietzschean quest to achieve cultural regeneration.

Levinas also makes use of the most enigmatic Nietzschean concept, which carries several interpretations, some of which are cosmic, while others pertain to the existential vigour, robustness and tenacity inherent in the advocacy of *amor fati*,⁶⁰ i.e. the celebrated 'eternal recurrence'. Levinas resorts to this term in order to confront the re-emergence of murderous anti-Semitism in the heart of the twentieth century: 'anti-Semitism ... is in its essence hatred for the man who is other than oneself ... hatred for the other man. It is ... the *eternal return* of the Jewish question.'⁶¹

Levinas, in the spirit of Book One of Nietzsche's seminal *Will To Power*, whose apt title is European Nihilism, is well attuned to the philosophical and existential discontent, the civilizational malaise in the form of alienation, nihilism and inauthenticity, the Achilles heel of liberal modernity and its ontological detriment. Towards the very end of his exposition in the 'Reflections on Hitlerism', prior to lamenting the intellectual and existential manipulation by the Nazis of Zarathustra's sermon, Levinas summarizes the gist of the ontological temptation inherent in the Hitlerian delusion of regeneration and authenticity, which takes care to capitalize metaphysically on the communal deficit and the 'transcendental homelessness' inherent in an epoch seemingly typified by decadence and nihilism. The paragraph is a veritable tour de force, and is highly reminiscent of the Spenglerian vogue of *Zivilisationkritiker*,⁶² which dominated the inter-war period. It is worth quoting in its entirety:

What characterizes the structure of the thought and truth of the western world is the distance that initially separates man from the world of ideas. He stands free and alone before the world. He is so free that he may not even be able to bridge this distance. Skepticism is a fundamental possibility of the western mind. And when man has bridged the distance and grasped the truth, he still preserves his freedom. He can reconsider and go back on his choice. This freedom intrinsic to the dignity of thought also harbors the danger. In the interval that separates man from idea slips the lie. Thought becomes a game. Man plays with his freedom and doesn't permanently commit himself to any truth. He transforms his capacity for doubt into a lack of conviction. Not being shackled to a truth turns into not wanting to engage oneself in the creation of spiritual values. Sincerity becomes impossible, bringing an end to heroism. Civilization is invaded by everything that is not authentic, by cheap substitutes ... in such a

society that has lost its living contact with the true ideal of freedom, trading it for degenerate forms . . . in this kind of society the Germanic idea of man comes as a promise of sincerity and authenticity.⁶³

In his *Letters to a German Friend*, Camus also deals extensively with the temptation of active murderous nihilism, the Achilles heel of the modernist Promethean passion which manifests itself in anti-Enlightenment political projects. Camus describes the totalitarian temptation as the 'constant temptation' to worship efficiency and contemptuously to negate reason.⁶⁴

We have already mentioned that both Levinas and Nietzsche adhere to the shared objective of intellectual and cultural vitality to be achieved by employing ever more refreshing and novel existential and hermeneutical approaches to historical texts. Both seek to explore the manner in which the canonical texts of Western civilization shed light on the modern condition and their respective zeitgeist. In that respect, Nietzsche's artistic and existential 'genealogy' of Greek culture as articulated in *The Birth of Tragedy* is comparable in terms of its ultimate *raison d'être* (revitalizing the cultural deficit of his own era) to Levinas's highly unorthodox, orthodox approach to the scriptures and the Talmud. For Levinas's readings of the Talmud are nothing short of revolutionary. He confronts seemingly anachronistic and esoteric texts which chiefly pertain to the subtleties of ancient Halacha, i.e. Jewish law, and achieves a 'contemporarization' of the text by drawing analogies between its a-temporal aggadic-philosophical maxims, and some of the most acute problems civilized humanity contends with during the second half of the twentieth century, e.g. the essence of modern war, the new economy, political revolutions or youth rebellion in post-modern society. Both philosophers strive to render such canonical texts ever more 'life enhancing'.

However, for Nietzsche the ultimate agenda is aesthetic (as Nietzsche proclaims in *The Birth of Tragedy*, 'Existence and the world are eternally justified solely as an aesthetic phenomenon'⁶⁵), whereas for Levinas the ultimate agenda is ethical, as the redemptive 'miracle of exteriority', phenomenologically exemplified in the meditations on the human face, contributes to a *Humanisme de l'autre Homme*, as the title of one of his works aptly implies. This stems from the gap between the two philosophers in terms of philosophical anthropology.⁶⁶ Here the Nietzschean 'Will to Power' and the Levinasian ethical heteronomy are in no way reconcilable.

VI. Levinas and Camus on Anti-Judaeo-Christian Streaks in Nazism

Nietzsche admires pre-Temple Judaism, the self-asserting tribe of former slaves who affirm themselves by 'racinating' themselves in the soil of the ancestral homeland, and conquering the land.⁶⁷ For Levinas the zenith of the Judaic spirit is rather different. It culminates in the sages of the Talmud, the moral excellence of Rabbi Akiva who is ill at ease with the death penalty, and the intellectual and ritualistic discipline reflected in the strict rationalism of Maimonides, the Vilna Gaon and his disciples. As we shall show in the next chapter, Camus prefers altogether the Homeric earthly longing to return to Ithaca, over the transcendently driven yearnings for Jerusalem.

Both thinkers regard Christianity as a direct moral and metaphysical offspring of Judaism, a fact that Nietzsche laments,⁶⁸ whereas Levinas embraces it with the somewhat retrospectively naive presupposition that the two theological-metaphysical forces should join hands in a spirit of fraternity, vis-à-vis the common National Socialist threat.

Thus, in a 1935 article on 'The Actuality of Maimonides',⁶⁹ Levinas writes of a 'Jewish-Christian civilization [which] has been put into question by an arrogant barbarism installed in the heart of Europe ... paganism has lifted its head again, reversing values [a pervasive reference to the communal perversion of the long envisaged Nietzschean 're-evaluation of all values'] ... and dissolving the very principles according to which until now it has been possible to re-establish order.'⁷⁰ Many in the Judaeo-Christian world were indeed perplexed by the re-emergence of paganism, and it is in this context that Levinas writes of the relevance of the twelfth-century philosopher and rabbinical figure, author of the seminal *Guide To The Perplexed*, in light of the political strife of the 1930s. For the spirit of Maimonides exemplifies an unrelenting steadfast commitment to the transcendent, in sharp contrast to the pagan worldview, which Levinas conceives of as 'a radical impotence to exit from the world [we have here an ironic inversion of the Nietzschean depiction of the Judaic-priestly morality as impotent] ... an inability to transgress the limits of the world. The pagan is imprisoned in this self-sufficient world, closed in on himself.'⁷¹

In a manner comparable to Levinas's depiction of the essence of the Third Reich in theological terms, Camus also portrays the political worship of the totalitarian leader as a twentieth-century mode of relapse into the lowest form of idolatry. As hitherto mentioned, for him too, the cult of Hitlerism 'restores idolatry and

a debased deity ... the origins of which are to be found in a primitive baying to the moon'.⁷²

In his 'To Fraternize without Conversion' of 1935,⁷³ Levinas once more calls for a common theological front, realizing that 'the antagonism between the monotheistic religions has reduced since the Hitlerism menace to their common patrimony'.⁷⁴

Camus, while remaining firmly entrenched in an earthly, inner-worldly and immanent mode of humanism and intellectual-existential opposition and resistance to the totalitarian *esprit*, is nonetheless well attuned to the anti-Christian streaks inherent in National Socialism, and alludes to a direct and intrinsic correlation between the Jungerian cult of technology and Total War on the one hand, and the establishment of a foreign policy governed by a racist 'rationale' of constant military expansion in order to provide a greater *Lebensraum* ('Living Space') for the facilitation of a Germanic empire of blood and soil on the other hand. For National Socialism constituted 'a regime which invented a biological foreign policy ... [and sought] the eventual establishment of the empire of blood and action ... [and] Junger had grasped the import of this logic and had formulated it in definite terms. He had a vision of "a technological world empire," of a "religion of *anti-Christian* technology"'.⁷⁵

Camus also alludes to 'the religion of the *Führer*', and asserts that 'the nihilistic revolution ... is expressed historically in the Hitlerian religion'.⁷⁶

In a 1938 article pertaining to 'The Spiritual Essence of Anti-Semitism',⁷⁷ Levinas refers to a Judaeo-Christian 'shared vocation: Israel and the church, being completely in the world, are yet strangers in the world, putting the world that seems to contain them constantly into question.'

The same underlying message of inter-faith solidarity appears on the eve of World War II, in a 1939 obituary for Pius XI,⁷⁸ in which Levinas writes that 'in a world increasingly hostile that fills itself with swastikas our eyes often look to the cross with straight and pure arms'.⁷⁹

In the same article Levinas also re-articulates his perception of the ascent of National Socialism as first and foremost a metaphysical occurrence and a grave spiritual challenge. Thus 'in spite of all the analysis of the economic, political and social causes of National Socialism in the light of which the racial persecutions are but an accident in the torments of the modern world, the Jews have the obscure sentiment that Hitlerism was a call to their vocation and their destiny'⁸⁰ [i.e., to confront that which Levinas conceives of as

a morally and metaphysically bankrupt mode of paganism with a steadfast and tenacious adherence to the transcendent].

Despite the abyss that separates Levinas and Nietzsche with regard to the theological, both thinkers dismiss the primacy of the political⁸¹ and the orthodox approach of social contractarians.⁸² Nietzsche entirely rejects this philosophical fable on moral and aesthetic grounds, whereas Levinas does well to recognize the inevitability of the political, for in the midst of the ethical encounter, the face to face, there emerges the third '*le tiers*', which obstructs and therefore also limits 'the Same's' infinite responsibility to 'the Other':

The relation with the other, is accomplished as service and as hospitality. In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality.⁸³

In a talmudic reading pertaining to 'Judaism and Revolution',⁸⁴ Levinas emphasizes that his Archimedean point is that all begins with the rights of the other and the self/same's infinite duty towards her. Counterintuitively, and in contrast to the social contract tradition, he goes on to proclaim that organized society is not about putting an end to the war of all against all in a Hobbesian environment and ambience of *Homo Homini Lupus*, but rather it is about the limitation of one's responsibility. The social contract, Levinas asserts, is more about limitations of duties than about the safeguarding of rights and privileges, and the political ought to always be under the supervision and criticism of the ethical/ethics as first philosophy. Therefore, Levinas insists 'on the irreducibility of the personal to the universality of the State ... [and appeals] to a dimension and a perspective of transcendence as real as the dimension and perspective of the political and more true than it'.⁸⁵

In the very same reading, Levinas argues, in harmony with Nietzsche, that the human personality will in vain strive to achieve its fulfilment in the realm of the state, and both thinkers reject the fascistic contention which grants the state an intrinsic metaphysical value, the state as a novel idol, and the effacement of the human individual in the totalitarian projects which Nietzsche envisaged as an announcing prophet of the geo-political constellations of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, while Nietzsche laments the channelling of all the creative Dionysian energies, the expenditure of the will to power not

in the promotion and facilitation of an authentic and autonomous vision of the self, who is being oppressed under the constraints and exigencies of a despotic political mechanism and the political demagogue whom Nietzsche depicts as 'the great man of the masses',⁸⁷ Levinas focuses his protestation versus the grievances of the concrete human other, the systematic dehumanization of entire collectivities, and the blindness in light of the infinite vulnerability reflected in the face of the other in the National Socialist death camps. In a word, Nietzsche is preoccupied with cultural waste, Levinas with human devastation.

Therein lies a possible explication as to the 'unbearable lightness of philosophical vulgarization' with regard to Nietzsche and the Third Reich. Levinas, as a humanist of the other person, declines the boundless Nietzschean spontaneity⁸⁸ and stresses responsibility.⁸⁹

The face of the other as a revelation, an epiphany, a trace of that which is beyond being, the redemptive miracle of exteriority which salvages the same from an atomistic hermetic mode of narcissistic solipsism, is to be contrasted with the Nietzschean notion of 'life as play', life as constant self-experimentation.⁹⁰

Levinas writes: 'The Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me by his essence qua infinity ... the welcoming of a being that appears in the face, the ethical event ... the epiphany that is produced as a face ... "reveals" infinity ... It is the ethical exigency of the face.' Moreover, 'the face in which the other – the absolutely other – presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it ... it remains commensurate with him who welcomes. This presentation is pre-eminently non-violence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As non-violence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace.'⁹¹

Most importantly, 'to approach the other is to put into question, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a "moving force," this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder. The "You shall not commit murder" which delineates the face in which the Other is produced submits my freedom to judgment.'⁹²

Moreover, Nietzsche's intellectual war of annihilation versus the metaphysical yearnings to transcend, the denial of that which Levinas defines as the metaphysical desire which can never be extinguished, satiated or quenched, proved to be an insurmountable anti-spiritual demand.

Hence the Judaeo-Christian God was replaced with metaphysical

solaces, God's metaphysical shadows according to Nietzsche, noumenal political speculations of Left and Right totalitarianism, utopian 'scientific socialism' and romantic *Volksgeist*, which gave rise to the deification of Hitler and Stalin. In the words of Camus, 'impatience with limits ... despair at being a man have finally driven them to inhuman excesses. Denying the real grandeur of life ... for want of something better ... they deified themselves and their misfortune began.'⁹³

In that regard, Nietzscheanism, like liberalism, suffers from a chronic communal deficit, with a crucial difference though: namely that Nietzsche never wrote for the bulk of mankind, but solely to the 'strong and the reliable', who can elevate themselves to a mode of existence which is above the petty concerns of the 'human, all too human'. Once more, it is the posthumous politicization of his sermon that rendered it vulnerable to philosophical and existential vulgarization. Camus directly addresses those who politicized the Nietzschean sermon, the active nihilists, the proponents of brown totalitarianism, in his *Letters to a German Friend*. In a striking passage he rebukes his German interlocutor for having opted for the murderous horizon in the modernist labyrinth of nihilism. Camus contrasts the choices he and his German counterpart had made. As Aronson does well to argue:

Letters to a German Friend showed Camus the political moralist at work. Camus wrote in sophisticated moral tones, speaking with the internationalist voice of someone who, after all, had German friends and who hated to make war. He even turned the fall of France to his country's moral advantage: we lost because of our doubts about killing. He suggested the French had taken 'a long detour' before going into action: 'we had first to see people die and risk dying ourselves. We had to see a French worker walking toward the guillotine at dawn down the prison corridors and exhorting his comrades from cell to cell to be courageous. In other words, we had to experience the horrors of the occupation before deciding to make war against the occupier.'⁹⁴

VII. *Levinas and Camus on the Universality of the Holocaust and the Atrocities Perpetrated in World War II / Overcoming the 'Theodical Temptation'*

Levinas survived the Hitlerian plague by virtue of being a French POW. Given the Kafkaesque bureaucratic absurdities of the Third Reich, Jewish prisoners of war, in contrast to their co-religionists in the civil world, were not stripped of their citizenship, and were thus spared deportation to extermination camps.

His parents and two brothers were murdered in Lithuania. His mother-in-law was sent on a transport from Paris to Drancy and did not survive. His own wife and daughter survived due to the courage of French friends, including Maurice Blanchot who offered them his apartment for several weeks, and especially due to the shelter they received from a Vincentian convent outside Orleans.

In an article Levinas wrote after the war entitled 'Honneur sans drapeau',⁹⁵ he movingly recounts the inescapable sense of culpability that accompanies the survival of genocide. Terms replete with biographical echoes and resonance such as escape, being held hostage, insomnia, trauma, obsession and persecution would find a pervasive place in his post-war writings. In 'Honneur sans drapeau', Levinas addresses the solitude inherent in 'this tumor of memory',⁹⁶ and 'the unjustified privilege of having survived six million dead'.⁹⁷ In his seminal *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas would stress that 'the judgment of history is made by survivors on the works of the dead who are no longer present to explain and defend them'.⁹⁸

While in Nazi captivity, the number of the military camp in which he was held prisoner was the historically symbolic 1492, the year in which perhaps the most catastrophic occurrence in the history of European Jewry (with the exception of 1933–45) took place – the deportation from Spain.⁹⁹

There was a dog in the military camp, which greeted the prisoners on a regular basis with enthusiastic barking, as they returned from another day of hard labour. The prisoners named this friend Bobby. In the eyes of Levinas this was 'the last Kantian in Nazi Germany'.¹⁰⁰

In a brief biographical segment entitled *Signature*, Levinas describes his intellectual evolution and writes: 'this disparate inventory is a biography. It is dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror'.¹⁰¹ Thus the half a decade which Levinas spent as a prisoner of brown totalitarianism shaped his post-1945 philosophical endeavour, and future dissidents of red

totalitarianism were later on to draw encouragement and inspiration from his work. This includes former dissident and president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel. As Salomon Malka, a former student of Levinas, recounts in his *Levinas: La Vie et La Trace*, during Havel's prison years of 1979–82, he often alluded to Levinas's writings in his correspondence with his wife Olga. In his letters Havel describes Levinas's work as 'magnificent like a revelation',¹⁰² and goes on to state 'that it is felt in every line'¹⁰³ that Levinas had also paid with his liberty in the battle against despotism. Analogously, Camus's seminal work directed against the totalitarian misadventures of the century proved instrumental particularly in light of red totalitarianism, which continued to subjugate the lives of millions of Europeans for almost four decades after the publication of *L'Homme Révolté*. Thus future dissidents of red totalitarianism also drew encouragement and inspiration from Camus's writings. Indeed, *L'Homme Révolté*, too, 'resurrected in a new anti-Communist wave in the late 1970s'.¹⁰⁴

Levinas only learned of the genocidal scope and magnitude of National Socialism after the war had ended, and came to speak of Auschwitz as 'a world that had lost its very worldliness'.¹⁰⁵ Camus is in accord: 'the crimes of the Hitler regime, among them the massacre of the Jews, are without precedent in history because history gives no other example of a doctrine of such total destruction being able to seize the levers of command of a civilized nation'.¹⁰⁶

The same philosopher who drew from Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerean fundamental ontology, also drew a metaphysical analogy between the Cartesian infinity of divinity (the very same infinity of Jewish mysticism about which Levinas was so profoundly suspicious) and the human face as an epiphany, a trace, a reflection of a metaphysical essence which exclaims 'thou shall not commit murder'.¹⁰⁷

Levinas was a philosopher who derived/inferred from the mystery of the transcendent eternity of the complete other to the mystery of the concrete human other,¹⁰⁸ who cannot be subjected to a reductionist categorization, whose ultimate essence remains mysterious and inaccessible, beyond any socio-political and cultural thematization and systematization, beyond the label categories of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and national identity. Yet when it came to the ultimate evil of the Hitlerian camps, Levinas retorted, 'evil has not a face',¹⁰⁹ for it denied the faces of 'the millions of millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism'.¹¹⁰

Thus, as Richard Bernstein well observes, 'it is crucial to realize that it is not exclusively the Jewish catastrophe that Levinas singles out. Auschwitz itself is a paradigm or exemplar of a much more general and pervasive phenomenon of evil. Levinas is explicit about this.'¹¹¹ In a word, the murderous racial prejudices and disastrous political experimentations with totalitarianism that typified the 'short' twentieth century¹¹² are of universal human significance, and stretch well beyond any particularistic contexts. Camus, who argues that the crimes of National Socialism are unprecedented in the history of human civilization,¹¹³ in a manner congruent with Levinas's perception of the world after Auschwitz as a world that had lost its very worldliness, defines his *Letters to a German Friend* as a document against violence, totalitarianism and political violence, and takes care to remain loyal to a universalist orientation. Thus his allusion to the Nazi enemy, as opposed to Germans per se, or his constant rhetorical use of the term 'free Europeans', rather than French nationals.

In contrast to Hans Jonas, who constructed and formulated a post-Holocaust mode of theodicy,¹¹⁴ a theodicy which is replete with all-pervasive Kabbalistic motifs,¹¹⁵ Levinas, as hitherto mentioned, resisted the latter metaphysical urge. His post-Holocaust views, in this regard, are more congruent with Emil Fackenheim's post-Holocaust theology, which is still receptive and sympathetic to the cosmic endeavour of *Tikkun*,¹¹⁶ literally implying 'fixing' the world in a spiritual sense, together with a vehement rejection of the nihilist temptation to cede one's spiritual and theological identity in the aftermath of the calamities and atrocities of the age of 'Total War', a measure which would paradoxically entail granting Hitlerism a 'posthumous triumph', from an ethical and metaphysical standpoint.

Given Levinas's fidelity to the religious temperament of his paternal Lithuanian home, which was fiercely anti-Hassidic,¹¹⁷ and strictly rationalistic in the spirit of Maimonides and the Vilna Gaon's radical transcendence, Levinas conceived of the Nazi abyss not as indicative of a theological void; rather, he saw in Nazism the abominable failure of Promethean modern man to live up to his own responsibility and commitments. Camus also sees the totalitarian atrocities as a ramification of the Promethean passion gone astray once 'man wants to become God ... [and] arrogate to himself the power of life or death over others'.¹¹⁸ Peace and immanent redemption, insists Camus, can solely be envisaged once 'each tells the other that he is not God'.¹¹⁹ Resorting to the most cardinal and

pivotal term in Levinas's philosophy, at a time in which the latter is under Nazi captivity, Camus, man of political and metaphysical resistance, insists that 'it is essential to find the middle path leading to the face of man'.¹²⁰

In the aftermath of World War II, Levinas would come to define his own middle path leading to the face of man. It is a path which rejects both the false idol of passive nihilism in a Nietzschean sense ('otherworldly mysticism', Buddhism, Schopenhauerism), and political messianism in a redemptive sense, in lieu of which he opts for the face-to-face ethical encounter:

Between a philosophy of transcendence that situates elsewhere the true life to which man, escaping from here, would gain access in the privileged moments of ... mystical elevation ... and a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every 'other' (cause for war) would vanish at the end of history – we propose to describe ... a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not a totalization of history but the idea of infinity.¹²¹

In the post-1945 era both these thinkers would also come to contend with red totalitarianism. This is the topic of the ensuing chapter.

Chapter 3

Critique of Soviet Marxism and Hegelian Philosophy of History

I. Depiction of Marxism as Philosophical Anthropology

We have demonstrated in the previous chapter that Levinas strives to demonstrate that monotheism anticipated and facilitated the metaphysical foundations and ideological infrastructure of the Enlightenment and the liberal *esprit*, and, consequently, that he builds the case for an internal and continuous linkage between monotheism and liberal republicanism. Thus, according to the Levinasian quasi-teleological narrative, political liberalism, by crowning the sovereign liberty of reason, continues and perpetuates the essence of monotheism, which also implies a rational demystification of the world. We have shown that according to Levinas the essence of monotheism includes the proclamation that there is a higher essence beyond that of the sensory world, and that Levinas professes that liberalism 'tends to place the human mind on a plane higher than the real, creating an abyss between man and the world ... [and] liberation by grace is replaced by autonomy, but it is pervaded by the Judeo-Christian leitmotiv of freedom.'¹ In a sense, the monotheistic spirit culminates in the Enlightenment enterprise, and both share a rejection of radical materialism ('what is left of materialism when matter is completely pervaded with reason'²).

Levinas also considers Marxism in his reflections on Hitlerism, and conceives of Marxism as the first socio-political doctrine to challenge this perception of the human condition (the ontological inclination of monotheism and liberalism 'to place the human mind on a plane higher than the real'³).

Thus in Marxism the human spirit is no longer perceived 'as pure freedom ... [for] the spirit is caught up in the grips of material needs'.⁴ Marxism, as a counter-Enlightenment philosophy, is the first to purport that consciousness does not determine being, and

in that respect Marxism is antagonistic to Judaeo-Christianity and liberalism in its conception of freedom.

For according to Levinas, the Marxist worldview entails the presupposition that

decisions that the intelligence did not make are imposed on it by a pre-existent struggle. 'Being determines consciousness.' Science, morality, and aesthetics are not morality, science and aesthetics in themselves but the expression at every moment of the fundamental opposition between bourgeois and proletarian civilizations ... The spirit as traditionally conceived loses the power to release bonds ... [for] it comes up against mountains that no faith by itself can move.⁵

Hence in Marxism 'absolute freedom ... is for the first time banished from the constitution of the spirit', and 'Marxism is not only opposed to Christianity but to ... liberalism for which "being does not determine consciousness" but consciousness or reason determines being. Marxism goes off on the opposite track from European culture or at the least breaks the harmonious curve of its development.'⁶

Nevertheless, Levinas takes care to stress that Marx is indeed well attuned to the importance of consciousness at least in the context of social class, and in that respect in Marxism 'the individual consciousness determined by being is not so impotent that it does not maintain, at least in principle, the power of shaking off the social enchantment that appears thenceforth as foreign to its essence. [For] Marx himself believed that to become aware of one's social situation is to liberate oneself from the fatalism it entails.'

Moreover, the ultimate *raison d'être* of Marxism is harmonious with the liberal legacy of 1789, i.e. the actualization of universal freedom and equality. Thus 'this rupture with liberalism is not definitive. Marxism is aware of pursuing in a certain way the traditions of 1789, and Marxist revolutionaries seem to be strongly influenced by Jacobinism.'⁸

Camus is also attentive to the lofty ends of Marx's philosophical endeavour, which is harmonious with the ethos of 1789, and takes care to distinguish between Marx's philosophy and the atrocities committed in its name throughout the bulk of the twentieth century. Marx's writings are replete with commitments for universal justice, asserts Camus, and just as Nietzsche was an intellectual victim of the murderous Machiavellianism of totalitarianism from the right, so it was Marx's misfortune to be philosophically and politically abused

by those who purported to implement his vision from the left side of the political spectrum.⁹

On the theoretical level, Camus's critique of Marxism stems from its seemingly scientific façade.¹⁰ On the empirical level, demonstrates Camus, Marxian predictions proved to be erroneous time and again. Thus for Camus the Marxist doctrine constitutes a utopian vision. Camus depicts Soviet Marxism as a murderous fundamentalist religion, which deifies history, in a manner fitting its left Hegelian philosophical affinities, in addition to its tenacious adherence to metaphysical political constructs such as progress, in the name of which all oppressive political measures are legitimized.¹¹

Camus argues that few Marxist devotees have accepted the faith after having immersed themselves in the 'sacred canonical writings' of the 'Marxian church'. 'First they accept the faith, only later do they read the Holy Scriptures.'¹²

With regard to the divinization of history, Camus proclaims that 'the revolutionary spirit thus undertakes the defense of that part of man which refuses to submit. In other words, it tries to assure him his crown in the realm of time, and, rejecting God, it chooses history with an apparently inevitable logic.'¹³ With regard to the theological overtones Camus detects in the Marxist dogma, for him 'socialism is ... an enterprise for the deification of man and has assumed some of the characteristics of traditional religions ... authoritarian socialism is about de-consecrating Christianity and incorporating it in a Church bent on conquest ... progress, the future of science, the cult of technology and of production are myths ... the idea of progress is substituted for the divine will'.¹⁴ Regarding the scientific façade of Marxism, Camus writes 'how could a so-called scientific socialism conflict, to such a point with facts? The answer is easy: it was not scientific ... Marx and Marxists have allowed themselves to prophesy the future and the triumph of communism to the detriment of their postulates and of their scientific method.'¹⁵

This leads us to Levinas's and Camus's critique of the Soviet regime as an attempt to implement the Marxist doctrine. We commence with Levinas.

II. Critique of Soviet Marxism

In a series of articles written during the 1950s, Levinas sought to criticize the failed attempts to implement the Marxist vision in the context of the Cold War, in particular the dehumanizing

streak he detects in the Soviet regime. In 'Sur l'esprit de Genève',¹⁶ Levinas describes 'the third' as the faceless power of weapons of mass destruction, and describes the atomic weapons as self-inflicted inhuman forces. For him, the geo-politics of the nuclear era is 'Cosmo-politics'. Echoes of this exposition are audible in Camus's assertion that the Marxist utopia gave rise to a nihilistic aspiration for power and domination, whose ultimate outcome might well be an atomic calamity.¹⁷

In 'Principes et Visages'¹⁸ one finds an anticipation of the Levinasian critique of Hegelianism and Marxism which reached its full fruition and culmination in *Totality and Infinity*. Three years after the death of Stalin, Levinas articulates a forceful critique of the Soviet regime, and addresses the Secretary-General of the party by his initial alone, namely as Mr K., possibly an ironic allusion to Franz Kafka's seminal *The Trial*, in which one Joseph K. is being accused by anonymous and inhuman bureaucratic forces whose identity he knows not (nor does he know the nature of the crime of which he is culpable, yet the outcome is a voluntary submission to the might of these powers to the point of serving as an accomplice in his own execution). Camus, while stressing the divinization of history in the Soviet world, is also inclined to insinuate the quasi-Kafkaesque aspects of the Soviet judicial system, with the sombre recollection of the Moscow show trials much in mind.¹⁹

Levinas commences his polemic against Soviet Marxism by attacking Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev's contention that the absence of alternative political parties in the USSR is justified given the disappearance of social cleavages in the Soviet Union. Levinas presents Khrushchev's rationale that the USSR's citizens are not politically oppressed given the USSR's alleged unprecedented achievements in terms of socio-economic disparities. He then discusses Khrushchev's contention that his subjects are free, from an objective standpoint, for they are being led, perhaps against their volition, by reason. This mode of argumentation, states Levinas, is symptomatic of 'themes that dominate the whole of western thought'²⁰ and reach their modern culmination in Hegel and Marx. He then proceeds to narrate the de-individuating streak inherent in this Soviet attempt to implement left Hegelianism. From the perspective of the proponents of this system, writes Levinas,

the state without contradiction and consequently without parties, accomplishes the humanity of man. It is reason accomplished and, even in its becoming, Reason gradually revealed. The individual finds

supreme satisfaction in the state. All his other worries and agitations pertain to illusion, ideology, subjectivity. Oh, our thinkers-in-chief, the ones who cannot be touched by anything but universality, how contemptuously they smile when subjectivity is concerned, dismissing it with 'That has no importance whatsoever.' The outcries of conscience? Symptoms of hysteria. For them, as for Mr K., liberty, equality, fraternity grasped at the level of the human heart come from abstract morality. We were always taught that liberty goes with the dis-individualizing of the individual, goes with the will to the universal that, for man, means disappearing into his coherent discourse, like an artist who would enter into his canvas fully alive and live mutely amid the shapes he traced there.²¹

If this is so, asks Levinas rhetorically, then why should we fear a one-party system, after all, in contrast to the particularistic and exclusivist racist/ultra-nationalistic agenda inherent in the fascistic and Nazi ethos, 'the idea of the worker is general enough to encompass all men', and thus, given its universalistic underlying guideline, why should we resist 'the structures that Mr K discussed ... [and the Soviet mode of] socialism ... as the pure accomplishment of the idea of universality?'²²

Regarding the universalist aspirations of left totalitarianism in contrast with right totalitarianism, Camus is in accord with Levinas: 'In actual fact, the Fascist revolutions of the 20th century do not merit the title of revolution. They lacked the ambition of universality. Mussolini and Hitler ... chose to deify the irrational, and the irrational alone, instead of deifying reason. In this way they renounced their claim to universality.'²³ Moreover, 'it is not legitimate to identify the ends of Fascism with the ends of Russian communism. The former never dreamed of liberating all men, but only of liberating a few by subjugating the rest. The latter, in its most profound principle, aims at liberating all men by provisionally enslaving them all. It must be granted the grandeur of its intentions.'²⁴ Thus both Camus and Levinas acknowledge the a-priori universalist orientation and vision which typifies Marxism on the level of *intentio*, its all-embracing and all-pervasive humanistic streak which is to be contrasted with the tribalism and particularism which characterizes right-wing totalitarianism.

Nevertheless, those of us who end up adhering to the rationale that Soviet Marxism is a desirable political end to pursue given its intentionalist moral superiority over fascism should revise their conclusions, professes Levinas. For in opposition to the

Hegelian contention that reason, universality and freedom unite in a philosophy of right or the state, Levinas sees a universality other than that of the state: 'Is there no universality other than that of the state, no liberty other than objective?'²⁵

Levinas describes his critique as 'difficult reflections', which 'go further than one would think ... Well beyond Marx and Hegel.'²⁶

Thus Levinas's rejection of Soviet Marxism is closely intertwined with his critique of Hegelian philosophy of history. Both are depicted here as impersonal abstractions, in light of which (or in darkness of which) the individual is effaced, as he/she becomes a faceless cog/hurdle in the way of the theology of progress/the unfolding of *Geist*. (For Camus too, under Stalinism man 'is transformed into a cog in the machinery of production ... a living man [is] enslaved and reduced to the historic condition of an object'. Echoing Levinas's critique of Khrushchev, he laments and deplores a depiction of the human condition according to which 'man is only an interplay of forces that can be rationally influenced'.²⁷)

Progress as the secularization of the religious concept of redemption/salvation marginalizes the self into a subsidiary position in which he/she is not visible vis-à-vis the awesome forces of the march of history. The politics of conceptual dialectics is a politics which turns its back upon the human face, its focal point being excessive intellectualism, conceptualizations which fail to transcend, from a humanistic standpoint, an abstract and faceless humanity, an incoherent ensemble.

This critique is well reflected in Camus's proclamation that

the history of Russian communism gives the lie to every one of its principles ... forgetful of its real principles, burying its solitude in the bosom of armed crowds, covering the emptiness of its negations with obstinate scholasticism, still directed towards the future which it has made its only God, but separated from it by a multitude of nations to overthrow and continents to dominate. With action as its unique principle, and with the kingdom of man as an alibi, it has already begun, in the east of Europe, to construct its own armed camp, face to face with other armed camps.²⁸

In Levinas, the primacy of the ethical is an uncontested *a priori*, in opposition to the primacy of abstract political and metaphysical concepts such as *Geist*/class/progress.²⁹

In the dictatorship of the proletariat the other is not a concrete and autonomous intrinsic entity in and of its own merit, but

rather an agent/extension of an abstract entity such as 'owners of the means of production', 'bourgeoisie', 'proletariat', et cetera. It is the politics of de-individuation, whereas in Levinas ethical inter-subjectivity takes precedence. For him, the ethical is not to be reduced to the political, but rather, the former strives to safeguard the latter.

