



The European Graduate School
EST. 1994

Seminar with Professor Diane Davis (4.5 ECTS credits)
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought
June Session/June 24–29 2019

Emmanuel Levinas: Language and Ethics

Description: This course examines fundamental concepts developed at the intersections of language and ethics in the works of Emmanuel Levinas (e.g., face, illeity, substitution, trace, *il y a*), with a special focus on what he calls “the language relation,” and with a consideration of comparative approaches and/or explications in Kant, Heidegger, Blanchot, Lyotard, Nancy, and Derrida.

Objectives: Students will gain the theoretical and philosophical background necessary to read and engage in contemporary (post-Heideggerian) ethical thought. After unpacking several of the most significant concepts in the Levinasian lexicon, students will engage in a careful collaborative reading of selections from Levinas’s major texts and then contemplate the adoption of aspects of Levinasian thought in two texts by Jacques Derrida. Through engagement with these works, students will critically contemplate some of today’s most pressing ethical and political issues while witnessing and evaluating the performance of a phenomenological writing practice that aims both to describe the indescribable and to interrupt that description in a way that exposes the enigma that it covers over.

Learning Outcomes: Students will have developed a grounding in non-foundational ethical thought and phenomenological methodology, as well as a basic capacity for scholarly work on contemporary ethico-political questions. Students will leave the course with not only a better understanding of the significance of the work of Emmanuel Levinas in contemporary philosophy but also with a more sophisticated conception of what is at stake (ethically and politically) in scholarship broadly speaking and the language relation more specifically.

COURSE OUTLINE

Module 1: The Lexicon

Major terms in the Levinasian lexicon

Module 2: Background and Context

Levinas's major contributions and response to contemporary philosophical lines of thought

Focused readings (all selections):

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Trans Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (Translation of *De l'existence a l'existant*, 1947).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (p. 21-81.) (Translation of *Totaite et Infini*, 1961.)
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2000. Chapters 1 and 153-162. (Translation of *Autrement qu'être*, 1974.)

Module 3: Il y a

The paraconcept of the il y a in Levinas, in contradistinction to the es gibt in Heidegger.

Focused reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. Selection from *Existence and Existents*. Trans Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (Translation of *De l'existence a l'existant*, 1947).

Optional background reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Trans Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (Translation of *De l'existence a l'existant*, 1947).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *On Escape*. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003. (Translation of *De l'évasion* (1st edn, 1935), Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1982.)

Module 4: Ethics as Interruption

On ethics as interruption of spontaneity.

Focused reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (p. 21-81.) (Translation of *Totaite et Infini*, 1961.)

Optional background reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Trans Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (Translation of *De l'existence a l'existant*, 1947).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Trans. Richard A Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999. (Translation of *Ethique et infini*, 1982.)

Module 5: le visage d'Autrui

On Levinas's idea of the "face," with comparisons to Heidegger and Nancy.

Focused readings:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. (p. 194-219.) (Translation of *Totaite et Infini*, 1961.)

Optional background reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The trace of the Other." Trans. Alphonso Lingis. *Deconstruction in Context*. Ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1961.
- "Transcendence and Height" and "Meaning and Sense" in *Basic Philosophical Writings*.
- *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Violence of the face." Interview. In *Alterity and Transcendence*. Trans. Michael B. Smith. Columbia: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1978. (Translation of *L'écriture et la difference*.)
- Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999. (Translation of *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*. Editions Galilée, 1997).

Module 6: Infinite responsibility

Levinas's notion of unconditional responsibility, with comparisons to Kant, Lyotard, and Derrida.

Focused reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2000. Chapters 1 and 153-162. (Translation of *Autrement qu'être*, 1974.)

Optional background reading:

- Derrida, Jacques. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." In Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Richard Rorty. *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. "At this very moment in this work Here I am." Trans. Ruben Berezdivin. *Rereading Levinas*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Module 7: Justice and the third party

Levinasian theory of justice and the other of the other.

Focused reading:

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2000. Chapters 1 and 153-162. (Translation of *Autrement qu'être*, 1974.)

Optional background reading:

- Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. (Translation of *De l'hospitalité: Anne Dufourmantelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre*, 1997).
- Derrida, Jacques. "A Word of Welcome." In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

Module 8: Ethics at the Edge of Consciousness

Jacques Derrida's negotiation of the tension in Levinas between infinite responsibility and justice.

Focused Reading:

- Derrida, Jacques and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.

Module 9: Unconditional Hospitality

Derrida's unpacking of Levinas's unconditional hospitality through the idea of a preoriginary "yes."

Focused Reading

- Derrida, Jacques. "A Number of Yes." *Qui Parle*, Vol. 2, No. 2, *Silence and Intervention* (Fall 1988), pp. 118-133

Optional background reading

- Heidegger, Martin. "The Nature of Language." From *On the Way to Language*.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Spirit*.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Mystic Fable*.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce."