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"WHEN IN THE 'BROTHER' THE STRANGER IS ACKNOWLEDGED" From Identity to Alterity and Dialogue, According to Emmanuel Levinas

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Abstract: A crucial question in a pluralist society is how justice can be done to alterity without endangering thereby one's identity. Levinas' dialogical phenomenology of the same and the other, and of responsibility, sets us on the track of 'fraternity' as human condition. As ethical condition of 'solidarity' this fraternity transcends sex and gender, even if the concept is originally rooted in biology. Inspired by Levinas, it is explained how fraternity attains its full sense when, in the brother, the stranger is acknowledged (and not the opposite: 'when in the stranger the brother is recognized'). This 'ethical fraternity' makes it possible to realize equality in society, and to promote a respectful and authentic inter-religious, or rather 'interconvictional' dialogue. Such an open dialogue appeals to an asymmetric and reciprocal mastership and critical learning from each other.

Keywords: Alterity, Brother, Fraternity, Identity, Inter-convictional Dialogue, Mastership, Responsibility.

1. Introduction

In societies wherein diversity increases quantitatively and qualitatively, the experience of alterity becomes a huge

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challenge. A crucial question in society is how one can do justice to alterity without thereby endangering one's own identity. This requires a reflection on identity and alterity and their mutual relationship. In this reflection, the dialogical thought of Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995)[1] will be our guide.

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[1]For the references to the works of Levinas, the following abbreviations of the original French edition, along with the cited page(s), are used throughout this essay. The cited page(s) from the available English translations is (are) indicated after the forward slash (/): AE: *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, La Haye: Nijhoff, 1974. [English translation (ET): *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, The Hague/Boston/London: Nijhoff (Kluwer), 1981]; AS: *Autrement que savoir* (Interventions dans les Discussions & Débat général), Paris: Osiris, 1988; AT: *Altérité et transcendance*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1995. [ET: *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans., M. B. Smith, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.]; DL: *Difficile Liberté. Essais sur le Judaïsme*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1976 (2nd ed.). [ET: *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, trans., S. Hand, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990.]; DVI: *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Paris: Vrin, 1982. [ET: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans., Bergo, Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1998.]; EI: *Éthique et Infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*, Paris: Fayard & France Culture, 1982. [ET: *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans., R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.]; EN: *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-a-l'autre*, Paris: Grasset, 1991. [ET: *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans., M. B. Smith and B. Harshav, London/New York: Continuum, 2006.]; HAH: *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1972. [ET: *Humanism of the Other*, trans., N. Poller, Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2003.]; HS: *Hors sujet*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1987. [ET: *Outside the Subject*, trans., M. B. Smith, London: The Athlone Press, 1993.]; EE: *De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris: Vrin, 1978 (2nd ed.). [ET: *Existence and Existents*, trans., by A. Lingis, The Hague/Boston: Nijhoff, 1978.]; IRB: *Is It Righteous to Be. Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas,* ed., J. Robbins and trans., J. Robbins, M. Coelen, with T. Loebel, Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2001; DMT: *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Établissement du texte, notes et postface de J. Rolland), Paris: Grasset, 1993. [ET: *God, Death, and Time*, trans., B. Bergo, Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2000.]; NP: *Noms propres* (Essais), Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976. [ET: *Proper*

His phenomenology of the same and the other, of which the self and the other are eminent expressions, sets him on the track of fraternity as a human condition. The realisation of this fraternity acquires different forms depending on whether identity or alterity comes to take a central position. Starting from fraternity where the other is approached and 'recognised' as 'alter ego', we will follow Levinas in his attempt at a surpassing towards an authentic fraternity where the other is given full acknowledgement as other. At the same time, it will become clear how this acknowledgement reaches farther than tolerance and implies, as justice, an exceptional form of mastership that, in turn, makes true, candid dialogue possible. Along the way, a few implications for 'inter-religious' or rather 'interconvictional' dialogue'[2] will be pointed out.

Names, Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1996.]; NLT: *Nouvelles lectures talmudiques*, Paris: Minuit, 1996. [ET: *New Talmudic Readings*, trans., R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999.]; NTR: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans., A. Aronowicz, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990; PM: "The Paradox of Morality" (interview with T. Wright, P. Hughes, A. Ainly), trans., A. Benjamin & T. Wright, in: R. Bernasconi and D. Woos eds., *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, London: Routledge, 1988, 168-180; QLT: *Quatre Lectures talmudiques*, Paris: Minuit, 1968. [ET: "Four Talmudic Readings," NTR, 1-88.]; SaS: *Du sacré au saint: Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques*, Paris: Minuit, 1977. [ET: "From the Sacred to the Holy. Five New Talmudic Readings," NTR, 89-197.]; TA: *Le temps et l'autre*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1979 (2nd ed.). [ET: *Time and the Other*, trans., R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.]; TI: T*otalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, La Haye, Nijhoff, 1961. [ET: *Totality and Infinity*: *An Essay on Exteriority*, trans., A. Lingis, The Hague / Boston / London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979.]; VA: "La vocation de l'autre" (interview by Emmanuel Hirsch), in: E. HIRSCH, *Racismes: L'autre et son visage*, Paris: Cerf, 1988, 89-102. [ET: "The Vocation of the Other," trans., J. Robbins, in IRB, 105-113.].

[2]We opt for the term 'interconvictional' because it can be understood inclusively, namely both for 'inter-religious dialogue' between organised religions as well as for the dialogue between

2. 'Fraternity'[3] as Human Condition

Modern, enlightened thought – and in its wake, not only modern but also late- and so-called postmodern Western culture – has succeeded rather well (although much work still remains to be done!) to give shape to the first two elements of the triptych of the French Revolution: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* – Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. Striving for autonomy and emancipation are not only core concepts but also value labels that pervade contemporary enlightened humanism strongly. However, they run the risk of lapsing into one-sidedness if they are not intimately linked with the idea of 'fraternity'. Hence our proposal, out of Levinas, to re-arrange the triptych from now on to: "fraternity, equality, freedom", with the understanding that fraternity does not come at the cost of equality and freedom but rather inspires and orientates them (HS 187/125).