In Camus as well, one finds an emphasis on concrete individuals, in particular those deemed as political heretics and hence expendable en route to the end of history. Thus his assertion that 'for the victim, the present is the only value ... Messianism, in order to exist, must construct a defense against the victims'. In a critique that echoes the negation of the temptation of a Hegelian theodicy as well as the Soviet version of the Marxian teleology, Camus states that 'the absolute is not attained, not, above all, created, through history. Politics is not religion, or, if it is, then it is nothing but the Inquisition ... [for] history can no longer be presented as an object of worship.'³⁰

Levinas forcefully concludes '*Principes et Visages*' with this critique of Hegelian philosophy of history and Soviet Marxism in mind:

A system where all that counts is the principles of impersonal Reason ... [denies] the necessity of personal goodwill and moral intention, a co-existence without system. [This] proves the importance, beyond universal structures, of the person to person, man-to-man relationship, it proves that man must see behind the anonymous principle the face of the other man.³¹

Camus's critique is strikingly analogous:

Traditional human relations have been transformed. These ... transformations characterize the world of rational terror in which, in different degrees, Europe lives. Dialogue and personal relations have been replaced by propaganda or polemic, which are two kinds of monologue. Abstraction, which belongs to the world of power and calculation, has replaced the real ... The ration coupon substituted for bread; love and friendship submitted to a doctrine and destiny to a plan; punishment considered the norm, and production substituted for living creation, quite satisfactorily describe this disembodied Europe, peopled with positive or negative symbols.³²

Moreover, asserts Camus,

revolution without honor, calculated revolution which, in preferring an abstract concept of man to a man of flesh and blood, denies existence as many times as is necessary, puts resentment in the place of love. Immediately rebellion, forgetful of its generous origins, allows itself to be contaminated by resentment, it denies life, dashes towards destruction, and raise up the grimacing cohorts of petty rebels, embryo slaves all of them, who end up by offering themselves for sale, in all the market-places of Europe, to no matter what form of servitude. It is no longer either revolution or rebellion but rancor, malice and tyranny.³³

In 'Le Debat russo-chinois et la dialectique',³⁴ Levinas criticizes the Machiavellian Soviet policy in the post-colonial third world, with its unequivocal support for non-democratic regimes. He rejects the Soviet political teleology according to which 'it would be reasonable to back anti-Communists if they represent a stage in the movement toward socialism and to show sympathy for governments that torture communists in their prisons'.³⁵ Once more, the bulk of the Levinasian critique is that political and metaphysical abstractions take precedence over ethical heteronomy. Levinas goes so far at the end of this article as to intimate a common ethical deficit, which Soviet Marxism shares with National Socialism. Hence Levinas's assertion that he is to be counted among those 'revolted by these contradictions [between the lofty ends of Soviet Marxism and its short-term political murderousness] as abstractions: black stops being black under the pretext that it is going to whiten. So we should ... recognize in nationalistic anti-capitalism the shadow of National Socialism'.³⁶

This resonates in Camus's assertion that 'it is legitimate to identify the means employed by both [left and right totalitarianism] with political cynicism which they have drawn from the same source, moral nihilism'.³⁷

Moreover, in the words of Camus,

we should always be prepared so as never to err to believe that what I see as white is black, if the hierarchic [Soviet] church defines it thus. Only this active faith held by the representatives of truth can save the subject from the mysterious ravages of history ... [for] the land of humanism has become the Europe we know, the land of inhumanity ... [typified] by action which recognizes no moral strictures. That is why it is condemned to live only for history and in a reign of terror.³⁸

Hence Camus's adherence to Levinas's condemnation of Soviet Machiavellian political action, for 'the will to power came to take the place of the will to justice, pretending at first to be identified with it and then relegating it to a place somewhere at the end of history, waiting until such time as nothing remains on earth to dominate'.³⁹

III. Critique of Hegelian Philosophy of History

'The Hegelian system represents the fulfillment of the West's thought and history, understood as the turning back of a destiny into freedom. Reason penetrating all reality or appearing in it. An unforgettable enterprise!'⁴⁰

Echoes of Levinas's critique of Hegelian philosophy of history are also all pervasive in his *chef-d'oeuvre Totality and Infinity*. In this work Levinas fully develops the arguments articulated in 'The Spirit of Geneva' according to which non-totalitarian politics can solely be envisaged 'as a postponement of the political consequences of the metaphysical principles of Western philosophy, prime among which is totality'.⁴¹ Hegel professed that philosophy is time grasped in thought, and indeed *Totality and Infinity* is a work of *Zeitdiagnose* that contends with the totalitarian political experiments of the twentieth century. It is a work written during the Cold War, 15 years after the defeat of Nazism. Levinas himself alludes to the anti-totalitarian driving force behind his critique of the notion of totality in *Totality and Infinity*, exclaiming, 'my critique of totality follows in effect from a political experience that we have still not forgotten'.⁴² In *Totality and Infinity* we find a rejection of 'a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every "other" (cause for war) would vanish at the end of history [instead of which] we propose to describe a relationship with the other that does not result in a ... human totality, that is not a totalisation of history'.⁴³

Moreover, Levinas insists that if the metaphysical principle of totality (the most salient modern exemplification of which is to be found in Hegel)

claims to integrate myself with the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent

with respect to me ... When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history.⁴⁴

We propose here to describe the critique of metaphysical totality that leads to totalitarian politics as 'the demystification of demystification', as a philosophical inversion of Friedrich Engels' celebrated 'negation of negation'. Levinas sees the following dynamic in the history of Western civilization: philosophical and metaphysical demystification of the other leads to dehumanization and consequently to political messianic teleology typified by political murderousness. Thus, in lieu of the alarming formula 'Demystification of the other – Dehumanization of the other – Political Murderousness', Levinas offers the following formula: 'Remystification of the other – Rehumanization/Reindividuation of the other – a metaphysical buffer zone *vis-à-vis* political murderousness'.

This demands explication: Levinas claims that Western thought has been culpable of metaphysical tyranny for some 25 centuries, from Parmenides to Heidegger.

By this he alludes to the tendency to annex the human other and reduce her to a third term. That is to say, the other is demystified and consequently also de-individualized as the shock of the encounter with the other is softened, via the instrumentality of a conceptual reference point which seeks to generalize and universalize the other within the confinements of a neat intellectual equation, a universal conceptual framework which is oblivious to the particularistic streaks inherent in individual identity.

Thus, for Levinas, Western metaphysics is virtually synonymous with 'a way of approaching the known being such that its alterity ... vanishes'. Moreover,

this mode of depriving the known being of its alterity can be accomplished only if it is aimed at through a third term, a neutral term ... in it the shock of the encounter with the other is deadened. This third term may appear as a concept term. Then the individual that exists abdicates into the general that is thought ... Western philosophy has most often been ... a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being ... The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object ... is precisely his reduction to the same.⁴⁵

For Levinas, the ontological tendencies of Western metaphysics to totalize the other reached its culmination in modern times. In

modern European thought, the subject is utterly devoid of any particularistic features, Levinas implies. The human condition is universalized under a third term, be it the Spinozistic Conatus, the Nietzschean 'Will to Power', or most pervasively Hegelian philosophy of history in which the other is a cog, an instrumental tool manipulated by the cunning of reason.

The metaphysical totality culminates, in that respect, in the objective freedom of the state. Levinas asserts that this seemingly esoteric metaphysical critique stems from the totalitarian tendencies of the zeitgeist, and points to a clear and pervasive correlation between Hegelianism and political totalitarianism. Levinas developed his critique, for which he came to be recognized as a thinker of universal stature, in the 1950s, i.e. after the demise of right-wing totalitarianism, and during the era of left totalitarianism, whose philosophical genealogy he traces back to the Hegelian focus on the realm of the political. Levinas does not reject the political per se, but rather professes that

in the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a state, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus in absentia. In welcoming the other I welcome the On High to which my freedom is subordinated ... this subordination is brought about in all the personal work of my moral initiative ... in the attention to the other as unicity and face (which the visibleness of the political leaves invisible). Subjectivity is thus rehabilitated, and not as egoism. Against the universalism of Hegelian reality ... we [are] insisting on the irreducibility of the personal to the universality of the State; we appeal to a dimension and a perspective of transcendence as real as the dimension and perspective of the political and more true than it.⁴⁶

As Levinas concludes his metaphysical critique in *Totality and Infinity*, one realizes that these theoretical conjectures aptly reflect the political rationale of left totalitarianism. Levinas expresses his fear of a system 'in which beings would be but objects'⁴⁷ (which is congruent with Camus's diagnosis of the dehumanizing streak which he regards as inherent to Soviet Marxism, i.e. his depiction of 'the concentration camp system of the Russians [which] has, in fact, accomplished the dialectical transition from the government

of people to the administration of objects, but by confusing people with objects'⁴⁸) and the ramifications of a teleology according to which history is understood as the manifestation of reason, whereby violence reveals itself to be reason's instrumental tool and 'philosophy presents itself as a realization of being, that is, as its liberation by the suppression of multiplicity'.⁴⁹

In such a system, maintains Levinas, 'knowledge would be the suppression of the other by grasp',⁵⁰ whereas for him 'transcendence means not the appropriation of what is, but its respect'.⁵¹

In Levinas, care and concern for the other (*l'autrui*) is metaphorically depicted as causing insomnia and the ability to respond to the other, 'response-ability', is given 'for free', i.e. absent any Machiavellian political calculations, or socio-economic considerations. In lieu of a hostile antipathy towards the quotidian, Levinas advocates daily attentiveness to the face of the other, following an era in which daily politics included mundane transportation of human cargo to extermination camps, where individuals were dehumanized, depoliticized in the sense that they were stripped of fundamental civic liberties, and given a 'new identity' in the form of a serial number, instead of a name, instead of a face. For Levinas, the call of conscience stems not from the same's focus on being, but from the 'miracle of exteriority' phenomenologically exemplified in the nakedness, the political and humanistic vulnerability of the concrete human other, and existential salvation is obtained not via the cessation of the escape from one's temporality and sheer finitude, i.e. death as the fundamental predicament of the human condition, but rather from adhering to the plights of the human other and the being-toward-death of the politically persecuted.⁵² The politics of the face is also a novel way of thinking about the politics of difference. In lieu of the Schmittian distinction between enemy and friend⁵³ and its political advocacy of homogeneity, Levinas makes use of traditional monotheistic concepts in order to construct the ethical infrastructure of a precisely antithetical political theory, one which ensures the primacy of human rights and human dignity and enables us to safeguard those rights, and thus consequently overcome and transcend a mode of the political and a jurisprudence which fails to see above the label category of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and national identity.

Levinasian politics is a politics of 'beyond Schmittianism'. In terms of political theory, this is a conceptual revolution, as the phenomenological meditations on the face augment and complement traditional constitutional, electoral and institutional remedies.⁵⁴ The key to an anti-totalitarian politics, argues Levinas, the ultimate anti-

totalitarian vaccine, is to see in the face of the concrete human other the a-temporal and universal appeal to human rights and human dignity, and this ethical stance is just as imperative as the legalisms inherent in constitutional amendments and guarantees. In fact, in times in which the legal system strives to ignore the face, as was the case with Schmittian jurisprudence and the corresponding legislation in the 1930s, the heteronymous nature of the face seeks to overcome it. In such dark times, heeding the call to the face constitutes the last humanistic frontier, in the absence of any binding formalistic and judicial remedies.

If the celebrated Freudian dictum and maxim is 'where id is, ego shall be', in Levinas it is 'where politics is, ethics shall be'.

IV. Conclusion of the Critique of Left Totalitarianism

We have shown that the bulk of the Levinasian critique of Hegelian philosophy of history and Soviet Marxism stems from its inclination to thematize and systematize the other, in a mode of reductionism that suppresses pluralism, tolerance, difference and particularism. In the words of Levinas:

Thematization and conceptualization are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence ... an appropriation ... an exploitation ... [it] is a philosophy of power which appears in the tyranny of the state ... Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is another inhumanity.⁵⁵

This metaphysical dynamic and evolution of Western thought culminates in modern philosophy and sets the ideational infrastructure for imperialist-expansionist political doctrines, the zenith of which is the tyranny and despotism of a distinctly modern political structure, i.e. totalitarianism, for the philosophical urge to totalize 'leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny'.⁵⁶

One finds a reflection of this rationale in Camus's critique of totalitarianism in *The Rebel*, particularly in the section entitled 'Totality and Trial':

Totality, is, in effect, the ancient dream of unity ... the individuals under a totalitarian regime are not free, even though man in the collective sense is free. Finally, when the empire delivers the entire

human species, freedom will reign over herds of slaves ... To insure man's control of the world it is necessary to suppress, in the world and in man, everything that escapes the empire, everything that does not come under [its] reign ... the empire must embrace ... people ... it is simultaneously war ... and tyranny, desperately affirming that one day it will be liberty, fraternity and truth.⁵⁷

Camus's philosophical and political analysis is somewhat more laconic in nature, yet strikingly analogous as he calls for 'a philosophy of limits, of calculated ignorance ... [for] he who does not know everything cannot kill everything. The rebel, far from making an absolute of history, rejects and disputes it.'⁵⁸

Echoing Levinas's critique of the overly ambitious nature of hegemonic philosophies, Camus claims that

the strange and terrifying growth of the modern State can be considered as the logical conclusion of the inordinate ... philosophical ambitions ... which gave rise to the revolutionary spirit of our time. The prophetic dream of Marx and the over-inspired predictions of Hegel ... ended up by conjuring up ... an irrational state ... one which ... was founded on terror.⁵⁹

While recognizing the incalculable contribution which these towering intellectual figures have bestowed upon us, in order to shed more light on the subtleties and complexities of the modern condition, Camus insists that their ingenious vitality notwithstanding, therein also lurks an explosive potential to politically recruit and manipulate their *oeuvres*, for the very same reasons for which from the right it was possible to achieve 'the unbearable lightness of philosophical vulgarization' by posthumously politicizing Nietzsche by overemphasizing and decontextualizing central pillars of his thought, while conveniently effacing/disregarding others. Camus writes, 'If Nietzsche and Hegel serve as alibis to the massacre of Dachau and Karaganda that does not condemn their entire philosophy. But it does lead to the suspicion that one aspect of their thought, or of their logic, can lead to these appalling conclusions.'⁶⁰

Against philosophies that reduce the other within the anonymous might of the political, Levinas advocates a different approach, one that makes peace with the 'otherness' of the other, and adheres to the ethical heteronomy inherent therein. Here Levinas shares with Camus a certain metaphysical humility. A philosophy that

recognizes its non-omniscient character is a philosophy that stands as a buffer zone against the totalitarian temptation.⁶¹

For beyond some of the finest metaphysical constructions, the principles of impersonal reason which typify the seemingly all-embracing and all-engulfing Hegelian and Marxian universalist structures and teleologies, there remains the idea of infinity, the unquenchable metaphysical desire and the notion of goodness which serve as the last humanistic frontier, in an era in which metaphysical constructions in the realm of the political legitimized in the eyes of many sacrificing of the human face of today for the prospect of a better tomorrow. Such is the gist of the Levinasian metaphysical buffer zone against totalitarianism. It is, in the final analysis, a mode of existential resistance to that which the philosophical conceptual category of totality strives to efface, and to which the Hegelian and Marxian historical and political forces have all too often not been sufficiently attentive, i.e. 'this infinity, stronger than murder, [which] already resists us in the face, is the primordial expression [of] "you shall not commit murder" ... Infinity presents itself as a face in the [act of] ethical resistance that paralyses my [philosophical and political] powers and from the depth of defenseless eyes rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution.'⁶²

Camus's critique, which calls for a philosophy of limits in the spirit of its non-omniscient metaphysical humility hitherto mentioned, which he defines as a rebellion against the murderous 'isms' of the zeitgeist, corresponds to 'an assured dignity ... it supposes a [moral/political/philosophical] limit [as] its universe is the universe of relative values. Instead of saying with Hegel and Marx, that all is necessary.'⁶³

For Camus, although it is not an ethical heteronomy, it is a 'perpetual struggle', hence 'the rebel can never find peace',⁶⁴ as he struggles to achieve metaphysical honour by adhering to the ethical imperative of human solidarity, as he resists not solely the tribalism and particularism of Right totalitarianism, but also the prima facie universalistic and humanistic façade behind which Left totalitarianism hides as it seeks to render justifiable its own messianic teleology, its own follies and atrocities.

As Aronson shows, in *The Rebel* the effort to overcome totality and its corresponding political analogy is forcefully described. Camus's historical and philo-political genealogy

reaches back to the Greeks and early Christianity, then moves to the marquis de Sade, romanticism, dandyism, *The Brothers Karamazov*,

Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, surrealism, the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. Camus talks of revolt as increasing its force over time and turning into an ever more desperate nihilism, overthrowing God and substituting man, wielding power more and more brutally.

However, as Aronson further notes, the crucial point – and this is precisely where Camus's philo-political diagnosis is uniquely and strikingly congruent with the Levinasian one as articulated in *Totality and Infinity* – is that for Camus too 'historical revolt, rooted in metaphysical revolt, seeks to eliminate absurdity [or alterity] by taking total control over the world, making murder its central tool'.⁶⁵

For Camus too, Stalinist Communism is 'merely' the latest most contemporary exemplification of this Western sickness, which Levinas also diagnoses as originating in the totalistic metaphysical urge. In Camus's own words, this metaphysical urge is essentially the blind impulse 'to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral' (in other words, it is the Levinasian metaphysical desire gone astray). This leads to killings and the justification of murder as a legitimate mode of political action, a rationale that culminates in Auschwitz and the Gulags. For Camus, the rebel must learn to live and act within limits, to embrace more moderate, even more reformist hopes – 'to live and let live in order to create what we are'.⁶⁶

As Levinas aptly concludes, 'peace therefore cannot be identified with the ... defeat of some and the victory of others, that is, with cemeteries or future universal empires. Peace must be my peace, in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness.'⁶⁷

Chapter 4

Religious Humanism and Middle Eastern Geo-Politics

I. Levinas and Camus Contra Religious Fundamentalism / Answer to the Question 'What is Metaphysical Suicide?'

As Catherine Chaliel does well to recognize in her seminal work on Levinas,¹ the twentieth century had forced us to rethink our modernist prejudicial notions regarding religiosity, sanctity and faith, and glare at the abyss to which a distinctly rational approach to human affairs can lead, as was the case with 'scientific socialism', 'social engineering' and the depiction attributed to Stalin of the societal role of the writer as 'the engineer of human souls'.²

Thus, if the twentieth century made us rethink modernist prejudices of progress and reason, the upheavals unleashed in the commencement of the twenty-first century oblige us to rethink and reassess the murderous streak inherent in a fundamentalist interpretation of monotheism which purports to alleviate and remedy the communal, normative, cultural and metaphysical deficit of our own era. In other words, to confront the specific mode of active nihilism which is contemporarily hegemonic and typifies our *zeitgeist*. In what follows we recount two parallel and pivotal texts in the intellectual evolution of Levinas and Camus, without which it is impossible to grasp the change in their *oeuvres* stemming from the upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s.

We allude here to *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *On Escape*, which are two transitory works in the ideational dynamic of these two thinkers. These are two labyrinthine works that will ultimately lead to a breakthrough from a philosophical, normative and political standpoint, culminating in two anti-totalitarian *chefs-d'oeuvre*, *The Rebel* and *Totality and Infinity*. In the 1930s the two thinkers are at odds, their work is incommensurate in as much as Camus's depiction of all types of religiosity is negative and highly dismissive. Solely in

the late 1940s does Camus come to recognize the merit and moral validity of modes of resistance to political oppression which lean on the transcendent. Thereafter both thinkers are in accord in the sense that they both regard both types of humanism, i.e. immanent and transcendent, as pivotal in the struggle against tyranny. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* the 'early' Camus contends with two suicidal temptations inherent in the modern world typified by the absurd, namely physical and metaphysical suicide. Metaphysical suicide is prompted by an adherence to metaphysical solaces in the form of traditional religiosity, according to the young Camus.

