



Friendship Otherwise - Toward a Levinasian Description of Personal Friendship

by Jack Marsh

Abstract

A Levinasian reading of intimate and personal friendship - of friendship "otherwise than political", as it were - suggests that intimate and personal friendship cannot be subsumed under either completely ethical or completely erotic terms. While friendship can be understood as a certain "fraternity", and thus be legitimately employed in discussing justice and politics, such a usage trades on a certain equivocation. Hermeneutics seeks to make the alien familiar, and deconstruction seeks to show that the familiar is always (already) alien. As this paper seeks to describe, a Levinasian reading of personal friendship involves both of these movements. In that Levinas, however, never explicitly addresses this relationship, the paper proceeds by sketching the broad contours of his thought before offering a phenomenology of personal friendship in the wake of the limits Levinas thematizes in his analysis of the ethical relation. The readings and analysis presented suggest that personal friendship appears as an irreducible excess, reducible to neither ethics nor enjoyment, while nevertheless passing through ethics and enjoyment. Friendship marks a space of non-violent familiarity and exteriority, a site of solidarity between identity and difference.

Introduction

The philosophical treatment of friendship has enjoyed a revival in continental philosophy as of late. This revival is in large part due to the influence of Emmanuel Levinas, who revived ethics as the proper topic of philosophy - as "first philosophy". This claim becomes evident in surveying recent discussions of friendship. For instance, in *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur explicitly engages Levinas in explicating his own moral anthropology.¹ In this work, Ricoeur appropriates the classical Aristotelian framework in constructing an ethics of "reciprocity", of shared community, where friendship occurs as the mutual striving for the "good life", for a certain virtue (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 187). Here, real community occurs as equal exchange - a "fragile balance in which giving and receiving are equal, hypothetically" (ibid., p. 188). One's "ethical intention" conditions moral sociality in the communal founding and maintenance

of just institutions (ibid., p. 172). The "friendship" of autonomous "intentions", as a reciprocity between "other-selves", defines friendship and is the condition of possibility of just institutions.² Jacques Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship* (1988), attacks the priority of this relationship in favour of "heterology, asymmetry, and infinity", taking up the Levinasian terminus in a plea for a politics that "answers first to the Other" (Derrida, 1988, pp. 632-44). Whether prioritizing self or other, whether a "hermeneutic" or "deconstructive" ethics, or whether through appropriating or distancing, Levinas is a point of reference.

In this essay I seek to give a Levinasian reading of intimate and personal Friendship - of friendship "otherwise than political". In introducing his phenomenology of eros, Levinas (1969, p. 253) writes:

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[W]e must indicate a plane both presupposing and transcending the epiphany of the Other in the face, a plane where the I bears itself beyond death and recovers also from its return to itself. This plane is that of love and fecundity, where subjectivity is posited in function of these movements.

Richard Cohen (1994, pp. 207-208) assesses the relation of these different “planes” as follows:

Levinas’s sequence: ethics first, eros second, reveals the “beyond the face” character of eros itself. It is not that eros is extraneous to ethics, or that ethics is extraneous to eros, for that matter, but rather that erotic nudity involves a specific subversion of an intersubjectivity already constituted ethically. Erotic nudity cannot be subsumed under purely ethical terms. But neither can it be accounted for without significance already established through ethical encounter.

I would like to suggest that intimate and personal friendship occurs on just such a plane. Friendship cannot be subsumed under completely ethical terms or under completely erotic or filial terms. Friendship can be understood as a certain “fraternity”, and thus be legitimately employed in discussing justice and politics. Such a usage, however, trades on a certain equivocation. Hermeneutics seeks to make the alien familiar, and deconstruction seeks to show that the familiar is always (already) alien. As I will seek to describe, a Levinasian reading of personal friendship involves both of these movements. In that Levinas never explicitly addresses this relation, I will begin by sketching the broad contours of his thought. I will then offer a phenomenology of personal friendship in the wake of the limits Levinas thematizes in his analysis of the ethical relation. My readings and analysis will suggest that personal friendship appears as an irreducible excess, reducible to neither ethics nor enjoyment, while nevertheless passing through ethics and enjoyment. Friendship marks a space of non-violent familiarity and exteriority, a site of solidarity between identity and difference. It should be noted that my intent is not so much to elaborate a philosophy of friendship as such, but to describe how the phenomenon of personal friendship discloses the possibility of a non-violent or non-coercive relation between identity and otherness (or alterity).