In this in general human 'fraternity' that transcends sex and gender, Levinas sees a form of responsibility of people for each other whereby the starting-point does not lie in the 'I' but in the face of the other that arouses me and calls me to responsibility. The starting-point for this responsibility is not found in the 'I'-myself but in the other, or rather in the epiphany of the other (for it is not the other that takes the initiative for that responsibility, but it is through its 'being' and 'appearing' – epiphany – itself that I am made responsible). Think for

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ideologies, worldviews and philosophical convictions that can also be non-religious. Take for instance 'secular-humanist' forms of spirituality and the creation of meaning.

[3]Since Levinas himself uses explicitly and consistently the term '*fraterinité*' (fraternity) to present his view on human relationships, we shall not replace his language-use with a 'gender-neutral' formulation (although Levinas also makes use of gender-neutral words). After all, the surpassing of the 'gender-specific' meaning of 'fraternity' – as will be made apparent throughout this essay – forms an essential part of his view on the human condition. To make clear that throughout our essay we understand fraternity, and likewise brother in a gender-transcending manner, we place both words between quotation marks: 'fraternity' – 'brother'.

instance of the responsibility of begetters for the child they beget out of their active, free choice and how they at the same time become responsible for the child they receive as 'other'. By means of its 'appearing' (epiphany) the other directs itself to me as an appeal for responsibility. This heteronomous responsibility begins with the prohibition 'do not kill' the other (walk on by indifferently, abandon, exclude, deny, hate, tyrannise, exterminate … – violence knows innumerably many forms). It unfolds itself in the commandment to acknowledge and promote the other, and thus promote its well-being: the work of goodness in its many forms (TI 172/198, 200/225, 281/304).

This responsibility-by-and-for-the-other reveals itself as a paradoxical proximity, in the sense that through the appeal of its face, the other comes tangibly near me, *and* at the same time remains infinitely separate from me. The difference between me and the other – expressed in the irreducible otherness of the other – is, ethically speaking, the appeal to the highest 'non-indifference': proximity without absorption nor fusion. The ethical proximity is the most original form of approach and contact whereby the other becomes a 'you' – or rather a 'Thou' – *and* the 'I' becomes a chosen 'I', which can be expressed as '*me voici*' – 'Here I am': reciprocity that does not eliminate the asymmetry (AE 104/82).

The ethical proximity of the one-for-the-other reveals our human condition as 'fraternity' or "the original fact of fraternity" (TI 189/215), namely a 'fraternity' that precedes our freedom. It is about a bondedness that precedes every active choice to bond oneself with the other. We are already bonded with each other, even before we can bind ourselves with each other. We are (passively) bonded in destiny even before we can (actively) enter into the destiny of the other. When Cain, according to the well-known 'origins narrative' in the Bible, poses the question after the murder of his brother "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4,9), we must understand this literally as: we are already bonded with each other, so much so that we owe it to each other – actively and creatively – to bind

ourselves to the other. That is our 'createdness' ('*créaturalité*' or '*créature*' as Levinas likewise says) (AE 117/192, 140/195). We are not first neutral beings, who then turn to each other on the basis of a free choice. We are, from the very beginning, assigned to each other 'face-to-face'. And on the basis of this bondedness that precedes our commitment (AE 174/136), we are called to choose freely for each other. In spite of myself, the well-being of the other concerns me: "I am bound to the other, before any liaison contracted" (AE 109/87).

And immediately Levinas qualifies this ethical 'fraternity' as "a relation of kinship, outside all biology" (AE 109/87). 'Fraternity' as the heteronomous condition of existence surpasses, in other words, every sex- and gender-specific particularity of 'brothers and sisters who are born from the same parents'.[4] Despite this surpassing, Levinas remains,

[4]This surpassing of sex- and gender-difference does not mean that Levinas would not pay any attention to this difference. On the contrary, from the beginning, namely in 'Le temps et l'autre – Time and the Other' (1947), up to 'Totalité et Infini – Totality and Infinity' (1961) and 'Difficile Liberté – Difficult Freedom' (1962), he pays attention explicitly and extensively to sexual difference and its meaning (and his views on 'woman' has provoked much controversy and critique). But at the same time, from the beginning of his independent reflection (beyond Husserl, his teacher in phenomenology), there appears a sex- and gender-transcending interpretation of 'maleness' and 'femaleness', that both qualify every human being (TA 34/54; EI /68/66). And as will be made apparent further, he developed in his second major work '*Autrement qu'être* – Otherwise than Being' (1974) the sex- and gender-transcending significance of the human condition as 'motherhood' with which he qualifies 'brotherhood' as a modality of human-being. This shows how the concept of 'fraternity' should not be isolated from other concepts like bondedness, solidarity…, in the sense that all these concepts clarify each other in an interactive cluster. Last but not least, he developed in his Talmud commentary 'Et Dieu créa la femme - And God created woman' (1972) the idea that the 'human' surpasses sexual difference (and its meanings) by preceding it. It is only within the context of the human that the division into masculine and feminine

besides the sex- and gender-neutral terms 'bondedness' and 'solidarity', using the term 'fraternity' whereby one inadvertently also begins to think of its biological meaning. Levinas does so intentionally, for between human and biological 'fraternity' he discovers – in spite of their radical difference – an undeniable analogy, in the sense that the biological announces the ethical 'fraternity' and 'prefigures' it. Just as brothers and sisters do not choose each other, but despite themselves – through birth – are embroiled in a common destiny, thus are people also embroiled in an ethical destiny: interconnectedness in spite of themselves, without preceding agreements. In other words, biology is less contingent and accidental than it seems at first sight. It delivers a prototype of our human relationships, even though these relationships also reach further than and free themselves from biology (TI 256-257/279).