The gist of Camus's notion of the absurd is captured in the following pronouncements: 'The subject of this essay is precisely this relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd.' 'What is absurd is the confrontation of the ... [the] irrational and the wild longing to clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.' 'The absurd ... is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia or unity, this fragmented unity.' 'My appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing the world to a rational and reasonable principle.'³

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Camus does not reject the notion of the transcendent, that which Levinas depicts as the 'Idea of Infinity', on principle, but rather on grounds which echo Kantian epistemology.⁴

For Levinas, not interpreting the scriptures and the bulk of the monotheist heritage according to the liberal legacy of the Enlightenment in a spirit of constant intellectual and hermeneutical renewal and sufficing oneself with a 'scientific' textual approach,⁵ or giving up the normative baggage inherent in monotheism altogether, is paramount to ethical-metaphysical suicide/defeatism in light of the totalitarian threat, whereas for the early Camus, the very choice to remain steadfast in one's adherence to monotheism constitutes metaphysical/philosophical suicide.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus does not overstep the boundaries of the absurd. He does not offer any positivity beyond it. Going beyond the absurd towards the other is a philosophical and existential breakthrough which appears solely thereafter in *L'Homme Révolté* and its literary analogies and exemplifications of *La Peste* and *La Chute*. Similarly, Levinas's *On Escape* struggles with the boundaries of being, yet the philosophical and existential breakthrough beyond being solely emerges years later, in the aftermath of World War II and captivity, in the 1950s with its all-pervasive political overtones.

In *On Escape*, Levinas's phenomenological utilization of the term 'nausea' is analogous and quite comparable to Camus's notion of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this groundbreaking essay of Levinas the notion of escape pertains to 'the need to get out of oneself, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that I [*moi*] is oneself [*soi-même*]',⁶ Similar to the Camus of the *Myth of Sisyphus* who rejects dandyism, Levinas categorically rejects hedonism as 'pleasure is a deceptive escape, it is an escape that fails'.⁷

Yet, as hitherto mentioned, the parallel obstacle to Camus's notion of the absurd that Levinas strives to surpass existentially for his work to mature is that of nausea. Like the absurd, 'the state of nausea ... encloses us on all sides. We are revolted from the inside ... There is in nausea a refusal to remain there, an effort to get out ... this despair, this fact of being riveted, constitutes all the anxiety of nausea. In nausea – we are riveted to ourselves ... we are there, and there is nothing more to be done ... this is the very experience of pure being'.⁸ 'Nevertheless, death is not the exit toward which escape thrusts us'.⁹ 'Nausea [*is*] the very act of self-positing: it is the affirmation itself of being. It refers only to itself, is closed to all the rest, without windows onto other things ... nausea reveals to us the presence of being in all its impotence ... it is the impotence of pure being, in all its nakedness'.¹⁰

We must admit, and emphasize here, that in harmony with Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*, Levinas's 1935 writing does not go beyond the position of this pure need to get out. The objective is to get out otherwise than by death, otherwise than towards nothingness.

Levinas forcefully concludes *De L'Évasion* in a sombre and critical tone, exclaiming that 'every civilisation that accepts being – with the tragic despair it contains and the crimes it justifies – merits the name "barbarian"'.¹¹

It was Levinas's lifelong vocation to render possible a religious humanism,¹² i.e. a reading of canonical monotheistic texts that seek to curtail and downplay anti-Enlightenment passages, and consistently to promote and encourage a humanistic-universalistic interpretative methodology. Analogously, the 'later' Camus of the post-1940 era would come to recognize that religious and secular humanists share a common normative and political agenda vis-à-vis the totalitarian plague.

Thus, following the calamities of the first half of the 1940s, the 'later' Camus articulates a very different position, one that makes room for a humanistic alliance between religious and secular modes

of resistance to totalitarianism. For Camus would come to see in the totalitarian plague, particularly in the nuclear era, the dreadful prospect of the collective suicide of mankind. For the plague is murderous active nihilism; it is, in his own words, 'a never ending defeat'.¹³

The revelation of the human reality as an inter-subjective reality in *The Rebel* is analogous to the epiphany of the human face in the Levinas of *Totality and Infinity*. Both thinkers achieve this turning point in their *oeuvres* in the 1950s and break free beyond being/ the absurd, beyond solipsism. Human solidarity, as recounted in *Totality and Infinity* and the bulk of Levinas's writings from the 1950s onwards, and *The Rebel*, *The Plague* and *The Fall* in Camus, constitute the ideational infrastructure for a novel ethics of human responsibility. In the totalitarian age, the age of total, all-sweeping and all-embracing messianic teleologies, Levinas and Camus cede the doctrinal, in lieu of which they opt to place the foundational ingredients of their thought on a non-speculative paradigm. Within the constellation of such cultural, historical and geo-political ambience, meaning is derived from concrete action in daily struggle and inter-subjective attentiveness and co-operation. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* the question of existential meaning is pivotal for Camus. Camus is torn between the affirmation of immanence and the metaphysical desire that Levinas describes so forcefully and vividly as a fundamental attribute of the human condition. Man is a metaphysical animal, as both Levinas and Camus acknowledge and imply.

As hitherto mentioned, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* man is condemned to live in the absurd. The absurd is the tension between the passion for clarity and unity (totality in the Levinasian) on the one hand and, on the other hand, the lucid necessity to remain in an immanent mode of existence with all the dread and anxiety inherent therein. The choice to adhere to existence, the light and the sea, Camus's choice, is not a return to a harmonious and naive state of being from which alienation is absent. The choice of immanence and concrete existence is a choice that remains conscious of the dread of existence and the metaphysical yearning to transcend. The man of the absurd lives in the tension between the need to remain within the boundaries of immanence and his desire for totality. Even while rejecting metaphysical and theological prospects, he does not cede the metaphysical yearning (desire in the Levinasian) itself. The tension, in which the man of the absurd lives, constitutes an overcoming of the various suicidal temptations (physical and metaphysical alike).

The sun (nausea in the Levinasian lexicon) signifies the incoherent structure of existence, the nihilistic streak that typifies the *zeitgeist*. The sea reflects reconciliation and friendship (the face plays a similar role in Levinas, in the sense that adherence to its ethical significance implies reconciling oneself with one's *raison d'être* as a responding subject who exclaims '*me voici!*'). The tension between the sea and the sun is the tension between immanent unity (symbolized by the former literary motif) and alienation and estrangement (exemplified by the latter).

In *The Rebel* the solipsism breaks. The revolt constitutes the Camusian ontological version of the Levinasian notion of 'Otherwise than Being/Beyond Essence'. It is the means through which man discovers his essence as a being that is linked to other subjects. The revolt establishes this mode of inter-subjective consciousness and is exemplified by solidarity. The revolt is an articulation and expression of man's quest for harmony and unity not solely with oneself ('ego-logy' in the Levinasian lexicon).

Two works of prose provide us with the key to fathom Camus's metaphysical and ethical transformation from solipsistic nihilism to immanent humanism: *The Plague* (1947), published four years prior to *The Rebel* (1951), and *The Fall* (1956).

In *La Peste*, Dr Rieux, chronicler of the plague, replies to Tarrou in a contemplative moment, 'Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me ... what interests me is being a man.'¹⁴

In *The Plague*, it is Father Paneloux who argues that the struggle against the plague is a redemptive one. Dr Rieux rejects this claim. For him redemption is too grand a scheme/concept, he is more preoccupied with man's health, and fighting to alleviate that which he detests and deplores most of all, 'death and sickness'.¹⁵

The Camus of *The Myth of Sisyphus* intimates that the source of the existential rift he defines as the absurd is the gulf between the subject and the world in one's consciousness. In that respect, man's tragedy stems from his ideational nature. His affirmative conclusion is embracing the non-redemptive essence of the human condition as a source of existential strength in a manner which strongly echoes Nietzschean overtones, specifically in the form of the latter's celebrated eternal recurrence and the ethical imperative inherent in the enigmatic cosmology of eternal recurrence. Reconciling oneself to the non-redemptive structure of the world in a post-theological epoch is paradoxically the sole path Camus envisages to achieving a sober 'redemption' from the chronic need to achieve totality and metaphysical unity. This paradoxically salvages the self from the

terror inherent in a fragmented and non-teleological, purposeless view of man and his place in the cosmos. Like the Levinas of *On Escape*, he seeks a way out of the age-old intellectual addiction to totality and unity in the history of Western thought. He has yet to come up with an ethical remedy and, like Levinas, his breakthrough will only be achieved in the aftermath of the National Socialist abyss, and with a lucid and fearless condemnation of the equally abhorrent nature of Stalinism, in an era in which, with the exception of several figures notwithstanding, very few thinkers of stature in the Parisian intellectual milieu dared challenge Marxist praxis in the USSR.

Confronting the problem of murder is at the very centre of *The Rebel*. Murder is synonymous with the negation of the other, and in that respect dealing with this problem is paramount to dealing with the question of 'otherness' – 'alterity' in Levinasian parlance. In that respect we find in *The Rebel* a re-examination of human metaphysics. That is, is it a metaphysics in which the solitary I, the ego, reigns autarchic, totalistic and supreme (Levinasian 'ego-logy'), or conversely, is it a metaphysics in which the 'We are', the '*Nous Sommes*', the 'Being-with-Other[s]', constitutes a primary focal point?

The world of *The Rebel* is a world in which the 'We', 'Being with Others', is a foundational metaphysical principle. The world is not the world of Leibnizian isolated monads, of self-enclosed subjects who lead a solipsistic mode of existence that leaves no room for the inter-subjective realm.

In *La Peste*, the primary/foundational experience that this *oeuvre* presupposes is the inter-subjective existence of man. In contrast to *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which presuppose the existence of an atomistic individual, an autarchic subject, *La Peste* presupposes that man is a creature whose founding trait is 'Being with Others'.

In a later work, *The Fall* (1956), Camus returns to this point and sheds light on the condition of solipsistic man who establishes his being through himself. The novella culminates with the suicide of an anonymous woman. The woman cried out as she jumped to her death in the River Seine. Clamence was shaken, he froze in his place, wanted to save the woman but did not.¹⁶ Yet this cry never left him.¹⁷ It placed upon him a demand, an analogous ethical imperative to the one inherent in the asymmetry between the same and '*l'autrui*' ('the Other') in Levinas.

Clamence's adventures from then onwards constitute a desperate attempt to return to the situation of being called upon and

demanded. The story ends in his wish to undo the missed face-to-face encounter, to undo lost time. Saving the woman is paramount to saving oneself (which is analogous to the celebrated Levinasian 'miracle of exteriority'), for only by responding to the demand deriving from the other does man discover his full human existence. Hence the forceful lamentation and exclamation with which the novella concludes: 'Oh young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may a second time have the chance of saving both of us!'¹⁸ Indeed, Clamence cannot save himself and the last lines of the story are, 'It's too late.'¹⁹ Clamence is thereafter condemned to exile from his home and his existence; he understands that his existence as a human subject is conditioned on the other, yet this insight does not drive him to action.

Interestingly, after *The Plague* and *The Rebel*, Camus returns to the fear that there might not be a timely response to the demand imposed by the other. In *The Fall*, Camus maintains his adherence to a Levinasian position, the thesis that the existence of man is in face of the other, yet becomes more acutely aware than in *The Plague* and *L'Homme Révolté* of the danger of missing the face-to-face encounter. It is difficult not to sense the strong presence of the calamities of World War II in *The Fall*. The late Camus is more aware of the danger of silence and passivity in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Auschwitz. He writes of the silence of the Jews of Amsterdam and is aware of the treason of humanity.²⁰

Camus, like Levinas, did well to realize that man lives in face of the other, that the existence of the other is a heteronomy. The first reaction of the later Camus was optimistic. *The Plague* and *The Rebel* carry an optimistic tone, they tell the story of a response to the task. *The Fall* is a story about the failure to respond, about the face-to-face encounter gone astray. Camus's ethical turn is rendered comparable to a religious conversion in *The Fall*. The sea becomes 'the bitter water of my baptism',²¹ 'this immense stoup of holy water'.²² The transition from the 'early' to the 'late' Camus is nourished by the occurrences of World War II,²³ but also from that which he perceived as the hegemonic attitude in the Parisian intellectual milieu to the Stalinist slaughterhouse – dialectical apologetics and moral apathy. Many refused to hear the screams of those drowned in the Gulags.²⁴

The Rebel is a saga about the abandonment of man's face in the totalitarian age, which emerges from the age-old dream for metaphysical totality.²⁵ The rebellion against tyranny and oppression is contingent upon solidarity.²⁶ The rebel identifies with the other

in the sense that he lets go of his solipsistic atomism and opens up towards the other. In this process of identification there emerges a transformation of one's sense of identity. One is no longer a self-enclosed being. The rebel discovers that he is uprooted from his prior mode of existence as an autarchic and self-sufficient being. The identification with the other means the enlargement of the existential scope from I to 'We are' (*Nous Sommes*). *The Rebel* reveals the essential partnership between self and other. The rebellion reflects, in the words of Camus, 'a growing self-consciousness of humanity'.²⁷

Camus regards the history of the metaphysical rebellion from 1789 to 1945 and onwards as intertwined with a rebellion against submission to religiosity. In *The Plague*, Dr Rieux, who heads the struggle against the plague, is questioned by his friend Tarrou as to how it is that he is driven by such tenacity of resistance and dedication, if he is devoid of faith. To this Rieux responds by implying that even Paneloux doesn't believe in a god that is completely omnipotent. For Camus, Paneloux epitomizes and personifies the religious humanist who is the secular humanist's *Compagnon de Route* – a figure whom we find in Levinas. Thus Camus and Levinas are fellow travellers in the inverted sense of the term, as they both embark upon the ethical and humanistic road in opposition to the totalitarian and structural tendencies of the time.

The Rebel grasps the basic existing correlation between people, and thereby also their common responsibility. The rebellion shapes a collective consciousness of ethical responsibility deriving from universalistic commonality. Moreover, rebellion as a response to oppression and injustice entails the relinquishing of absolute freedom. The Rebel cedes his freedom to murder and imposes his will without constraints.

Here, the later Camus shares with Levinas the critique and negation of boundless spontaneity, as well as his adherence to the Levinasian insistence upon the pivotal role of human discourse, language, dialogue and the allusion to the Platonic orientation that 'the good is beyond being' – given its dialogical and reciprocal nature. In the later Camus, as with Levinas, the revolt is first and foremost a response to an ethical demand and the acknowledgement of the imperative need for self-limitation, for response to the other implies ceding the boundless and limitless expansion of the self, which Levinas calls 'ego-logy'. In Levinas the face commands, 'Thou shall not commit murder!' In Camus also, a revolt which is devoid of this ethical dimension loses its very meaning and *raison d'être*.

Camus also sees eye to eye with Levinas regarding the existential merit of this approach. For Camus this is the secular humanist's way of achieving his full humanity. For Levinas it is the redemptive miracle of exteriority. For the former the revolt is a boundless joy: 'The "*nous sommes*" paradoxically defines a new form of individualism ... I alone, in one sense, support the common dignity that I cannot allow either myself or others to debase. This individualism is in no sense pleasure; it is perpetual struggle, and, sometimes, unparalleled joy when it reaches the heights of proud compassion.'²⁸ As man comes to recognize the value of human life both for the self and the other, he comes to recognize the value of the struggle, of a difficult freedom, and comes to recognize the meaning that the revolt bestows upon his life and his existence as a human subject.

In *The Fall* Camus points to the fear of missing the call/demand, the Levinasian ethical heteronomy. The source of this fear is man's tendency and inclination to return to a solipsistic mode of being, to remain firmly entrenched behind the walls of one's autarchic existence. In order to live up to one's humanity, one must always be conscious of the imperative nature of the revolt. The ethical subject cannot forsake his responsibility ('Difficult Freedom' in Levinasian parlance) and retort, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

As Camus makes clear throughout his exposition in *The Rebel*, as well as in the concluding paragraphs of *The Plague*, there always comes a time when man has had enough of prison (including the ontological prison of the atomistic self, trapped historically in a political nightmare of existential alienation, once the very rebellion which sought to alleviate his socio-economic plight turned into oppression, as 'the city that planned to be the city of fraternity becomes an ant-heap of solitary men'²⁹), as he strives 'to find the middle path leading to the face of man'.³⁰

II. Visionary Politics / Dualist Political Ontology, Israel and Algeria in the Writings of Levinas and Camus

As David Ohana shows in his *Humanist in the Sun: Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration*, the Mediterranean for Camus is an existential, socio-political and ethical alternative to Europe's twentieth century. It challenges cold Europe, which places its trust in history and not in nature.³¹ Europe, ideological continent of abstraction, is estranged from the immanent existence of the here and now, whereas Camus sees the meaning of humanity reflected

in the stones and sands and sea and blazing Mediterranean sun of the Levant. For the latter elements reflect man's reconciliation with the elements, as well as the limits and sheer essence and finitude of our immanent world. Our kingdom is of this world, and there is no meaning beyond existence.

Camus rejects all forms of 'leap' or transcendence. Europe searched for totality, and glorified and strove for only one thing: the futurist reign of the sovereignty of reason. While Levinas points to Abraham's existential expedition in the light of infinity as the plausible remedy to redeem Europe from its follies and atrocities, for Camus the same objective is to be realized by the antithetical mythical simile of Ithaca. Towards the very end of *The Rebel*, Camus's vision and pathos culminates in his call to learn to make peace with the relative justice of our finite planet, and his call for a philosophy of 'measuredness', in lieu of the messianic quest for complete justice at any cost. His call is to learn to live within limits, to embrace more moderate socio-political and overall existential approaches, as the world is our only love under the sun. Here, asserts Camus, formidable joy is born, and we should refuse to delay it for some futurist salvation. We should choose Ithaca together with the generosity of the understanding man.³²

The modern revolutions, according to Camus, ultimately strengthened the power of the state: 1789 brought Napoleon, 1848 brought his nephew, 1917 brought Stalin, the 1920s in Italy brought Mussolini, and Weimar brought Hitler. Hence the distinction between revolution and revolt is critical. According to Camus, the resistance drew its opposition to National Socialism from a revolt, not a revolution. A revolution is the actualization of an intellectual ideal in history, whereas a revolt constitutes an utter refusal to submit to an order that seeks to bring man to worship it and be consumed by it. The revolt stems from human solidarity. 'Remark on the Revolt'³³ is a short piece that sets the ideational and normative foundations for *L'Homme Révolté*.³⁴

In 'Remark on the Revolt', Camus calls upon the human subject to reach beyond the self and discover his existential vitality and worthiness in his rapport and commitment to others. In that respect, he begins to regard human solidarity as a philosophical certainty. This would culminate in his celebrated Cartesian inversion in *The Rebel* seven years later: 'I revolt, hence we exist.' Camus remained loyal to his philosophy of limits, his refusal of philosophies of history and totalistic doctrines. His philosophy of balance and anti-ideological stance against political abstractionism he depicted through a philosophical metaphor, which he called 'The Meridian'.

With regard to the question of Algeria, Camus recognizes the injustice of colonialism perpetrated towards the indigenous population,³⁵ and is an advocate of a federal mechanism in Algeria,³⁶ yet at the same time categorically refuses to regard terrorism inflicted against civilians as a legitimate form of political resistance.³⁷

Levinas conceives of the essence of Jewish existence, in harmony with Franz Rosenzweig, as a meta-historical, meta-political mode of existence.³⁸ In that respect, mainstream Zionism constitutes a paradox for Levinas as it seeks to promote 'the normalization of the Jewish condition'. This is something that Levinas fears more than he wishes, although he does recognize the necessity for Jewish political sovereignty in the aftermath of World War II. Levinas strives to demonstrate the streak of universalist humanism inherent in the Zionist enterprise, for example as exemplified in the experiment of the Kibbutz. Levinas fears the degeneration of Jewish metaphysics into an ethnocentric chauvinistic mode of ultra-nationalism, and fears that ethically and metaphysically Jewish sovereignty might paradoxically entail the end of Judaism.

As we sought to demonstrate in the previous chapter, Levinas is also contra fundamentalism. Levinas alludes to the idea of Infinity strictly in the ethical context of inter-subjectivity, hence he is no advocate of mainstream contemporary religious Zionism. His messianic conception implies metaphorically and ethically that each one of us is the messiah, in a categorical and heteronymous sense, hence the emphasis of personal responsibility in sharp contrast to the sadly hegemonic territorialist fetishism that typifies religious Zionism of the last four decades. This is in harmony with the Leibowitzian conception of the messianic idea of Judaism. Both Levinas and Leibowitz purport to facilitate the neutralization of the messianic idea in Judaism, like early Hassidism. According to Leibowitz, messianism constitutes a perpetual struggle for the amelioration of the human reality on all levels – spiritual, moral, socio-economic, cultural.³⁹ This implies that messianism always remains a longing for the perfection that we should strive to obtain, yet never fulfil in the immanent realm. Hence the messiah is always the messiah to come, whereas the messiah of the present is always a false messiah. Thus, on this conception, messianism is an existential and ethical ideal that one ought to strive towards, in contrast to immanent messianism, which is a utopianism. This is in harmony with Maimonides's conception of the messianic era: the end of the 'enslavement by [foreign] kingdoms', i.e. an era of geo-political stability which enables scholarly pursuits, reminiscent of Kant's *locus classicus*, *Toward Perpetual Peace*.⁴⁰

Levinas is a proponent of negotiations and a peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians, yet at the same time, like Camus, strongly opposes the radical left which fails to distinguish between legitimate political resistance to occupation and oppression, i.e. guerrilla warfare against military targets, and the indiscriminate slaughtering of innocent civilians. Both Camus and Levinas are equal to the task of confronting highly complex questions from a moral and political standpoint, which directly pertain to their immediate reference groups. Where Levinas negates religious fundamentalism, which fails to recognize the fundamental human essence of the political other, Camus rejects the extremist European factions in Algeria, which do not recognize the just grievances of the indigenous population and its legitimate rights.

For Levinas, Israel carries twofold significance:

- 1 A metaphysical space of sanctity, i.e. a space of unconditional stepping out towards the other, a heteronomy, an ethical and supra-political existence.
- 2 A concrete political entity that ought to demonstrate spiritual leadership and moral responsibility.

This is, of course, correlated to Levinas's conception of Judaism as 'a religion of adults', a system of duties and imperatives.⁴¹ Levinas does not conceive of the state of Israel as a state among states, just as he does not conceive of the *raison d'être* of the Jewish people as a people among peoples. As Howard Caygill observes, 'for Levinas, the state of Israel cannot be a state like all others but has [sordid realities apart from] the prophetic mission of transforming the meaning of the state, divesting it of its idolatry of power.'⁴²

Caygill is among those who criticize Levinas for his supposed silence 'on the evidence of the extent of the *Realpolitik* conducted by the state of Israel during and since 1948'.⁴³ Fascinatingly enough, both Levinas and Camus were accused of roaring silence regarding the stormy seas of Mediterranean politics in Israel and Algeria. A thorough examination of this critique extends beyond the realm of this work, which pertains to their anti-totalitarian critique. However, it cannot go unnoticed that the almost slanderous accusations according to which Levinas did not rebuke the moral outrage of the carnage in Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, in which Arab Christians massacred Arab Muslims and the Israeli Army stood idly by, are entirely unjustified. The fact is that there could hardly be a stronger verbal condemnation of these atrocities than Levinas's lamentation/

exclamation regarding 'the shock that the human possibility of the events of Sabra and Shatila – whoever is behind them – signifies for our entire history as Jews and as human beings'.⁴⁴

Nowhere is Levinas's moral outrage – vis-à-vis the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and Gaza, and by and large a territorialist mode of messianism (to be distinguished from ethical-spiritual-intellectual messianism) – more pervasive.

Regarding this ultra-nationalization of the Zionist ideal, Levinas seems to lament it as 'some sort of a commonplace mystique of the earth as native soil'.⁴⁵

Moreover, according to Levinas, the territorialist fetishism of the Israeli radical right, according to which the land is intrinsically holy and sacred in and of itself (and not because of the ethical and spiritual potentialities it might entail), is paramount to degeneration into the abomination of idolatry and analogous to the abominable nature of European fascism. For Levinas asserts that 'a person is more holy than a land, even a holy land, since, faced with an affront made to a person, this holy land appears in its nakedness to be but stone and wood'.⁴⁶

As Howard Caygill well observes,⁴⁷ Levinas distinguishes between the strange fire of fanaticism and religious fundamentalism,⁴⁸ and the spiritual fire of 'the embers still glowing beneath the ashes, as Rabbi Eleazar called the words of the prophets'.⁴⁹

For Camus, Algeria symbolizes light, sun and sea, elements of concrete engagement with the world which are intertwined with elements of his thought that certain scholars are inclined to regard as pantheistic. That is to say, for Camus also, Algeria is not solely a concrete place, but also a symbolic space that offers another way of being in the world, a metaphysical space.⁵⁰

To conclude, Algeria and Israel, for Levinas and Camus, are case studies in which personal identity becomes intertwined with questions of moral boundaries vis-à-vis resistance to political oppression, and in addition to their being (i.e. Israel and Algeria) a concrete place, they are also a place which constitutes, at least in potentiality, a metaphysical and moral alternative to the political atrocities and follies of Europe's all-too-tragic twentieth century.

Camus, in the concluding segment of *The Rebel*, articulates the vision that the Mediterranean region, which for him entails first and foremost Algeria, constitutes an opening to the possibility of the political, which is entrenched in the ethical.

Thus, for Camus also, as Tony Judt observes, 'the larger problem was not how to choose between morality and politics, but how

to forge a politics of moral engagement',⁵¹ and he too resorted to a dualist ethical-political metaphor in the form of Algeria/The Meridian.

Sadly, a brief glance at the contemporary geo-political constellations in Israel and Algeria vividly exemplifies the tragic gulf between the vision common to Levinas and Camus in this regard, and the sordid Middle Eastern reality in the commencement of the twenty-first century.

III. Humanisms for the Twenty-First Century: Moving Beyond the Tragedy of Modernity

This is a century that in thirty years has known two world wars, the totalitarianisms of the Right and Left, Hitlerism and Stalinism, Hiroshima, the Gulag, and the genocides of Auschwitz and Cambodia. This is a century which is drawing to a close in the haunting memory of the return of everything signified by these barbaric names.⁵²

The 20th century, which denies all forms of morality and desperately attempts to achieve the unity of the human race by means of a ruinous series of crimes and wars ... the cynical revolutions, which can be either of the Right or of the Left...⁵³

The tie with the other is knotted only as responsibility ... whether accepted or refused, whether knowing or not knowing how to assume it, whether able or unable to do something for the Other. To say: Here I am (*me voici*). To do something for the Other. To give. To be a human spirit, that's it.⁵⁴

At this limit, the 'we are' [*Nous sommes*] paradoxically defines a new form of individualism ... I have need of others who have need of me and of each other ... I alone, in one sense support the common dignity that I cannot allow myself or others to debase. This individualism is in no sense pleasure: it is perpetual struggle, and, sometimes, unparalleled joy when it reaches the heights of proud compassion.⁵⁵

In the *Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard outlines the two key narratives of modernity.⁵⁶ On the one hand, he depicts the saga of reason as a process of rationalization, which is typified by the Enlightenment ethos and *esprit*. On the other hand, there emerged the narrative of freedom as a process of liberation. The latter narrative is typified by the Marxist struggle for universal redemption, but also by the more particularistically inclined and individually based quest for freedom which we find in existentialist

philosophy. Both Camus and Levinas were attentive to the sordid correlation between the totalizing subject and totalitarian politics. Both opposed giving precedence to metaphysical constructs in the realm of the political (general will, *Geist*, progress) over concrete individuals, both deplored that which Camus defined as the 'divinization' of history à la Hegel and his adherents and successors. Levinas and Camus rejected sacrificing the human face of today for the delusional messianic hopes for a utopian tomorrow. They did well to realize that this is a murderous conceptual mirage. Camus and Levinas can be regarded as the 'Galileos' of applying the ethical to the political. They were not embarrassed by cynics, nor deterred by political rivals, to sustain their call for a politics grounded in humanistic values. They were Galileos in the sense that despite the atrocities of their era, the worst that humanity had known, they refused to relent, and tacitly exclaimed with regard to the primacy of the ethical and the dignity of the individual: *Epur si muove*.⁵⁷ Galileo referred to our planet, Camus and Levinas to the inevitable need to move towards a humanitarian politics. Camus called it the 'perpetual struggle', Levinas (leaning on Judaism, but including therein all the moral capital of Western civilization, Christianity and the Enlightenment included) 'Difficult Freedom'.

In reassessing the commonalities of their heritage in the twenty-first century, Camus can help us see the way towards a social democratic politics, in lieu of messianic Stalinism,⁵⁸ whereas Levinas is keenly aware that the yearnings for the transcendental are an intrinsic part of the human condition, and seeks to channel this messianic streak to the realm of inter-subjectivity, thereby bypassing the all-pervasive dangers of religious fundamentalism.

IV. Afterword: A Brief Personal Reflection on the Abuse and Misuse of the Religious Horizon in Contemporary Geo-Political Discourse

The struggle in the history of ideas against tyranny and for liberty is not as one-dimensional as it might have seemed in the previous century, i.e. a battle solely waged against secular active nihilism, in the form of right and left totalitarianism, nor as it is all too simplistically depicted today – i.e. religiosity versus secularism, or continuity versus change.

The focal point of the conflict is rather between those who place the rights of the other person to exist before their respective metaphysical and political conceptualizations, and those who do

not. The struggle is not necessarily launched between progress and tradition, as much as between those for whom the sacred is life itself, and those for whom the sacred is the very possibility to lead a certain mode of existence in accordance with a given set of metaphysical values and assertions. For the former, the humanism of the other person is an uncontested *a priori*, beyond any idea system, beyond abstractionism.

In contrast to certain trends in some intellectual quarters to depict the current geo-political climate as wrought with a civilizational schism, and the tendency to formulate a rather crude normative equation, a dichotomy according to which religiosity is bound to be in perpetual opposition to enlightened liberalism and necessarily synonymous with fundamentalism, intellectual and physical terrorism, political oppression and by and large a totalitarian mindset,⁵⁹ one must not set aside a more encompassing historical perspective on modernity and the totalitarian shadow.

In the twentieth century, as atheistic doctrines challenged 'the very humanity of man' under the banners of Fascism, Nazism and the Chinese and Soviet modes of implementation of Communism, two of the greatest humanists of the epoch who resisted all forms of political oppression (the colonial atrocities of the West and Nixonian Machiavellian foreign policy inclusive) were religious humanists who leaned on the transcendent – Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. They exemplified a mode of religiosity which is unfortunately not sufficiently pervasive and audible contemporarily, despite the notable renaissance and flourishing of Levinas scholarship in the ethical context – i.e. a mode of piety and religious humanism for which a principal goal is the humanization of the socio-political and cultural state of affairs, for which the underlying normative universalistic agenda is just as imperative as its underlying metaphysical *raison d'être*.

Notes

Introduction

1 While it is true that 'generally speaking people were not tempted by totalitarianism but by what they took to be the promise of building a better world', as Tracy B. Strong comments, the notion of the totalitarian temptation implies that leading thinkers fell prey to the temptation to deduce and assume that short-term political repression will prove worthwhile and carry as its derivative long-term political and moral dividends, from an almost utilitarian perspective, with the inherent underlying assumption that posterity will be the beneficiary of the imperative need for an intermediate phase of despotism. A classical manifestation of this mode of dialectical apologetics (with the corresponding humanistic teleological rationale) is Merleau-Ponty's stance vis-à-vis the Moscow show trials in his *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Thus, to clarify, the temptation was not strategic (for that would entail a normative endorsement of totalitarianism and political oppression as an intrinsic vocation), but rather a tactical alliance with repressive political mechanisms for the foreseeable future. The term 'the totalitarian temptation' was famously coined and pioneered by Jean-François Revel. See his *La Tentation Totalitaire* (Paris: Broche, 1976). Revel contends in his work not so much with the totalitarianism of the right, given its a-priori normative inferiority, but rather with the totalitarian and authoritarian rationale from the left, precisely because the left purported to be lofty, i.e. to pursue a humanistic and universalistically oriented geo-political agenda. As will be rendered pervasive in Chapter 2, both Levinas and Camus came to recognize the a-priori universalist orientation and vision which typifies Marxism on the level of *intentio*, i.e. its all-embracing and all-pervasive humanistic streak. Revel speculates a paradigm and hypothesis according to which man persists in his adherence to utopian political doctrines and political systems, in which a messianic streak is omnipresent, also in his more recent works, specifically *Ni Marx, Ni Jesus* (Paris: Laffont, 2002), and *La Grande Parade: Essai sur la survie de l'utopie socialiste* (Paris: Pocket, 2001).

2 This will include philosophical essays and reviews published in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger*, *Les cahiers de l'Alliance Israelite universelle*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Le Matin* and *Esprit*. Particular emphasis will be on articles from the 1930s and 1940s pertaining to National Socialism and Stalinism. These will include *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'Hitlerisme*, *Principes et visages*, *Le Debat russo-chinois et la dialectique*. With regard to Camus, particular emphasis will be placed upon his political writings in *Combat*, personal writings in *Carnets*, published correspondence, in addition to the canonical writings of the relevant time frame, specifically *L'Etranger*, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, *Caligula*, *L'Homme Révolté*, *La Peste*, *Lettres à un ami allemand* and *La Chute*. These writings will be considered in conjunction with Levinas's *De L'Evasion*, as well as his post-war *chef-d'oeuvre Totalité et Infini*, achieved by late 1960. We end our quest in this year, in order to remain faithful to a congruency between our methodological guidelines and the chronological timetable, as this is the very same year in which the short and much prolific life and intellectual enterprise of Albert Camus came to an abrupt and tragic end.

3 For example, in the aftermath of the stormy and hostile reception of *L'Homme Révolté* in 1951, Sartre mockingly referred to Camus as 'the High Priest of Absolute Morality'. For more, see Neal Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Post-War France: Albert Camus, Max Jacob, Simone Weil* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), p. 60.

4 An ideational dynamic and evolution that reached its zenith and culmination in modern European thought, according to both Levinas and Camus.

5 Accordingly, the half a decade which Levinas spent as a prisoner of brown totalitarianism shaped his post-1945 philosophical endeavour, and future dissidents of red totalitarianism were later on to draw encouragement from his work. This includes former dissident and president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel. As Salomon Malka, a former student of Levinas, recounts in his *Levinas: La vie et la trace* (Éditions Jean-Claude Lattes, 2002), during Havel's prison years of 1979–82 he often alluded to Levinas's writings in his correspondence with his wife Olga. In his letters Havel describes Levinas's work as 'magnificent like a revelation', and goes on to state that 'it is felt in every line' (p. 96) that Levinas had also paid with his liberty in the battle against despotism. Analogously, Camus's seminal work directed against the totalitarian misadventures of the century proved instrumental particularly in light of red totalitarianism, which continued to subjugate the lives of millions of Europeans for almost four decades after the publication of *L'Homme Révolté*. Thus future dissidents of red totalitarianism also drew encouragement and inspiration

from Camus's writings. Indeed, *L'Homme Révolté*, too, was resurrected in a new anti-Communist wave in the late 1970s. Hence both Camus and Levinas proved in this historical context that their political critique stands the test of time in terms of its sheer relevance and applicability, and that they thus justly merit due recognition in academic quarters and intellectual circles for the fine diagnosticians of totalitarian politics and its philosophical seeds which they are. For more on Camus as a source of inspiration for Eastern and Central European dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s, see Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), pp. 117–18.

6 I have in mind in this context chiefly the latter's celebrated First Discourse (*Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs*), and the regrettably scholarly overlooked and somewhat neglected section of the former's seminal *Human, All Too Human* entitled 'A Glance at the State'.

7 The word 'genocide' did not exist until the legal scholar Raphael Lemkin originated the term in 1943. As an internationally sanctioned, legal definition, genocide was not acceptable until 1951, the very same year in which Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* and Camus's *The Rebel* saw the light of day. For a more contemporary consideration of this, see Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

8 For more on Nietzsche's political misappropriation, see Tracy B. Strong's article, 'Nietzsche's Political Misappropriation', which addresses this issue, in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). As Strong asserts, 'it is well known that National Socialism claimed to find its roots in the doctrines of the *Übermensch*, the will to power, in Nietzsche's apparent validation of cruelty, in his pronouncements on greatness and destiny. Clearly and openly, the Nazis appropriated Nietzsche's remarks on racial superiority, the need for strength and ruthlessness, and war, seeking to cast Nietzsche as an intellectual ancestor of National Socialism ... [However], perhaps no opinion in Nietzsche scholarship is now more widely accepted than that the Nazis were wrong and/ignorant in their appropriation of Nietzsche ... there is in fact no correct political interpretation because Nietzsche does not in fact have a "real" political doctrine' (pp. 130–2).

9 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 vols (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961); trans. David Farrell Krell, 4 vols (New York: Harper and Row, 1979–86).

10 As William Paul Simmons well observes in his *An-Archy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas's Political Thought* (Lanham,

MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 'Levinas claims that his heteronymous philosophy will reverse the relationship: "By this 'turn,' philosophy changes radically. If the Other is taken seriously ... the ultimate meaning of all things and humans has been changed"' (p. 22).