Hence Levinas has no difficulties qualifying human 'fraternity' also as 'motherhood' and 'pregnancy', in the sense

takes place (SaS 126/164, 132/167, 133/168). The human governs sex and gender (SaS 135/169), which means that maleness and femaleness are secondary with regard to human-being: "Man and women, when authentically human, work together as responsible beings. The sexual [and gender] are only the accessory of the human" (SaS 131/170). "Fundamental are the tasks that human beings accomplish as human beings and that [man and] women accomplish as human beings. They have other things to do besides cooing, and, moreover, something else to do and more, than to limit themselves to the relations that are established because of the differences in sex [and gender]. Sexual liberation, by itself, would not be a revolution adequate to the human species" (SaS 135/169). In other words, relationships based on sexual and gender differences are subordinated to – and have to be inspired ethically by – the interhuman relation of responsibility-by-and-for-the-other – irreducible to the drives and the complexes of the libido – to which woman rises as well as man (SaS 148/177). The transcendence of the human with regard to sex and gender likewise justifies the use of gender-neutral terms, as Levinas himself does when he qualifies 'human fraternity' as responsibility, alliance-before-contract, proximity, solidarity, etc.

that – beyond all sex-related meanings – these metaphors express how our inter-human bondedness takes place as an 'ethical motherhood': "gestation of the other in the same" ('*gestation de l'autre dans le même*') (AE 95/75). Responsibility for the other as ethical pregnancy, not as a wish and free choice, but as a calling – as an already being called – preceding all conscious and free self-determination. Levinas does not see this as a kind of spiritual metaphor but as the indication of the real and necessary incarnation of the ethical subject. The soul, as 'ensoulment of the same by the other', is only possible as embodied animation. That we in our deepest being, deeper than our consciousness, are marked by the 'being for the other', is just as radically and pre-originally inscribed in our bodies. In this regard, Levinas can state that our body is our soul: "The psyche is the maternal body" ('*psychsime comme un corps maternel*') (AE 85/67). I am in and through my exposed and vulnerable body already connected with the other, even before I can link and identify myself with my body as 'my' body (AE 96/76). Being an ensouled body here means "having the other in one's skin" ('*avoir-l'autre-dans-sa-peau*') (AE 146/115): we are able to be 'occupied' with the other because the other already 'occupies' or 'sits inside' us, in the sense that the directedness towards the other marks and ensouls our bodiliness and precisely in so doing makes it 'sensible' for the other. And this sensibility is not only corporeal but also 'passive': the bearing of the other is a bearing even of the passion and suffering of the other: "the bearing par excellence" ('*le porter par excellence*') (AE 95/75, 132/104), 'uterinity' of the human subject as "trembling of the womb" (*le frémissement des entrailles utérines*) (SaS 158/183) or "moaning of the entrails" (*gémissement des entrailles*) (HAH 94/64): "perhaps maternity is sensibility itself, of which so much ill is said among the Nietzscheans" (SaS 158/183). Ethical brotherhood as ethical pregnancy and maternity, condition of every human being, male or female, prior to freedom (AE 148-149/116).

This condition of existence of 'fraternity prior to freedom', however, does not exclude but rather includes freedom (AE

211/166). It does make freedom into an inspired freedom, i.e. a freedom that is ensouled by the 'for-the-other' of responsibility. It does not concern a formal freedom, namely the free will (*'liberum arbitrium'*) that can choose between two equally neutral possibilities, but rather an 'orientated' freedom that is raised above itself towards the other than itself. But this pre-conscious and pre-consensual 'orientation' of freedom is not a doom, coercion or unavoidable fatality. Human 'fraternity' is "prior to the free and the non-free" (AE 14/12). The passive 'ensoulment' by and for the other is not about an 'irresistible inclination' (AE 157/197) or a kind of 'natural instinct' (AE 175/138), and still less a 'divine predestination' to which I would – as a 'merciless mercy' – be inexorably surrendered (AE 160/124). Rather, it concerns a 'being-appealed-to' or an 'appealability' to which I can respond positively or negatively. My freedom thus no longer has the first word, but it neither is eliminated. On the contrary, it is summoned in order to effectively concur with and substantiate the fraternity within which I in spite of myself am 'situated'. Freedom is called to a response, and is likewise the possibility to respond. I must say yes, but I can say no. The covenant of fraternity, in which I find myself, is no ontological or natural 'necessity', just as an object that is released must necessarily fall, surrendered as it is to the laws of gravity. It concerns an appeal, a task and a mission, which stands in sharp contrast to all (external or internal) coercion and inevitability. Fraternity presents itself as an 'authority' that cannot impose anything, but can only appeal and oblige. The Good of the 'by-and-for-the-other' in which I am 'created' is a 'disarming authority' that can only make a claim on me by appealing to my free, good will (AS 69). With this, it is useful to distinguish between two forms of 'must', namely an 'incontrovertible' and an 'irresistible' must (AE 154/120). The duty to take upon oneself the fate of the other – a duty that is directed toward me immediately and incontrovertibly from the face – can indeed be very much resisted. We can simply ignore the appeal that proceeds from the other: much is not even necessary, a slight distraction