11 Another great intellect that later on achieved great recognition and dared challenge the Marxian dogma, including its Sartrean existentialist version (I have in mind chiefly Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, the second volume of which he never completed), was Michel Foucault, who recognized the nature of the Soviet regime as early as 1953, whereas for Sartre it was solely the Soviet Machiavellian decision to invade Hungary in 1956, while the eyes of the world were transfixed on the Suez Canal, which made him disassociate himself from the USSR. As James Miller establishes in his *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 'Although it is impossible to establish precisely the dates of Foucault's active involvement in the PCF, it seems he left by the summer of 1953. The last straw, he would recall, had been the so-called "Doctors Plot". This putative plot was first "unmasked" by Soviet newspapers in January 1953. In a series of inflammatory articles, Party journalists charged that a cabal of traitorous doctors, most with ties to an international Jewish organization, had conspired to murder prominent Bolsheviks and to poison Stalin himself, who was then in the throes of his final illness. The slanderous accusation pandered to anti-Semitic sentiments and provoked a government sponsored campaign to purge Jews from positions of public responsibility in the Soviet Union. Throughout his life, Foucault was intensely hostile to any hint of anti-Semitism. The blatant racism of this propaganda initiative, combined with the evident mendacity of the charges, left him aghast: "The fact is, from that moment on I moved from the PCF"' (p. 58). Attending Sartre's interment, he retorted to a former student that Sartre's legacy can be parsimoniously summed up in the word 'terrorism' (p. 38).

12 Camus became a somewhat isolated subject of ridicule and even contempt on the Left Bank of the River Seine in the aftermath of the scorning reviews that his *L'Homme Révolté* received in *Les Temps Modernes* (starting in the May 1952 review it received by the journal's nominal managing editor at the time, Francis Jeanson, to be soon thereafter followed by another devastating critique by Sartre himself), in large measure due to its ethical flair and clear-cut and unapologetic rebuke of political repression in the USSR. According to some prominent commentators (e.g. his leading biographer Olivier Todd, in *Albert Camus: une vie* [Paris: Gallimard, 1996]), Camus's chief protagonist in *The Fall*, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, an isolated exile in Amsterdam who severely criticizes Parisian society, constitutes a fictional reflection of Camus's

own sense of growing alienation vis-à-vis the prominent fellow travellers of the time, and the socio-political and cultural ambience in the capital by and large. With regard to Levinas, the latter solely received considerable recognition at a late stage in his life, and his academic teaching career began as late as the sixth decade of his life, partly due to his highly unfashionable and untimely preoccupation with the ethical and the transcendent. For more, see the most exhaustive Levinas biography as of date, Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 1994), especially pp. 305–73.

13 We will closely examine three chief articles, the recurring motifs of which culminate in *Totality and Infinity*. The articles are 'L'esprit de Genève' (*Esprit* 1 [1956], pp. 96–8), a quasi-apocalyptic article which deals also with the daunting prospect of universal annihilation in the Cold War atomic era. 'Principes et Visages' (*Esprit* 5 [1960], pp. 863–5), a critique of the Khrushchevian Soviet political system, its inherent political repression, and the underlying philo-political a-priori presuppositions which constitute its Archimedean point, and finally 'Le Debat russo-chinois et la dialectique' (*Esprit* 10 [1960], pp. 1622–4), which is a polemical short piece in which one finds a devastating critique of that which Levinas conceived of as the Machiavellian nature of the Soviet foreign policy in the early years of the Cold War. We will spend the bulk of this chapter showing the manner in which these modes of argumentation came into their culmination and full fruition in *Totality and Infinity*. We will do this, of course, as we stress its analogous modes of criticism in the writings of Camus, specifically in *The Rebel*.

14 As Aronson writes in the context of Camus. See his *Camus and Sartre*, p. 4.

15 See especially Book VIII, 544c–569c, as well as Book IX 571a–592a, and Book 615c–619b.

16 Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960), p. 278.

Chapter 1

1 See Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 1994), p. 38.

2 For more on this, see the segment entitled 'From Russian Literature to Phenomenology' (pp. 30–5) in Roger Burggrave's *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003).

3 In this context, I am inclined to adhere to Simmons's contention that Levinas usually uses Judaism and Greek as metaphors whereby

Judaism refers to the ethical relation to the Other, while Greek refers to the rational order, which emphasizes universality, discourse and the political. In Judaism, pre-philosophical experiences are not thematized, while the Greek tradition thematizes every pre-philosophical experience it encounters. That is to say, it reduces all of transcendence to a neuter category. A prime example is Plato's 'good beyond being' which is 'immanentized' by Aristotle in Book 1 of *The Nicomachean Ethics*. See William Paul Simmons, *An-Archy and Justice: An Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas's Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 9.

4 Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 51.

5 Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: la vie et la trace* (Éditions Jean-Claude Lattes, 2002), p. 70.

6 Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), p. 358.

7 'Introduction to Philosophy'.

8 As recounted in François Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas essais and entretiens* (Paris: Actes du Sud, 1996), p. 72.

9 Levinas pioneered Husserlian phenomenology in French with seminal articles, e.g. 'Sur les "Ideen" de M. E. Husserl', which appeared in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* CVII (1929), pp. 230–65, and 'Fribourg, Husserl et la phénoménologie', which appeared in *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langues allemandes* 5 (1931), pp. 402–14.

10 Most notably perhaps with the groundbreaking article 'Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* CXII (1932), pp. 395–431.

11 *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Alcan, 1930); trans. Andrée Orianne, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

12 *Méditations Cartésiennes: Introduction à la phénoménologie par Edmund Husserl* (Paris: Almand Colin, 1931).

13 See, for example, Paul Ginestier, *La Pensée de Camus* (Paris: Bordas, 1964), p. 23.

14 According to Avi Sagi's *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd* (Tel Aviv: Mod Publishers, 2002), the early Camus is typified by the absurd (the paradox and tension between the existing alienation and the unobtainable existential yearning to transcend and achieve unity), whereas the *raison d'être* of the later Camus is to construct a new home for humanity, in the form of socio-political solidarity. Other good depictions of the rapport between the absurd and the revolt can be found in Jean Sarocchi, *Camus* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), and John

Cruikshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

15 I am adhering here to Jacob Golomb's useful distinction between the 'early' and 'late' Camus. See e.g., *In Search of Authenticity: from Kierkegaard to Camus* (New York: Schocken, 1999), p. 268.

16 Albert Camus, *Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance, Newspaper Combat, 1944–1947* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), p. 34.

17 David Ohana provides an excellent summary of this aspect of Camus's work in his preface to the Hebrew edition of *Lettres à un ami allemand*, as well as in his *Humanist in the Sun: Albert Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration* (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishers, 2000; in Hebrew). See also Chapter 5 of Robert de Luppe, *Camus* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1963).

Chapter 2

1 The day in which Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany.

2 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlerisme', *Esprit* 2 (1934), pp. 199–208.

3 In this context, see especially his *Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution: Ideological Polarisation in the 20th Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995).

4 Emmanuel Levinas, *Unforeseen History: Some Thought on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 21.

5 Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 152.

6 Ibid., pp. 147–8.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 40.

8 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 13.

9 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 148.

10 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 13.

11 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 146.

12 Ibid., p. 212.

13 See, for example, David Ohana, *Humanist in the Sun: Albert Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration* (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishers, 2000; in Hebrew).

14 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 148.

15 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 15.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. One finds here an anticipation of the manner in which Levinas would define Judaism as antithetical to Hitlerism several decades later, as a 'category of being', typified by 'Difficult Freedom' and as a 'religion of adults', thereby implying the infinite demand to responsibility manifested in quotidian, monotonous daily regularity and attendance to the demands of the Other ('Election is made up not of privileges but of responsibilities ... beings must be able to demand more of themselves than of the Other ... The idea of being chosen, which can degenerate into that of pride but originally expresses the awareness of an indisputable assignation from which an ethics springs and through which the universality of the end being pursued involves the solitude and isolation of the individual responsible' (*Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990], pp. 21–6), in contrast to a facile otherworldly mode of metaphysical refuge one often finds in solipsistic mysticism ('[mystical] enthusiasm is not the purest way in which to enter a relationship with God. The Pharisee has seen this in his life ... he cannot be easily dazzled' [p. 28]).

18 Levinas would later claim that technology and monotheism share a common objective in this regard, i.e. the demystification of the world, and attaining liberation from being chained to the constraints of a given physical realm. For an extensive elaboration on the shared objectives/ramifications of monotheism and technology, see his essay, 'Heidegger, Gagarin and Us', in *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 231–4.

19 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 15.

20 Ibid.

21 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 53–4. Such selective textual demonstrations would prove incalculable in the politicization of Nietzsche, inaugurated by his sister and Adolph Hitler who crowned him as the 'home philosopher' of the regime through the manipulative, Machiavellian and highly contentious utilization of his writings.

22 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 17.

23 See especially the first essay, section 16.

24 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 17.

25 'Israel is about to be released from the house of bondage ... it is a figure of humanity! Man's freedom is that of an emancipated man remembering his servitude and feeling solidarity for all enslaved people', *Difficult Freedom*, p. 152.

26 See, for example, Levinas's assertion that 'Idolatry is fought not on account of its errors, but on account of the moral degeneracy that accompanies it' (ibid., p. 174).

27 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 155.

28 Ibid., p. 204.

29 This is correlated to what Levinas would come to define in *Totality and Infinity* as 'the metaphysical desire', which 'is a desire that cannot be satisfied'. For 'the metaphysical desire has another intention; it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it ... A relationship whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger ... [it is] a desire for the absolutely other. Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the senses one allays, metaphysics desires the other beyond satisfaction ... [it is a] desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other' (*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* [Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969], p. 34). While Levinas has in mind the concrete human other in this context, he also speaks of the eternal mystery of infinity as the complete other: 'the relation with infinity cannot ... be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it' (p. 25).

30 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, pp. 18–20.

31 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 149.

32 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 20.

33 It is important to emphasize that we focus here on the posthumous politicization of Nietzsche, this despite the fact that his *oeuvre* is not explicitly political, as its existential gist lies in an ontological message for the benefit of the individual, and not in any collective recipe for action. In fact, if Nietzsche intimates an original philosophy of history it is aesthetically driven, and is well reflected in his proclamation that 'mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men – that and nothing else is its task' (*Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]). Such is, according to Nietzsche, the *raison d'être* of human history and all other matters are at best subsidiary. Moreover, Nietzsche mocks the Hegelian emphasis upon the centrality of the political, as he proclaims that 'every philosophy which believes that the problem of existence is touched on, not to say solved, by a political event is a joke' (p. 160). The fact that Nietzsche stands in sharp opposition to some of the chief paradigms of modern European thought, such as science as redeemer and positivism (e.g. Auguste De Comte), the religion of reason and rationality (Spinoza, Kant), and the centrality of the political (Hegel, Marx), further clarifies and explicates his inherent antagonism to the Hegelian and Kantian notions of progress, which is well summarized in his celebrated disinclination to adhere to utopianism and political messianism, as this prospect 'this hope, will be arrogance, an overestimation' (*Human All Too Human*, Aphorism 443 – 'Hope as arrogance'. For a comprehensive view of Nietzsche's political

stances, see the section entitled 'A Glance at the State' of this important yet somewhat scholarly neglected work). With regard to the cult of the statesman and the notorious *Führerprinzip*, Nietzsche mocks political leaders and demagogues, as reflected in his depiction of them as 'the great men of the masses' (Aphorism 463). Despite the fact that Nietzsche does not offer a comprehensive, systematic and coherent political theory (this was far from being his objective), he does specify his detestation of the democratic order, as he states that the 'death of the state ... is the result of the democratic concept of the state' (Aphorism 471). He is also highly sceptical as to the merits of grandiose socio-political upheavals, which seek to alleviate the collective well-being of mankind. Thus, in correlation to the prospect of a revolution, he observes: 'an overthrow can never be an organizer, perfecter of human character' (Aphorism 463). Such is the Nietzschean version of Kant's celebrated maxim that mankind constitutes a 'warped wood'. For Nietzsche's attitude towards the prospect of a better tomorrow is clear-cut; it is a conceptual mirage, for 'the destiny of man is designed for happy moments, not happy eras. The idea [of happier epochs] will endure in the human imagination as "the place between the mountains," [but] it is a false conclusion' (Aphorism 471). Hence Nietzsche is a fiercely anti-utopian thinker *par excellence*, and this tacitly implies, in my view, that it was clearly a posthumous intellectual fallacy and philosophical perversion to recruit Nietzsche ideologically in the service of the partisans and proponents of the Third Reich, or in fact any totalitarian enterprise. For history well demonstrates that utopianism is always synonymous with, and inherent in, any totalitarian project, be it on the particularist level on the radical right – in order to redeem the *Volkegeist*, or with the universalist orientation of the radical left which purports to 'salvage mankind in its entirety'. Most notably, Nietzsche regards the very existence of the state as tragic, in the sense that the most gifted individuals are either consumed, or even annihilated by this novel modernist idol. Accordingly, 'the most industrious men are taken to be soldiers ... each able, intelligent, ambitious man is ruled by greed for political glory' (Aphorism 481). In addition, Nietzsche also poses the question of whether the state is indeed worthy of the fact that the most gifted persons 'have to be sacrificed to this gross and gaudy flower' (ibid.). Needless to say, Nietzsche's response is a resounding no. Indeed, Nietzsche's anti-political lamentations culminate in his overt call to possibly allow for the creation of an autonomous non-political sphere for privileged persons of artistic, creative and overall existential excellence, as he stresses that certain specific individuals must not preoccupy themselves with affairs of state: 'some people must be allowed to keep out of politics' (Aphorism 438). Lastly, those who proclaim that Nietzsche is

culpable of creating the philosophical mindset which gave rise to fascism in general, and Nazism in particular, seem tacitly to suggest that there are also pervasive anti-Semitic tones in his thought. This is a much prevalent misconception, as the following segment will vividly clarify. According to Nietzsche, European Jewry served as 'a scapegoat for every possible public and private misfortune' (Aphorism 475). Furthermore, Nietzsche also pays tribute to the Jewish contribution to Western civilization by professing the following: 'To whom we owe the noblest human being [Jesus], the purest philosopher [Spinoza], the mightiest book, and the most effective moral code in the world'. Furthermore, 'in the dark medieval times ... Jewish freethinkers, scholars and Doctors, who, under the harshest personal pressure, held fast to the banner of enlightenment and intellectual independence, and defended Europe against Asia; we owe to their efforts ... a more natural, rational ... explanation of the world ... Judaism made Europe's history and task into a continuation of the Greek' (ibid.). To conclude, the Nazis distorted and perverted also those philosophies that they falsely claimed to be their intellectual kin, despite the all-pervasive anti-nationalistic salient features of Nietzsche's *oeuvre*.

34 In opposition to an ethics of duties, e.g. the Kantian one.

35 To borrow from Walter Benjamin.

36 For a good exposition of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, see P. L. Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

37 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 151.

38 Ibid.

39 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 20.

40 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 146.

41 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, Aphorism 475 – 'The European man and the destruction of nations'.

42 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 21.

43 Ibid.

44 For extensive coverage of this question which has not ceased to haunt political theorists for the last seven decades, see Steven Ascheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). The debate started in the 1930s and 1940s with important contributions by George Bataille, 'Nietzsche et les fascistes' (1937), in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: 1970), pp. 447–65, and Herbert Marcuse, 'Was Nietzsche a Nazi?', *American Mercury* 59 (1944), pp. 737–40; in addition to articles which tackled the question during the very years in which National Socialism was a political reality, e.g. Joachim Gunther, 'Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus', *Nationalsozialismus Monatshefte* 2 (1931), pp. 560–3, and Anthony Ludovici, 'Hitler and

Nietzsche', *English Review* 64 (January 1937), pp. 44–52, 192–202. In the 1960s and 1970s Georg Lukacs and Jacob Talmon wrote highly critical and anti-Nietzschean expositions in the context of right-wing intellectuals who supposedly set the ideational infrastructure for the ascent of Fascism (see Georg Lukacs, *Von Nietzsche bis Hitler oder der Irrationalismus und die deutsche Politik* [Berlin: Fischer Bucherei, 1966], and Jacob Talmon, 'Aspects of Nietzsche's Thought in Historical Perspective'), a view which Ze'ev Sternhell seems to share in his seminal *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; see especially pp. 5–7, 250–2). It seems that as time passed, instead of subsiding the debate pertaining to Nietzsche and the political only increased in volume and tenacity. In the last three decades of the twentieth century the number of publications seems to have surpassed the previous decades. Particularly influential were Peter Bergman, *Nietzsche: The Last Anti-Political German* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2000), Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), Kurt Rudolf Fischer, 'A Godfather Too: Nazism as a Nietzschean "Experiment"', in Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (eds), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 291–300, Simone Goyard-Fabre, *Nietzsche et la question politique* (Paris: Sirey, 1977), and Rudolf Kuenzli, 'The Nazi Appropriation of Nietzsche', *Nietzsche Studien* 12 (1983), pp. 428–35. Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) provides a very good analysis of Nietzsche's advocacy and vision of an elitist meritocracy. The debate continues well into the first decade of the twenty-first century with the recent publication of Golomb and Wistrich (eds), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism*, which is inclined to conclude that while 'there is much that is disturbingly antiegalitarian and antidemocratic in Nietzsche, and his writings on Jews are open to differing interpretations ... his emphasis on individualism and contempt for German nationalism and anti-Semitism put him at stark odds with Nazi ideology' (pp. 14–15). Rudiger Safranski, author of the seminal intellectual biography *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (New York: Norton and Company, 2002), also felt obliged to contend with Nietzsche's 'posthumous reception' by the next generation of Europeans 'including his dubious association with German nationalism' (pp. 317–50). Most recently, Richard Wolin offers a revisionist, highly questionable and deeply controversial reading of Nietzsche and the political in his recent *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from*

Nietzsche to Postmodernism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), see especially pp. 27–63.

45 To borrow from Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 118–72.

46 For more, see David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics, and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* (London and Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2000). I also think that Nietzsche's vehement rejection of the democratic possibility also undermines his agenda to achieve a politics which pursues radical change in Western socio-political life/the politics of transfiguration (to borrow the term from Tracy Strong's *Friedrich Nietzsche and The Politics of Transfiguration*).

47 Both thinkers admire Dostoyevsky, yet for Nietzsche it is the quasi-misanthropic and alienated Dostoyevsky of *Notes from the Underground*, whereas for Levinas it is the implied appeal to infinite responsibility which appears in the religious aspects of Dostoyevsky's *oeuvre*, in particular *Brothers Karamazov*, which Levinas was much fond of quoting: 'everyone of us is guilty before all, for everyone and everything, and I more than others.' Camus played the character of Ivan Karamazov in a 1935 staging production of the novel in Algiers. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he writes extensively, with a sense of existential empathy, of Dostoyevsky's seminal *The Possessed*, in which the nihilist character of Kirilov commits suicide ('It is not despair that urges him to death, but love of his neighbour for his own sake' (ibid., p. 109)).

In the same work he also recognises that *Brothers Karamazov* constitutes Dostoyevsky's existential response to the grave challenge of nihilism with which he grappled in *The Possessed* ('Thus Kirilov...and Ivan are defeated. *The Brothers Karamazov* replies to *The Possessed*. And it is indeed a conclusion', (ibid., pp. 110–111). In a similar vein to Levinas, he also conceives of the great modernist novelists as life-philosophers: 'The great novelists are philosophical novelists ... Dostoevsky, Proust ... Kafka ... to cite but a few' (ibid., p. 101).

Most importantly, it is in this context that Camus warns his generation of the looming danger of recruiting Europe's finest minds in the service of active nihilism. Camus writes: "Everything is permitted," exclaims Ivan Karamazov ... But on condition that it is not taken in the vulgar sense ... "Everything is permitted" does not mean that nothing is forbidden ... One becomes ridiculous when drawing from Rousseau the conclusion that one must walk on all fours and from Nietzsche that one must maltreat one's mother' (ibid., pp. 67–8).

48 In a discussion with Sartre, Malraux and Koestler, 29 October 1946, *Carnets*, janvier 1942 – mars 1951, p. 186.

49 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 257.

- 50 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, essay 2, section 2.
- 51 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo* (Pittsburgh, PA.: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 97.
- 52 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 84.
- 53 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 250.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 213–14.
- 55 Ibid., p. 153.
- 56 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 9.
- 57 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Solitude de Kippur', in *Solitude d'Israel, Donnes et débats*, PUF, pp. 9–11 (speech at the fifteenth International Conference of Jewish Intellectuals in French-speaking countries). This talmudic reading, conducted in 1975, pertains to the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973; see also Levinas, *Neuf Lectures Talmudique* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1977).
- 58 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 25.
- 59 Ibid., p. 280.
- 60 As reflected in Aphorism 341 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
- 61 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 281.
- 62 See, for example, John Farrenkopf, 'Nietzsche, Spengler and the Politics of Cultural Despair', *Interpretations* 20, no. 2 (1992), pp. 165–85.
- 63 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 19.
- 64 Camus, *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 18.
- 65 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), section 5.
- 66 Both Levinas and Nietzsche reject the philosophical anthropology of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who regards pity and compassion as an a-priori innate human disposition that the civilizing process had degenerated. For a more extensive comparison of Nietzsche and Rousseau in terms of philosophical anthropology, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 67 As Yirmiyahu Yovel shows in his *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche and the Jews* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1996), p. 10.
- 68 Nietzsche depicts Judaism as the ethical point of departure for various 'metaphysical illusions' such as Christianity, liberalism, socialism, democracy and by and large the Enlightenment humanistic ideals, e.g. equality, progress and the rationalistic spirit of 1789. This becomes much more pervasive in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, essay 1, section 16, in which Nietzsche professes that Western civilization in its entirety bows 'before three Jews and one Jewess' – thereby arguably implying that Europe had 'capitulated' to the spirit of Judaea in terms of its universal

fundamental values. Further, by conceiving of the French Revolution as a Jewish triumph versus the spirit of Rome, Nietzsche essentially argues that the various secular reincarnations of theological doctrines are distinctly Jewish as well. That is to say, God's 'metaphysical shadows' all share a common messianic streak, a distinctly Jewish notion, i.e. the certitude that mankind is redeemable on the collective realm. As far as Nietzsche is concerned, all such religious/secular messianisms and utopias are equally erroneous and involve self-deception. Nietzsche asserts that 'a Jesus Christ was possible only in a Jewish landscape' (*Gay Science*, Aphorism 137), and that 'regarding this background of all Christian morality, Christianity did aim to "Judaize" the world' (Aphorism 135). 'And the Christians?' asks Nietzsche, 'Did they want to become Jews ... did they perhaps succeed?' (Aphorism 139).

69 Emmanuel Levinas, 'L'actualité de Maimonides', *Paix et Droits* 15, no. 4 (1935), pp. 6-7.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 151.

73 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Fraterniser sans se convertir', *Paix et Droits* 16, no. 38 (1935), p. 12.

74 Ibid.

75 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 149.

76 Ibid., pp. 153-4.

77 Emmanuel Levinas, 'L'essence spirituelle de l'antisemitisme d'après Jacques Maritain', *Paix et Droits* 18 (1938), pp. 3-4.

78 Levinas, 'A propos de la mort du Pape XI', *Paix et Droits* 19 (1939), p. 3.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid. Interestingly, Julien Benda articulated similar reflections during the Holocaust. He solely began to immerse himself textually in the biblical writings as late as the eighth decade of his life, while fleeing and hiding from the Nazis. The historical circumstances and upheavals gave birth to novel ontological and existential conjectures, hence his analogous articulation of 'a feeling I had never known before, that of a veneration for my race in the person of its Prophets, who hurled into the world, at the cost of their repose, the idea of morality' (Benda, *Exercice*, p. 172). See also *The Company of Critics*, p. 42.

81 For Levinas too, it is facile for the state to degenerate into a modern new idol. As he writes in *Beyond the Subject* (London: The Athlone Press, 1982), 'The state, in spite of the work of establishing the rule of law, is also the place of corruption, and perhaps, the ultimate refuge of idolatry. The state is jealous of its sovereignty, the state in search of hegemony, the

conquering, imperialist, totalitarian, oppressive state, attached to realist egoism. Incapable of being without self-adoration, it is idolatry itself' (pp. 183–4).

82 As Howard Caygill well observes in his *Levinas and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 'the subject of modern political philosophy [is] the autonomous property owner who freely exchanges in commerce with other property owners or who creates a polity in a social contract with other free subjects. The paradoxical subject of *Totality and Infinity* does not achieve self-certainty through control over its property ... but is defined by the hospitality extended to the other.'

83 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300.

84 Levinas, *Quatre Lectures Talmudique* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968).

85 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 301.

86 Nietzsche had envisaged some of the key political dynamics of the twentieth century. For instance, the fact that in some futurist and remote epoch there will be a decline in the centrality of the nation-state is clear to Nietzsche: 'a later generation will also see the state become meaningless in certain stretches of the earth – an idea that many today cannot contemplate without fear and abhorrence' (*Human All Too Human*, Aphorism 472). Nietzsche was also one of the first thinkers who envisaged the grand potentialities and necessity of constructing the European Union. Hence his exclamation that 'a good European should work actively on the merging of nations' (Aphorism 475). Nietzsche also points out that the current greatest promoter of further integration and deepening of the EU is well suited to perform this historic task. Namely 'the Germans, because of their age-old, proven trait of being the nations' interpreter and mediator, will be able to help in this process' (ibid.). Nietzsche also hints at the rise of privatization and multinational companies, which will become stronger than numerous nation-states. Hence there appears 'the end of the antithesis "private and public." Step by step, private companies incorporate state business' (Aphorism 472). In his critique of Communism there are notable echoes of the totalitarian essence of Stalinist Russia: '[Socialism] needs the most submissive subjugation of all citizens to the absolute state, the like of which has never existed' (Aphorism 473). Further, Nietzsche asserts that Communism will strive to efface all manifestations of self-assertion: 'socialism is striving for the destruction of the individual' (ibid.). Moreover, Nietzsche predicts the notorious persecutions of people of Judaeo-Christian faith in Stalinist Russia, or the persecution of Buddhists in Communist China, by exclaiming that such regimes 'will always work automatically to eliminate piety' (ibid.). Later on, Nietzsche adds that such states will be obliged to resort to gross

violations of human rights, in order to remain in power, and that such regimes could never rule the world in its entirety, but solely parts of it: 'it can only hope to exist here and there ... by means of the most extreme terror' (ibid.). Lastly, with regard to European Jewry, it seems that in this case too, Nietzsche articulated a terrifying prediction. He writes in *Dawn of Day* that European Jewry 'had gone through a schooling of eighteen centuries such as no other nation has ever undergone', and that 'one of the spectacles which the next century will invite us to witness is the decision regarding the fate of European Jews ... the only thing that remains for them is either to become masters of Europe or to lose Europe' (Aphorism 205).

87 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, Aphorism 463.

88 As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, 'The relation with the Other ... puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one's immanent destiny' (p. 203).

89 'Morality begins when freedom ... feels itself to be arbitrary and violent' (ibid., p. 84).

90 For an excellent account of this existential motif in the Nietzschean oeuvre, see Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

91 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 203.

92 Ibid., p. 303.

93 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 269.

94 Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 33.

95 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Honneur sans drapeau', in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, no. 6–8 (1966), pp. 1–3. This essay later appeared as part of the *Noms Propres* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976), pp. 141–6.

96 Ibid., p. 1.

97 For more, see Marie-Anne Lescourret's splendid assessment of the gist of these post-genocidal reflections in her biographical *Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 1994), pp. 127–30.

98 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 18.

99 This gave rise, in the sixteenth century, to Lurianic Kabbalism in Safat, Israel. This cosmology served as a mystical mode of theodicy, which sought to explicate the calamity of exile for the Jewish people, which was depicted as part of a universal plan of universal redemption. Hence the upheavals of 1492 are solely the pangs of the messiah. On the particularistic level, the spirit of this dialectic of redemption was re-employed in the aftermath of the Holocaust by the advocates of religious Zionism. On the universalistic level, the same rationale was employed by the secular mode of messianism known as orthodox Marxism. During the Stalinist era,

leading intellectuals served as apologetics for the calamities of Stalinism, analogously arguing in the same spirit about the dialectics of (universal) redemption. Some of these intellectuals ultimately became heretics of orthodox Marxism, e.g. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, André Malraux, André Gide and Paul Nizan. Levinas's own work was deeply antithetical and antagonistic towards any notion of theodicy, whether Hegelian-universalist or Zionist-particularist. This is well reflected in Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 127–30.

100 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 216.

101 Ibid., p. 291.

102 Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: La vie et La trace* (Éditions Jean-Claude Lattes, 2002), p. 96.

103 Ibid.

104 Aronson, *Camus and Sartre*, pp. 117–18.

105. Levinas, *La Solitude de Kippour, Solitude D'Israel*, pp. 9–11, speech at the International Conference of Jewish Intellectuals in French-speaking countries, 1975.

106. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 153.

107 'The face is not the mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, et cetera.; it is all that, of course, but takes on the meaning of a face through the new dimension it opens up in the perception of a being. Through the face, the being is not only enclosed in its form and offered to the hand, it is also open, establishing itself in depth and, in this opening, presenting itself somehow in a personal way. The face is an irreducible mode which being can present itself in its identity ... The face, those eyes ... to see a face is already to hear "You shall not kill," and to hear "You shall not kill" is to hear "Social justice"' (Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, pp. 8–9).

108. 'The idea of the perfect is ... the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral consciousness, which calls in question my freedom. Thus this way of measuring oneself against the perfection of infinity is not a theoretical consideration' (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 84).

109 Salomon, *Levinas: la vie et la trace*, p. 91.

110 Quoted from the opening dedication of *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

111 Bernstein's encompassing and cogent explication of Levinas's 'anti-theodical' ethical and philosophical temperament also appeared as part of *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 252–67. On a biographical note, however, despite Levinas's universalist orientation in principle, as a philosophical and ethical standpoint, he himself never

normalized his relations with the Germany of post-1945. In 1983 Levinas was awarded the Karl Jaspers prize by Heidelberg University. He sent his son to receive the prize on his behalf, and read to an attentive audience his words of gratitude *in absentia*. For Emmanuel Levinas vowed never to set foot on German soil again.

112 1914–91, to follow Eric Hobsbawm's guidelines as articulated in his seminal *The Age of Extremes* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

113 'The crimes of the Hitler regime, among them the massacre of the Jews, are without precedent in history because history gives no other example of a doctrine of such total destruction being able to seize the levers of command of a civilized nation' (Camus, *L'Homme Révolté*, p. 153).

114 I have in mind in this context especially Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

115 Jonas's account of a God who limited his omnipotence in order to render possible the prospect of human free will is strikingly analogous to Laurianic cosmology in which the light of *Einsof* (Infinity) contracted itself in order to 'make room', in a spiritual sense, for the construction of the worlds. All the more, Jonas's gnosticism, according to which 'the human constitution is comparable to ... the model of the cosmos itself ... [and] liberation [is] effected through knowledge' (see Jonas's entry on 'Gnosticism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [New York: Macmillan, 1967], p. 340) is congruent with the Kabbalistic contention that the individual human being constitutes a microcosmos, and that restoration of cosmic harmony is realizable strictly as a result of doctrinal adherence.

116 See especially Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1994.

117 The spiritual opponents of the Hassidic approach that stressed emotional ecstasy and euphoric enthusiasm were known as *Mitnagdim*. The latter advocated intellectual immersion in sacred texts, and dreaded the speculative mysticism of the Hassidim that came dangerously close to heretical pantheism, in their eyes, particularly in the aftermath of the fiasco of the false Messiah Sabbatai Sevi, in 1666. The *Mitnagdim* were led by the Vilna Gaon, who went so far as to call for the excommunication of Hassidic sects.

118 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 212.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 270.

120 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 103.

121 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 52.

Chapter 3

- 1 Emmanuel Levinas, *Unforeseen History: Some Thought on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 15.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., p. 16.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 17.
- 8 Ibid., p. 16.
- 9 As Camus writes, 'With the exception of Marx, Nietzsche's adventure has no equivalent; we shall never finish making reparations to the injustice done to him ... history records ... philosophies that have been misconstrued and betrayed' (Albert Camus, *Essais* [Paris: Gallimard, 1965], p. 486).
- 10 Camus goes so far as to insinuate that Marx's temperament is that of the prophet, not the man of science. Hence his depiction as 'the prophet of justice without mercy who rests, by mistake, in the unbelievers' plot at Highgate cemetery' (Albert Camus, *The Rebel* [New York: Penguin Books, 1971], p. 270).
- 11 Once more, Camus depicts *fin-de-siècle* Marxism as analogous to messianic apocalyptic expectations: 'the revolutionary movement, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, lived, like the early Christians, in the expectation of the end of the world and the advent of the proletarian Christ' (*The Rebel*, p. 178).
- 12 Ibid., p. 80.
- 13 Ibid., p. 76.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 160–2.
- 15 Ibid., p. 187.
- 16 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Sur l'esprit de Genève', *Esprit* 24 (1956), pp. 96–8.
- 17 This becomes pervasive once Camus alarmingly alludes to 'the hideous prospect of atomic suicide' and somberly concludes that 'our period is the period of private and public techniques of annihilation' (*The Rebel*, pp. 186, 213).
- 18 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Principes et Visages', *Esprit* 5 (1960), pp. 863–5.
- 19 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 209. Interestingly enough, Hannah Arendt, in her seminal anti-totalitarian work which was published during the same year in which *The Rebel* was published, also stresses the quasi-Kafkaesque

nature of the Stalinist judicial system and the absurd and surreal nature of the rationale of its political persecutions: 'It may be understandable that a Nazi or a Bolshevik will not be shaken in his conviction by crimes against people who do not belong to the movement or are even hostile to it; but the amazing fact is that neither is he likely to waver when the monster begins to devour its own children and not even if he becomes a victim of persecution himself, if he is framed and condemned, if he is purged from the party and sent to a forced-labor or a concentration camp. On the contrary, to the wonder of the whole civilized world, he may even be willing to help in his own execution and frame his own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched' (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1976], p. 307). See also Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 231. Milan Kundera claims that from his own experience, solely some of those who insisted on their innocence were spared long sentences of imprisonment in the Czechoslovakian case. See his *L'art du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

20 Levinas, 'Principes et Visages', p. 864.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 146.

24 Ibid., p. 212.

25 Levinas, 'Principes et Visages', p. 864.

26 Ibid.

27 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 238.

28 Ibid., p. 192.

29 Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969): 'The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces ... the meaning of individuals ... is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to, to bring forth its objective meaning' (pp. 21–2). Also: 'If [history] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other. History as a relationship between men ignores a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me. When man truly approaches the other he is uprooted from history' (p. 52). And, 'In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with a third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the

- I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus in absentia. In welcoming the other I welcome On High to which my freedom is subordinated ... this subordination ... is brought about in all the personal work of my moral initiative ... in the attention to the Other as unicity and face ... subjectivity is thus rehabilitated ... and not as egoism ... Metaphysics therefore leads us to the accomplishment of the I as unicity by relation to which the work of the State must be situated, and which it must take as a model. The irreplaceable unicity of the I which is maintained against the State is accomplished ... we [are] insisting on the irreducibility of the personal to the universality of the state; we appeal to a dimension and a perspective of transcendence as real as the dimension and perspective of the political and more true than it' (pp. 300–1). 'The family does not result from a rational arrangement of animality; it does not simply mark a step toward the anonymous universality of the State' (p. 306). 'The essence of discourse is ethical. In stating this thesis, idealism is refuted ... Idealism, completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics. The Other and I function as elements of an ideal calculus, receive from the calculus their real being, and approach one another under the dominion of ideal necessities which traverse them from all sides. They play the role of moments in a system, and not that of origin. Political society appears as a plurality that expresses the multiplicity of the articulations of a system' (p. 216).
- 30 Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 177, 266. In the same passage Camus also contends with the question of Marx's intellectual responsibility for the atrocities committed under the banner of his thought: 'it is possible that Marx did not want this, but in this lies his responsibility which must be examined, that he incurred by justifying, in the name of revolution, the henceforth bloody struggle against all forms of rebellion' (p. 177).
- 31 Levinas, 'Principes et Visages', p. 865.
- 32 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 206.
- 33 Ibid., p. 268.
- 34 Levinas, 'Le Debat russo-chinois et la dialectique', *Esprit* 10 (1960), pp. 1622–4.
- 35 Ibid., p. 1624.
- 36 Levinas, *Unforeseen History*, p. 109.
- 37 Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 212–13.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 209, 214, 216.
- 39 Ibid., p. 192.
- 40 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Séa, Hand (London: Athlone, 1991), p. 235.
- 41 This reading of Levinas is well reflected in Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 94.