would suffice… After all, an irresistible 'must' would not be an ethical 'must' but a not-being-able-to-do-otherwise. We can choose to do or not to do that which we must, and that is precisely our ethical freedom – the freedom of response. Confronted with the incontrovertible appeal of the vulnerable other, we can pretend that we have not noticed that appeal. The appeal can be pushed away or muffled away amidst other summons and obligations. It can be overrun by the drive for self-preservation, which can manifest itself imposingly or subtly, or it can hide itself in boredom, absent-mindedness or diversion, fatigue or laziness (as anticipated fatigue). That, however, does not change anything of the incontrovertible character of the appeal that ensues from the face. We can escape from it by turning away our gaze or by pretending not to have noticed the appeal of its epiphany, but this 'pretending' already demonstrates that we have 'heard' the appeal, namely that an urgent 'must' has ensued from the vulnerable other, my brother. Heteronomy is, in other words, the basis for autonomy, which the so-called modern, 'revolutionary' concept of freedom has turned entirely inside out. Thanks to the heteronomy of ethical 'fraternity' wherein we in spite of ourselves are situated, we can autonomously acknowledge or reject, fulfil or neglect, this 'fraternity'. On the basis of a fundamental ethical option, whereby we establish good or evil, we confirm 'fraternity' as our 'human being' or rather as our 'humanity' itself (TI 189/204; AE 10/8, 17/14).

In other words, negotiation, agreement and contract do not fall outside the responsibility of people for each other. It is not because the 'dialogical' precedes the 'dialogue' that the concrete conversation would be unimportant (DVI 224/146). On the contrary, the concrete dialogue is, as still will be made apparent below, called to give expression to the original, or rather pre-original condition of 'fraternity' wherein we are 'placed' and 'anchored'. It is precisely the goal of our essay to investigate how and which conversation can give shape in an authentic manner to 'fraternity' as an expression of the *humanum*, that implies in the spirit of the French Revolution the

'equality' or rather the 'common dignity' of all people. Our human condition of 'fraternity' shows, in other words, from the beginning a universal, inclusive dimension: every human person is responsible for every other human person. The responsibility of the one-for-the-other refers to a general, shared humanity as the basis of our irreducible equality, for which we all and together are actively and creatively responsible (TI 189/214).

3. When in the Stranger I Recognize My 'Brother'

The experience and the realisation of this universal 'fraternity' is thus not self-explanatory, and even less a romantic dream that falls like a gift from the sky. The human person after all is an 'ambiguous' being in the literal sense of the word. As we stated above, the human person is not determined to be for-the-other ('otherwise than being'). He can also look the other way. The possibility of this choice is neither neutral nor formal, but is marked by the 'being' of the human person, just as it is observed by us at first sight, namely his spontaneous egocentrism of the 'attempt at being' (*conatus essendi*) (Spinoza) (NP 104/71). In de 'struggle for life' (Darwin) or the '*élan vital*' (vital impulse) of the human person (Bergson) (EE 29/23; TI 253/276), something strange is revealed: there is something more important than 'my own life', namely the life of the other (PM 172), as was made clear above in our phenomenology of 'fraternity'. This does not preclude that in or in spite of that 'being-for-the-other', the 'being for oneself' remains operative, driven as every human person is to cope with the problems that are caused by one's own finitude and fragility (AE 4/4; AS 63-64).

This primary 'dynamism of being' in the human person implies the inclination to organise 'fraternity' on the basis of self-interest, or rather of mutual self-interest, i.e., of reciprocally well-understood egoism. In other words, 'fraternity' realises itself in a first movement through all sorts of 'fraternities' or 'brotherhoods' that come about amongst like-minded individuals, meaning to say amongst people who recognise

themselves in the other on the basis of all kinds of 'affinities', similar characteristics, interests or concerns, activities, convictions and ideas. Such fraternities rest on the reciprocity of sympathy, according to Levinas (TA 86/91). We start with this phenomenology, in order to reflect further on 'identitary fraternity'.

In our spontaneous longing, we strive for reciprocity on the basis of recognition. Thanks to the other, I would like to arrive home in myself: the one is for the other what the other is for the one. Thanks to sympathy, the other is known as another 'myself', i.e., as an 'alter ego' (TA 75/83). I find myself again in the other, in her or his characteristics, and I am thereby attracted to the other. It is the dream of a common existence which we all share commonly and mutually. Sympathy appears here as the relationship of direct exchange because we are accessible to each other and understand each other, at times with but half a word or a glance. In and through its sympathy, the other puts oneself in my place, sees and treats me as 'similar' (*semblable*) – which is not the same as 'equal'. Thanks to our mutual 'resemblances' (DMT 51/40) we become one with each other, we form a 'brotherhood' of mutual 'intropathy' and understanding (HS 169/113). Today, this reciprocity is often called 'empathy', based on the ability to allow oneself to live 'within' the other, with the expectation that the other also allows oneself to live 'within' our existence and our experiences.

This 'brotherly' reciprocity is not only aimed for in interpersonal relations but also in the formation of all kinds of groups and communities. Humans are not solitary but social beings (Aristotle). Humans, after all, do not fall out of the sky but are born. By means of their ancestry, people belong to a group, with its own characteristics and customs. The first environment where people belong to is the family. Via the family, one belongs to other groups, namely those of ethnicity and nationality (and in this word lies the concept '*nasci*' – to be born). The factual circumstances of the birth determine to a large part to which group we belong. Via ethnicity or

nationality we are likewise embedded, among others, in a network of relationships with quite specific economic, political, cultural and historical characteristics. This uniqueness, which distinguishes one group of people from other groups, is usually experienced as 'natural', on the basis of the pre-given objective character and on the basis of the fact that that objective identity usually also has a well-established past.

Upon closer inspection, however, it turns out that that uniqueness is always the result of construction and development. But however this history is at work, the uniqueness is always experienced as participating in characteristics, features, customs and traditions that – often separately, but certainly in their specific coherence as well – differ from other particularities with their own characteristics, value patterns and behaviours. It is precisely in and through this belonging to groups and communities that people develop, at the same time, their social identity. It would seem that this social identity is external in nature, but what is unique to human persons is that they identify themselves with them so much so that they transform these communitarian forms of identity and experience them as internal forms of identity: an experience of reciprocity that offers the satisfaction of security: we arrive at home with each other.

The differences between groups of people, in other words, can be traced back to attributes, features and characteristics whereby they can be assigned a specific particularity: family, people, race, gender, culture … Mostly, these specific characteristics are united and 'arranged' into a cluster, with its own internal – whether or not historically or artificially construed – cohesion, whereby people can be distinguished from each other not only individually but also socially. We can call this particularity the 'natural' identity of groups, and in this regard also label it as valuable and worthwhile: "It is not that the tribal is proscribed; it comprises many virtues" (VA 96/109). The cognateness, whatever type it may be, is in no way evil and should thus not be suppressed or forbidden. It ushers in numerous possibilities and expresses itself moreover in

many praiseworthy qualities and virtues, like internal, warm solidarity within this 'shared destiny'. Various 'fraternities' are an eminent expression of this.

Last but not least, the ideological communities (religions and others) to which one belongs usually by birth – unless if by conversion – likewise give shape to this social identity. They express a unique 'internal world' with its own language-use, symbols, rituals, narratives and convictions. It is no coincidence that they come to the fore in this context of 'brotherhood' and 'fraternities', wherein the so-called 'symbolic order' of signs and rituals, 'sacred' places with their particular arrangement, language and forms of expression (like ways of greeting, garments, headwear, etc.), calendars and feasts, all play a 'foundational' and 'inspirational' role. Furthermore, the community life of such identitary 'fraternities' is objectified in forms of organisation and structures, statutes and regulations (including the criteria of surveillance and sanctioning). That is the tangible, objective incarnation of the ideological fraternity – and of every identitary fraternity – as a social dynamism.

Reversing a paradoxical statement of Levinas (cf. infra), we can summarise these considerations on the 'identitary fraternity' as follows: "When I recognize my 'brother' in the stranger". And Levinas does not hesitate linking this idea with the way in which Israel has evolved from being nomads to being the 'chosen people'. As the 'chosen people' Israel experiences its 'being set apart' from other peoples as a source of value and dignity, upon which its individuality precisely rests. Even when this election may not lead to the haughty pretence of being 'better' than others, it still gives a special significance to the existence of the people of Israel, out of which ensues an ineradicable feeling of self-worth. Levinas points out expressly how the Bible is also the book of a people (VA 97/109) and how the children of Israel, according to that Biblical tradition, are presented as the descendants of the patriarchs. They receive the vocation and mission to substantiate being the chosen people by keeping the covenant, by maintaining and studying the Mitzvoth of the Torah (cf. the

Talmud as a 'unique' form of Jewish thought). Hence Levinas affirms: "The children of Israel are introduced as the descendants of the patriarchs. Consequently, the virtues of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the glory of their relations to other men, are presented as very elevated" (VA 96/109). At the end of this essay, it will become clear how this is not an end-point, in the sense that for Israel (and for the Bible) a 'beyond-the-tribal' is necessary, just as this likewise applies to all 'fraternities'.

4. When in My 'Brother' I Acknowledge the Stranger

However valuable it may be, the 'tribal' fraternity can never be an endpoint. It is not the sufficient precondition for humanity in the full sense of the word. Upon closer inspection, it remains after all based on 'recognition' (EN 40/24). This means that the 'intropathy' of sympathy and empathy, beyond deductive knowledge, is positive (EI 58-59/58), but at the same time it does not go far enough. Even though as 'vibration' it is an 'experience-beyond-knowing', it remains a form of reciprocity (DVI 63/64), or rather a form of "mutual knowledge" (HS 151/101). One starts with the observation of the other who appears just like I do, in order to be involved with the other as an other-who-is-related-to-me. It is and remains a form of knowledge that makes finding oneself in the other possible. The question consequently is, how can we reach beyond the reductive reciprocity, into the other as other, into a relationship that is more – or better, different, radically different – than observing and empathising knowledge (EN 254/194).

For that purpose, the tribal and the identitary 'fraternity' must be surpassed, a "scandalous exigency" (VA 96/109), but – along the road to humanisation – a necessary exigency! We can concretise this demand by reversing the above-mentioned expression regarding the "recognition of the 'brother' in the strange other", namely into the ethical appeal "to acknowledge, in the 'brother' himself, the stranger: the moment in which fraternity attains its full sense" (VA 96/109).

To make this clear, we base ourselves on the distinction that we, in line with Levinas, can make between 'countenance' and 'face'. This distinction – yes even contradistinction – is important for all too often are both confused with each other. In that confusion, the face is then understood as the face of the other, meaning to say as her or his physiognomy, the facial features, the plastic or graphic form, in short the 'visibility' of the other. It is that which can be brought forth in an image, and thus in extension also the personality and the character, the psycho-social, ethnic, cultural, religious or ideological… characteristics of the other (VA 97/110). On that basis, the other can be catalogued and 'diagnosed', likewise on the basis of its belongingness to groups, communities, or 'fraternities'. What Levinas means, however, with the face of the other is not its countenance or its appearance, but the remarkable given that the other – not only factually, but also principally – never coincides with its appearance, image, photograph, presentation or belongingness to a group. Hence he states that the other is invisible and unknowable: a mystery that never surrenders itself (TI 4/34). That is why, according to Levinas, we cannot actually speak about a 'phenomenology' of the face, since phenomenology describes that which appears. The face is that which in the face of the other escapes from our glance. The other is 'different', irreducible to its appearance, literally a 'stranger', and precisely as such the other reveals itself as face. Naturally, the other is also visible; naturally, the other appears and thus evokes all sorts of impressions, images and representations whereby the other can be described and characterised personally and in terms of its group. Naturally, we can come to know quite a lot about the other on the basis of what the other lets us 'see'. But the other is more than its photograph, or rather he is not only factually more – in the sense that I can discover even more about the other – but it can never be adequately represented and contained in one or the other image. And because it is not 'understandable', it is neither 'graspable'. It is essentially, and not only factually or temporarily, a 'withdrawing' and 'transcending movement'. I