42 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 73.

43 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 52.

44 Ibid., p. 52.

45 Ibid., pp. 42–3.

46 Ibid., pp. 300–1.

47 Ibid., p. 302.

48 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 205.

49 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 302.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 For a good assessment of this, see Roger Burggrave, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002).

53 Carl Schmitt's *Distinguo ergo sum* can be summarized in his insistence that 'the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy'. See his *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

54 For Simon Critchley, Levinas stands at the critical junction between the ethical and the political, and he is most attentive to the anti-totalitarian streak inherent in his thought: 'Both [*Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being*] begin with the statement that the domination of totalising politics is linked to the fact of war, both the fact of the Second World War, and equally the Hobbesian claim that the peaceful order of society ... is constituted in opposition to the threat of war-of-all-against-all in the state of nature. For Levinas, the domination of the category of totality in Western philosophy, from ancient Greece to Heidegger, is linked to the domination of totalising forms of politics, whether Plato's adventure with the tyrant Dionysus in Syracuse, or in Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism ... For Levinas, totality reduces the ethical to the political. As Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, "Politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself"' (Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi [eds], *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], p. 24).

55 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 46. Clearly, this critique of fundamental ontology is very much congruent with Levinas's critique of Hegelianism. Indeed, it is much more relevant, in terms of its sheer philosophical content, to the latter.

56 Ibid., p. 47. Once more, this critique of ontology still echoes

the all-pervasive critique of Hegelianism inherent in Levinas's writings throughout the bulk of the 1950s.

57 Camus, *The Rebel*, pp. 199–201.

58 Ibid., p. 289.

59 Ibid., p. 146.

60 Ibid., pp. 106–7.

61 Hence 'the other cannot be totalized' (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 35), for 'the relation between the same and the other ... [is] a relation whose terms do not form a totality ... [but rather] a face to face' (p. 39). However, Levinas does acknowledge the possibility of another approach, in fact the alternative approach has been hegemonic throughout the history of ideas, particularly in modern times. Hence his acknowledgement that 'the I can indeed ... enter upon a different course: it can endeavor to apprehend itself within a totality. This seems to be the justification of freedom ... from Spinoza to Hegel ... [in which] freedom is not maintained but reduced to being the reflection of a universal order which maintains itself and justifies itself all by itself ... For the philosophical tradition of the West every relation between the same and the other ... reduces itself to an impersonal relation with a universal order. Philosophy itself is identified with the substitution of ideas for persons' (pp. 87–8). 'Our whole effort is to contest the ineradicable conviction of every philosophy that objective knowledge is the ultimate relation of transcendence, that the Other ... must be known objectively' (p. 89). 'The idea of infinity, revealed in the face ... require[s] a separate being [for in contrast to Hegelianism] the idea of infinity provokes separation not by some force of opposition and dialectical evocation, but by the feminine grace of its radiance' (p. 151). For 'the other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign' (p. 194). For 'the relation with the face, with the other absolutely other which I can not contain, the other in this sense infinite ... the relation is maintained, without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity. The "resistance" of the other ... has a positive structure: ethical' (p. 197).

62 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 199–200.

63 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 254. Moreover, 'The consequence of rebellion ... is to refuse to legitimise murder because rebellion, in principle, is a protest against death' (p. 249).

64 Ibid., p. 249.

65 See Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel That Ended It* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 118.

66 See *ibid.*, p. 119. Victor Brombert, in his analysis of Camus's 'The Renegade', is highly attentive to Camus's critique of totality. For him 'the allegorical identity of the renegade [exemplifies] the modern intellectual,

heir to a humanist culture, but now impatient with the “seminary” coziness of his tradition and with its sham, and who, in search of systems and ideologies, espouses totalitarian values that have long ago declared war on the thinker and his thought. This ... shows the poison of ideological absolutes ... The terror of the absolute, so powerfully conveyed in this story, is one of Camus’s permanent themes. The militant need for the absolute implies absolute negation. Ideology replaces life. No problem of our time has preoccupied Camus more than this disastrous temptation of the absolute” (from his *The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel* [Lippincott: Philadelphia and New York, 1961], pp. 230–1).

68 Totality and Infinity, p. 306.

Chapter 4

1 Catherine Chaliel, *Levinas: L'utopie de l'humain* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1993), pp. 25–6.

2 Of which the celebrated Czech novelist Josef Skvorecky made some use. See his *Engineer of Human Souls*, trans. Paul Wilson (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999).

3 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 6, 21, 50–1, respectively.

4 ‘I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me to know it. I can understand only in human terms’ (ibid., p. 51).

5 Levinas has been criticized in certain quarters for not joining in the scholarly endeavour of demystifying monotheistic texts, under the premise and the supposition that a ‘naïve’, i.e. non-historicist, reading which still examines and analyses a text while granting it a ‘sacred and a-temporal dimension’ might lead to fundamentalism. While it is true that Levinas seeks to leave the text mystified to a certain extent, he does so for a constructive normative agenda that is antithetical to the fundamentalist one, i.e. with a pluralist and universalist, rather than an exclusionist and reactionary, agenda in mind.

6 *On Escape* was originally published in the French under the enigmatic title of *De L’Évasion* (Fata Morgana, 1982). All quotations will be given from Bettina G. Bergo’s translation to the English (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), here p. 55.

7 Ibid., p. 62.

8 Ibid., p. 66. Interestingly, Levinas wrote and published *On Escape* in 1935, two years prior to Sartre’s first notable literary achievement, with its underlying and recurring theme, i.e. the omnipresent and

pervasive phenomenological and existential leitmotif of nausea (see Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: A Romantic Rationalist* [New York: Penguin, 1999]). Unfortunately, notable scholars who tackled this question (e.g. Epstein in his *Near and Far: On the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* [Tel Aviv: Mod Publishers, 2004], p. 50) have yet to ascertain whether Sartre had actually read *On Escape*. The Sartrean notion of nausea ('seasick at the sea of contingency') has been rendered also as analogous to the Camusian notion of the absurd, despite the fact that at first sight it seems to be the very inversion of the Levinasian nausea (internal). While we do know for sure that Sartre's textual initiation to German phenomenology and Husserl and Heidegger was in fact prompted by Aron and Levinas (in his famous obituary essay in remembrance of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre himself stated that he 'was introduced to phenomenology by Levinas'), we do not know whether he is also conceptually indebted to the Levinasian pioneering phenomenological depiction of the sentiment and notion of nausea. If so, Sartre never acknowledged it, as the question was never posed to him. The sole recorded meeting between Levinas and Sartre occurred towards the end of Sartre's life, with Bernard Henri-Levy. On the question of Sartre's indebtedness to Levinas, see, for example, James Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 63, 82.

9 Levinas, *On Escape*, p. 66.

10 Ibid., p. 68.

11 Ibid., p. 73.

12 E.g. his famous article in *Difficult Freedom*, entitled 'For a Religious Humanism'.

13 Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 118.

14 Ibid., p. 231. This is in response to Tarrou's exclamation that 'it comes to this ... what interests me is learning how to become a saint'. Dr Rieux responds, 'But you don't believe in God.' Tarrou answers in a manner that possibly summarizes Camus's post-war philo-political and ethical endeavour, i.e. 'Exactly! Can one be a saint without God? – That's the problem, in fact the only problem, I'm up against today' (ibid., pp. 230–1).

15 Ibid., p. 175.

16 Camus writes, 'I was returning to the Left Bank and to my home by way of Pont Royal. It was an hour past midnight, a fine rain was falling, a drizzle rather, that scattered the few people on the streets. I had just left a mistress, who was surely already asleep. I was enjoying that walk, a little numbed, my body calmed and irrigated by a flow of blood rather like the falling rain. On the bridge I passed behind a figure leaning over the railing and seeming to stare at the river. On closer view, I made out

a slim young woman dressed in black. Between her dark hair and coat collar could be seen the back of her neck, cool and damp, which stirred me. But I went on, after a moment's hesitation. At the end of the bridge I followed the quay towards Saint-Michel, where I lived. I had already gone some fifty yards when I heard the sound – which, despite the distance, seemed dreadfully loud in the midnight silence – of a body striking the water. I stopped short but without turning round. Almost at once I heard a cry, repeated several times, which was going downstream; then it abruptly ceased. The silence that followed, as the night suddenly stood still, seemed interminable. I wanted to run and yet didn't move an inch. I was trembling, I believe from cold and shock. I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me. I have forgotten what I thought then, “too late, too far ...” or something of the sort. I was still listening, as I stood motionless. Then, slowly, in the rain, I went away. I told no one’ (*The Fall*, trans. Justin O’Brien [New York: Vintage Books, 1991] pp. 313–14).

17 ‘I realized, calmly, just as you resign yourself to an idea the truth of which you have long known, that the cry which had sounded over the Seine behind me years before had never ceased, carried by the river to the waters of the Channel, to travel throughout the world, across the limitless expanse of the ocean, and that it has waited for me there until the day I encountered it. I realized likewise that it would continue to await me on seas and rivers, everywhere in short where lies the bitter water of my baptism. Here too, by the way, aren't we on the water? On this flat, monotonous, interminable water whose limits are indistinguishable from those of the land? Is it credible that we shall ever reach Amsterdam? We shall never get out of this immense stoup of holy water. Listen. Don't you hear the cries of invisible gulls? If they are crying in our direction, to what are they calling us?’ (ibid., pp. 334–5).

18 Ibid., p. 356.

19 Ibid.

20 In a somewhat macabre tone he writes in *The Fall*: ‘I live in the Jewish quarter or what was called so until our Hitlerian brethren spaced it out a bit. What a clean up! Seventy-five thousand Jews deported or assassinated; that's real vacuum-cleaning. I admire that diligence, that methodical patience! When one has no character one has to apply a method. Here it did wonders, no one can deny it, and I am living on the site of one of the greatest crimes in history’ (ibid., p. 281).

21 Ibid., p. 335.

22 Ibid.

23 ‘I looked upon myself as something of a superman’, recounts Clamence, while alluding to his old self (ibid., p. 291).

24 'No excuses ever, for anyone; that's my principle at the outset. I deny the good intention, the respectable mistake ... the extenuating circumstance ... In philosophy as in politics, I am for any theory that refuses to grant man innocence and for any practice that treats him as guilty' (ibid., p. 347). No doubt, echoes of Levinasian ethics are audible once more, as Camus adheres to Ivan Karamazov's contention that all humanity is equally culpable, and that the solitary I always carries the pivotal part of the burden of responsibility, a moral stance and an existential attitude which Levinas was much fond of alluding to and quoting time and again.

25 By way of contrast, 'When he rebels, man identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself, and from this point of view human solidarity is metaphysical' (Albert Camus, *The Rebel* [New York: Penguin Books, 1971], p. 17).

26 'Man's solidarity is founded upon rebellion, and rebellion, in its turn, can only find its justification in this solidarity. We have, then, the right to say that any rebellion which claims the right to deny or destroy this solidarity loses simultaneously its right to be called rebellion and becomes in reality an acquiescence in murder' (ibid., p. 22).

27 'Because of the sense of solidarity we have already pointed out, it would rather seem that what is at stake is humanity's gradually increasing self-awareness as it pursues its course' (ibid., p. 20).

28 Ibid., p. 297.

29 Ibid., p. 238.

30 Camus, *The Plague*, p. 103.

31 See David Ohana, *Humanist in the Sun: Albert Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration* (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishers, 2000; in Hebrew), pp. 13–15.

32 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 306.

33 *La Remarque sur la Révolte*, Existence, Preface by J. Grenier (Paris, 1945).

34 Just as Levinas preceded *Totality and Infinity* with a series of short articles, political and normative commentary and critique, in the 1950s.

35 As early as 1939, 'the young Camus visited the Kabyle Mountains and wrote (for a socialist newspaper in Algiers) a series of articles on the suffering of the Berbers and the indifference of the colonial regime. The articles, the most important of which are reprinted in *Actuelles* 3, constitute a powerful piece of social criticism, and they led, a year later, to Camus's "exile" from Algeria. His "cry of indignation", Jules Roy later wrote, made him 'suspect in the eyes of the authorities' (Jules Roy, *The War in Algeria* [New York: Grove Press, 1961], p. 122). See Michael Walzer, *Company of Critics* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 143. It was

also Camus's criticism of the Machiavellian Communist attitude towards the indigenous population of high officials in the PCF during the 1930s (in the hope of thereby pacifying and lulling partisans and proponents of the moderate left) which abruptly ended his short flirtation with the PCF between 1935 and 1937. Even prior to the upheavals of World War II, Camus went on to call for a redistribution of land, technical assistance on a large scale, local self-government and equal rights for all the inhabitants of Algeria (*ibid.*).

36 In this context, I accept Walzer's contention that the chief reason for which Camus advocated federalism was the fact that 'he saw it as a particular instance of the pluralism to which he was increasingly drawn' (*ibid.*, p. 148).

37 Responding to the pervasive criticisms of the time, he exclaimed, 'it seemed to me both indecent and harmful to protest against tortures in the company of those who readily accepted ... the mutilation of European children' (*Résistance*, p. 121). This is also the reason for which he refused to sign petitions that included signatures by those who supported FLN violence (this is morally analogous and hence comparable to a contemporary refusal to co-sign a petition in support of a political faction that perpetrates suicide bombings against civilians. Even if one recognizes the just nature of the resistance's ultimate political objective, it is still feasible to refuse to render legitimate its recourse to crimes against humanity. This is Camus's crucial point). Moreover, it sheds light on the often decontextualized and misconstrued interpretation of his famous remark to a group of students at Stockholm University, a day after having received the Nobel Prize: 'I have always condemned terror. I must also condemn a terrorism that is carried out blindly, in the streets of Algiers for example, and may one day strike my mother or my family. I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother against "justice".'

38 Levinas wrote the preface to a French edition of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. He first read this work, which left upon him a powerful impression and influence, in 1935, a critical year for Levinas, both intellectually – the year in which he also wrote *On Escape*, and historically – as he grasped the enormity of the zeitgeist, with the commencement of the judicial and legalistic dehumanization of European Jewry, starting with German Jewry in the Nuremberg Laws.

39 For the most comprehensive survey of Leibowitz's philosophy of Judaism available in English, see his *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. Elzizer Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

40 Like Kant in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, the other Emmanuel is also

highly receptive to the notion of hospitality. In the very commencement of *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), he states that 'this book will present subjectivity as the welcoming of the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated' (p. 27). As Howard Caygill recognizes in his *Levinas and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 'The welcome and hospitality of the other is the consummation of the infinity produced by the violent encounter with the other. In the first stage, subjectivity and its totality are shattered by the advent of infinity by means of the other, then they are reconstructed in the welcome and offer of hospitality extended to the other' (p. 109). For more on Levinas vis-à-vis Kant, see Catherine Chaliel, *What Ought I to Do? Morality in Kant and Levinas*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

41 A heteronomy, in distinction from Kantian autonomy – in Levinas it is externally imposed, not internally, in distinction also from lofty mysticism, from theological rhetoric and metaphysical speculations which are utterly devoid of concrete ramifications.

42 Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 174.

43 Ibid.

44 *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 296.

45 Ibid., p. 296.

46 Ibid., p. 297. As Malka shows in her *Emmanuel Levinas: la vie et la trace* ([Éditions Jean-Claude Lattes, 2002], p. 223), Levinas even criticized certain forms of urbanization for the Bedouin citizens of Israel as colonial.

47 Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, pp. 199–203.

48 The term 'strange fire' is taken from the mysterious death of the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10.1–2). In a piece that appears in *Difficult Freedom* entitled 'The Light and the Dark' (p. 227), Levinas insinuates the all-pervasive danger of the horrific and catastrophic mélange of political fanaticism cloaked under the façade of religious piety. Thus 'the fire of militant struggle can destroy itself, absolute principles can betray themselves in the fight to be realized. The call is ... none other than a call to responsibility. The ethical here is the reservation – the holding back' (Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p. 202).

49 Ibid.

50 See especially one of the last sections of *The Rebel*, entitled 'Thought at the Meridian'.

51 Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 331.

52 Emmanuel Levinas, 'Useless Suffering', *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-*

of-the-other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Hashav (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

53 Camus, *The Rebel*, Part 3, 'Historical Rebellion: The Terror'.

54 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 97.

55 Camus, *The Rebel*, 'Thought at the Meridian: Moderation and Excess'.

56 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

57 With regard to Camus, Sartre came to recognize this in his farewell note to Camus published in *France-Observateur* on 7 January 1960: 'His stubborn humanism, narrow and pure, austere and sensual, waged a dubious battle against events of these times. But inversely, through the obstinacy of his refusals, he reaffirmed the existence of moral fact within the heart of our era and against Machiavellians, against the golden calf of realism.'

58 My point here is that this is still somewhat relevant in light of the growing disenchantment among notable segments of the Russian citizenry with free-market economy and liberalism, given the vast socio-economic disparities in present-day Russia. A decade and a half after the demise of the Soviet Union, one still cannot argue that the current Russian regime/administration has achieved full democratic consolidation. Nor are Communist parties entirely politically marginal in other former Soviet satellites.

59 See, for example, Simon Critchley's article, 'Five Problems in Levinas's view of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to them', *Political Theory* 32 (2004), pp. 172–85. In a paragraph pertaining to the dualist nature of Israel in Levinas, Critchley alludes to contemporary geo-political constellations, and writes: 'One should remember that the Bible is George Bush's favorite bedtime reading' (*ibid.*, p. 175). Here Critchley's linkage/association of biblical inspiration with George Bush and Christian fundamentalism in this context almost implies a Gordian knot between the two. This rationale seems to me to be almost analogous to those who are in the business of intellectually discrediting Nietzsche because of his Hitlerian misappropriation. Both these intellectual enterprises (Nietzsche and the Bible) can be an endless source of civilizational wealth and ceding any of them because of the way they are misused in certain quarters constitutes a colossal loss for our cultural and spiritual well-being. In my view, discrediting the intellectual legacy of monotheism because of its misappropriation by fundamentalists in the three monotheistic religions is as simplistic as discrediting Nietzsche due to his posthumous political vulgarization.

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