can never capture the other into nor identify it with its plastic form, its historiography or its psychological, sociological, ethnic, cultural or ideological *Gestalt*. The other is never simply the expression or the 'sacrament' of its 'fraternity', i.e., community, social group or ideological 'church'. Its 'epiphany' takes place paradoxically as a withdrawal, literally a 'retreat'. Its epiphany is always a breaking through and a confounding of this epiphany whereby the other always remains 'enigmatic', and precisely because of that it imposes itself as the 'irreducible' and the 'strange', in short as 'the radical other' that is and remains 'infinitely' other. The other is unconquerably 'different' because it escapes once and for all from every attempt at a final representation and diagnosis. In its face, the other is the infinite that 'infinitises' itself (AE 113-116/89-91). The epiphany of the face makes all curiosity ridiculous. Hence the challenge to distrust our own seeing and interpreting, even though we are not directly inclined to do so due to our self-interest (NP 153/102).

It is precisely this infinite, or rather the 'self-infinitising', alterity that obscures and even questions the tribal 'fraternity' and familiarity. Hence the inclination to rid ourselves of the foreignness of the other, by means of reducing the other to our own identity and tribal 'fraternity'. Levinas calls this "reduction of the other to the same" (TI 16/46) the unavoidable temptation of the tribal and even 'brotherly' violence – however contradictory 'brotherly violence' may even sound. Hence that the 'fraternity-beyond-the-tribal' rests on the prohibition against reduction and violence: "Thou shalt not kill" (EI 93/89), with which the awareness is given at the same time that a cross-border, universal 'fraternity' is never easy nor self-evident, and thus never simply falls down from heaven for free – not even as one or the other form of 'divine grace'! It always costs time and effort, commitment and responsibility. It does not rest on the spontaneous inclination to sympathy or empathy, for that reciprocity accords insufficient acknowledgement to the otherness – the foreignness – of the other who stands before me 'face-to-face'. The other penetrates

unasked into my personal and communitarian identity as the stranger, as a foreigner in whom I do not 'find myself'. Perhaps the other – as 'similar' or 'like-minded' – seems familiar to me at first, but slowly but surely this familiarity gives way to a painful feeling of alienation, namely that the other never coincides with that familiarity and similarity. Unavoidably and unrelentingly, the other appears as the one who throws upside down my personal and our tribal ('brotherly') identity. The nearby and at the same time 'foreign brother', who in his familiarity becomes even more strange, introduces a remarkable 'difference' that sows uncertainty and confusion. The foreigner that we thus discover in the 'brother' literally means a 'disruption of order' or 'dis-order' that seems to undermine our tribal 'fraternity'. Hence that our tribal 'fraternity' comes under pressure, in the sense that it is tempted by the tendency to violence, be it in direct and brutal, or in indirect and more subtle or sly forms, at times making use of organisational 'arrangements' and rules and sanctions. On the ideological (religious, convictional…) level, we distinguish on the one hand inclusivism, whereby the truth of the other is reduced to our own truth or whereby our own truth is imprinted onto the other – via all sorts of 'techniques of persuasion.' On the other hand, there is exclusivism that not only excludes and rejects, but also diabolises and persecutes the other as 'foreign'. And this is expressed in all kinds of terror and racism: "In the expression of racism, one experiences human identity uniquely on the basis of its persistence in being, while turning qualitative differences and attributes into a value, as in the apperception of things that one would possess or reject" (VA 98/110-111). The subtlest form of inter-convictional violence is the indifference towards the foreign other, in the sense that one – out of a feeling of superiority or of self-defence – finds the dialogue with the other irrelevant and superfluous.

This means that the surpassing of the tribal 'fraternity' is only feasible by means of the confrontation with the permanent and recurrent possibility of violence towards the foreign other, i.e., mainly the attempt to transform the other into a 'similar' or

'like-minded' 'brother'. Then one can be 'in agreement' amongst each other, beyond all differences which one relativises. This enforces indeed the warmth of immanent solidarity, but at the same time it goes at the cost of the real dialogue with the 'brother' wherein the foreign other reveals oneself.

Hence, the cross-border 'open fraternity' is in need of the ethical 'restraint' (NLT 94-96/123-126). This is a form of scrupulousness, which refers back to the Latin *scrupulus*, 'a pebble in the shoe'. The surpassing of the tribal 'fraternity' into an open 'fraternity' does not begin as a great, spontaneous magnanimity that is directed at the other 'with pleasure'. The dialogue between 'stranger brothers' begins with a form of unease and 'embarrassment' precisely because one is brought to shyness through the epiphany of the strange other. The most original ethical moment of the conversation with a real 'other' does not consist in doing something, namely in confiscating the other's time and being. The ethical encounter with the foreign 'other' begins with withholding the spontaneous inclination of 'sympathy' that seeks 'recognition' in the other in order to avoid all diligence with regard to the other. The ethical *'fait primitif'* of dialogue is no altruism, neither sympathy nor empathy, but a dynamics of 'shivering' (AE 110/120). This is namely an utmost circumspection and carefulness, apprehensive as we are to do injustice to the other in all our forward-marching self-certainty (AE 86/68). The moment that 'brotherly' dialogue 'founds' and installs itself ethically, i.e., becomes fully humane, consists in 'something from nothing', namely in the 'scruple' that nestles itself in the spontaneous movement of establishing, defending and developing one's own (personal and communitarian) identity, distinct from other identities or 'brotherhoods'. An ethically qualitative dialogue begins with the suspension of all self-evidence with which we approach the other, foreign conversation-partner in 'self-complacency' and self-certainty. An authentic dialogue that encourages connection does not begin with a self-aggrandising enthusiasm but with a remarkable form of 'hesitation', whereby

one controls and restrains oneself in the fear that in the dialogue one would do violence to the other.

We can likewise qualify this as 'tolerance', a first step in the relationship with the foreign other. The literal meaning of *'tolerare'* is to put up with, to endure, to 'accept' the alterity of the other. This is rather a negative attitude that does not coincide with the positive attitude of respect, justice, confirmation and acknowledgment, of which more will be discussed below. The choice for tolerance towards the other implies that one refrains from 'killing' the other, i.e. manipulating or abusing, or reducing the other in a subtle or brutal manner to oneself. Tolerance as reluctance (DL 225/172). This is not yet dialogue but rather the absolute, minimum condition for dialogue (we shall take this up again later).

4. Mutual and Asymmetric Mastership

The initially negative 'restraint' and tolerance, upon closer inspection, create space for an utterly positive approach to the other, in the sense that it makes possible the acknowledgment of and the respect for the other as a foreign other. In this regard, the open, cross-border 'fraternity' is based on the fundamental attitude of justice, namely on doing justice to the irreducible otherness of the other. Respect "is a relationship between freedoms who neither limit nor deny one another, but reciprocally affirm one another. Respect is adequate here, provided we emphasize that the reciprocity of respect is not an indifferent relationship, such as a serene contemplation, and that it is not the result, but the condition of ethics. It is language, that is, responsibility of the one for the other" (EN 48/30). This reciprocity, however, should not be understood wrongly, in the sense that it is not a condition for respect. The acknowledgment by the other should not be a condition for my acknowledgment of the other. If such were the case, acknowledgment would get bogged down into utilitarianism. It then remains an expression of my self-interest: *'do ut des'* (AT 110/199). "All the shackening of the world filters through 'sympathetic' faces as soon as the [asymmetric] relation of

mutual responsibility is suspended" (EN 49/31). In other words, respect is a way that people do justice to each other not as people who are the same but as people of equal dignity, regardless of what the other does for me or gives back to me (NP 46-47/32-33).

The way to do justice fully to the strange otherness of the other is by accepting the mastership of the other, or better still by acknowledging and confirming it (TI 73-75/100-101), beyond the pretension of our own mastership toward the other that perhaps again runs the risk of falling in the trap of the reduction of the other to our own 'conviction and view'. With this, we arrive at what we can call, inspired by Levinas, the reversal of the 'natural', egocentric mastership. We assume spontaneously that we ourselves can teach everything to the other, while ethical mastership turns the roles around by stating radically that the other is my master, whereby the natural asymmetry of I-to-the-other based on self-interest is reversed. The epiphany of the face reveals itself as instruction, as teaching. By means of speaking to me, the other awakes in me something new. I do not discover something that has already beforehand been slumbering within me, but I am – despite myself – confronted with the heteronomous fact of the otherness of the other that speaks to me by looking at me or that addresses me without words, stutteringly or explicitly. I cannot predict nor foresee the speaking – the revelation – of the other; I do not have the other 'at hand' and it is precisely its otherness that 'makes me wise'. In the conversation that begins with the epiphany of the other, I am no longer the first and original, the alpha and omega of meaning, the '*archè*' or 'principle' to which all meaning and value return. I am no longer the designer, but the one addressed, the one receiving, the one listening, or rather the one who is awakened and called to listen, and who thus needs to learn everything still. Only by withdrawing myself from my self-complacent 'knowing' do I create space in order to learn truly from the other. To paraphrase Levinas, it sounds as follows: 'The face breaks through its plastic form [– its physiognomy, psychology,

sociology, ethnicity, fraternity, culture, religion …, in short its countenance or appearance] – and speaks to me. The other 'expresses itself' by means of addressing me. And thus is the face infinitely more than all that I can see and describe of it. The face 'instructs me' and calls me to dedication and attention. The word – the glance or the wordless word – of the other is *magisterial*: it instructs me about the other without my finding it within myself. Thus the other is the source of revelation. Listening precedes knowing *and* speaking. I am a response-being, literally 'response-able', answerable' (cf. TI 22/51, 41/69, 45-46/73). Here, the idea of Plato that the soul is in conversation with itself, is radically transcended. In contrast with what Plato calls "the dialogue of immanence" (DVI 214/139) Levinas talks of "the dialogue of transcendence" (DVI 225/147). The learning that the face-to-face realises is not a solipsistic self-knowledge (*'gnothi seauton'*) but a dialogical learning (DVI 216/140, 221/144). I do not descend into myself in order to find wisdom, but I step outside of myself in order to learn thanks to the other and become 'wise'. This does not mean that I merely accept everything from the other slavishly and meekly. On the contrary, it does mean that I enter into discussion, give comments, think critically or contradict. Only thus do I learn new things, which can likewise bring the other to new insights and standpoints. This speaking and 'counter-speaking' not only expresses the humane, universal 'fraternity' with which we began this essay, but it also develops it into a community event of fellowship that – beyond every 'special-arrangement-between-us' that allows for coalescence – discovers, acknowledges and confirms in the 'brother' the other as other, whereby even I am done justice as the 'strange brother'.

This mastership of the other seems to be a beautiful and tempting idea, but upon closer inspection it is about an unruly idea that is anything but easy to realise. Even in the direct face-to-face, the temptation of rhetoric is never far away. One searches for 'beautiful language' that creates the impression that one encounters the other and 'walks along' with him or

her. Rhetoric as "the art that is supposed to enable us to master language" (HS 203/135), or literally as eloquence or 'beautiful saying' (*bellettrie*) (HS 207/138-139), can pervert unnoticed the dialogue between the strange other and myself. Not every discourse is a relation with exteriority, the otherness of the other. We often approach our conversation partner not as our 'master' and 'teacher', but "as an object or an infant, or a man of the multitude" (TI 40/70). Our discourse is then rhetoric and represents the position of someone who tries to outsmart his neighbour. Rhetoric, which is not at all absent in any conversation, approaches the other not frontally (*face-to-face*) but sideways, via a detour. To be sure, not as an object in the sense that the rhetorical discourse directs itself to the other through all its artful trickery – but indeed trying to obtain the 'yes' of the other in a devious manner. As propaganda, flattery, diplomacy, etc. is a way to spoil the freedom of the other. In this regard, rhetoric is a particular form of violence: "not violence exercised on an inertia (which would not be a violence), but on a freedom, which precisely as freedom, should be incorruptible" (TI 42/70). The deception of rhetoric consists precisely in that one attempts to get the other to one's side by arousing trust, namely the trustworthiness of the partial truth, so that the other is then prepared to take along the beautifully embellished lie in the guise of truth (QLT 138/64). In this way, rhetoric degenerates into a form of deception that hides under the 'fine appearance' of 'convincing truth' and thus promotes a form of 'disguised violence'!

It is precisely this possible and factual, recurrent appearance of misleading rhetoric in the direct *face-à-face* that makes the permanent vigilance of the shivering and restraint sketched above never superfluous. It likewise implies the necessary suspicion towards a cold-blooded dialogue whereby friendliness and diplomacy are used as 'non-violent means'. That is a dialogue that is more concerned about the dialogue in the dialogue. Then it is all about a form of 'circumspect tolerance', which upon closer inspection appears to be a 'too careful tolerance'. One wants to be 'friendly' towards each

other and as a consequence we run the risk that no real dialogue at all takes place, in the sense that we become too indulgent of each other or that we remain stuck in general declarations of goodwill. In such a dialogue without debate there is indeed politeness – a form of 'decent' and nicely packaged tolerance – but no real acknowledgement of each other's irreducible alterity and uniqueness.

Even in interconvictional dialogue, too much tolerance and caution can stand in the way of an authentic encounter on the basis of a discussion with an 'open visor'. The seemingly 'important' and 'polite' dialogue then becomes, upon closer inspection, a cruel and hefty debate. Wars on religion – and other ideological wars – arise not so much because the debates would be too sharp, but because they are lacking. Hence the importance of direct exchange whereby one draws up the courage not only to pose questions but also to question the other, and to allow oneself to be questioned as well by the other, however embarrassing and perhaps even painful that confrontation may be. When one discusses about certain themes, it is thus not sufficient that the participants in the interconvictional dialogue present their own views, but also that the other questions critically those views. For that purpose, it can be useful that the one asks the other how that other understands the view of the former, what questions and resistances does it evoke, which resonances does it uncover, but also where do deeper oppositions lie. By doing so, a dialogical 'back-and-forth' arises that reflects what Levinas unravels in Rabbinic discourse, namely an 'unending commentary' of a commentary on a commentary, that again unleashes new commentary (SaS 154/181). It is an honest and persevered confrontation between convictions, beyond mild forms of tolerance and friendliness, which upon closer inspection betray forms of indifference. "Attention and vigilance: not to sleep until the end of time, perhaps. The presence of persons who do not fade away into words, get lost in technical questions, freeze up into institutions or structures. The presence of persons in the full force of their irreplaceable identity, in the full force of their

inevitable responsibility. To acknowledge and name the insoluble substances and keep them from exploding in violence, guile or politics, to keep watch where conflicts tend to break out, a new religiosity and solidarity – is loving one's neighbour anything other than this? Not the facile, spontaneous *élan*, but the difficult working on oneself: to go toward the other where he is truly other, in the radical contradiction of his alterity, that place from which, for an insufficiently mature soul, hatred flows naturally or is deduced with infallible logic" (AT 101/87-88).

5. Conclusion

Thus we arrive at the humane 'fraternity-beyond-the-tribal' with which we have begun. It introduces the connection with the strange other, without absorbing the other in its own identity, but likewise without locking up the self in its own world: "a surplus of fraternity" (DVI 224/147). This new ethics and spirituality is, according to Levinas, also essential for a correct understanding of Judaism as an 'open identity', meaning to say as an identity that needs transcendence. In Israel's history, the children of Israel are presented as descendants of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This origin and history likewise determine their identity. But according to Levinas, it is a crucial moment in the development of ethical and religious consciousness when the Bible links the awareness of human dignity with the understanding of being a 'child of God', and no longer with the notion of being a 'child of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. Levinas calls this the "filiality of transcendence", "a superior form of piety, above any tribal link" (VA 96/109). Levinas also evokes how in the texts of Isaiah the Israelites call themselves 'children of God' and how in their liturgy the expression 'our Father' appears time and again. To be sure, the Bible is a book of a people (level of identity) but also a book of a people for whom this 'unity as a people' does not suffice (level of transcendence). It is not enough to only qualify oneself as 'descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', for the absolutizing interpretation of such a

qualification leads to exclusivism and racism. Therefore, Levinas finds it necessary that the people of Israel receive the Torah: "It does not suffice for this people merely to be descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob: it must be led to Sinai. The departure from Egypt is accomplished at Sinai" (VA 96/109). There, their election evolves into their mission, namely the task to uphold the Law. In other words: there, the particularity of their election becomes the universality of their responsibility, not only for their own people but also for all peoples. Here resounds the promise God made at the very beginning of Israel, namely at the calling and sending of the patriarch Abram: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12,2-3). And that Abram becomes the "father of the whole humanity" (NLT 84/114) is even linked to his new name Abraham: "No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17,5). His 'being-for-all-the-others', his 'being "for all the humanity of humankind" reveals "a new humanity: the biblical humanism" (NLT 86/117) of 'universal fraternity' as a gift of 'createdness' and an ethical task (DVI 249-250/165-166).