The Ethical Relation

1. Levinas’s Concern

In Levinas’s two major and classic works, *Totality*

and *Infinity* (1969) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1981/1997), he seeks to offer an account of subjectivity and alterity without reducing either to a third term. The philosophical tradition has always sought to reconcile the same and the other in a relation that renders separate and different terms comprehensible. The consequence of this movement is that the third term ends up evaporating the uniqueness of the terms it seeks to explain. In pre-Kantian metaphysics, this took the form of elaborating the eternal metaphysical structure of the real, the structure that grants stable identity to entities that change across time. In modern philosophy, the emphasis shifted to epistemic justification and methodological purity, but the goal of articulating the stable structures necessary to explain identity and difference maintained its primacy. In contemporary philosophy, the quest for certain and absolute knowledge has largely been abandoned. Yet, even here, the primacy of the third term over the terms it purports to explain maintains itself. Whether Hegel’s *Geist* or Heidegger’s *Being*, singular entities become dependent on and subordinate to a third term. In Hegel, for example, individuals are moments in the procession of a single and universal subject coming to know itself as history. In Heidegger, *Dasein* is a site where *Being* reveals and conceals itself, opening singular entities to the possibilities of their historical destiny. Despite some radical differences in their respective positions, Hegel and Heidegger both locate singular entities in a drama that privileges the knowing or aesthetic relation. This move ends in subordinating the importance of singular and unique entities to a general term or relation that can, as history testifies, offer a justification for violence and oppression. It is this violence and oppression - the coercion of the third term - which Levinas contests. I will now review how Levinas seeks to describe intersubjective relation in a way that avoids subsuming the same and the other into the third.

2. Separation of the Self

For Levinas, the self crystallizes in enjoyment [*jouissance*]. We do not experience good food as a Cartesian idea. The food we eat, the air we breathe, the light, the warmth and illumines are not experienced as causal necessities for bare subsistence. These qualitative elements are first of all objects of taste, first of all enjoyed or suffered. The happiness achieved in enjoyment liberates the self; in this happiness the self achieves independence. This freedom, however, is dependent upon content - the joy or pain of eating, looking, breathing, and so forth. The very advent of the self in enjoyment shows that the freedom achieved in separation is happily dependent on the world. The self is not posited as a hypothesis somehow “behind” experience; it forms in

enjoyment. Though we no doubt experience need and dissatisfaction, this suffering is dependent upon and anticipates the happiness of enjoyment. This anticipation discloses interiority as the site from which I live. The space of enjoyment is the place we call home, the place of habitation.

The home is not first of all experienced as “equipment.” Home is an “inside space” to which I retire after work and thus can be interpreted as an “implement”, much as the hammer or pen is an implement. The home protects me from rain and sleet. Yet home is not an end in the ultimate sense; it is the beginning. The privileged place of home is that it is the condition of possibility for life and action. We engage the world and live life out of a home, out of interiority. We do not “constitute” objects a priori, we recognize home as having dwelt in it as concrete being. In other words, we are only able to represent or conceptualize home as an implement by the already concrete experience of dwelling, and this dwelling marks the interiority produced in enjoyment. Thus, thinking about the world presupposes dwelling, the separation of the self from the elements and the recollection of the elements in the intimacy of the home. This recollection “designates a suspension of immediate reactions the world solicits in view of a greater attention to oneself, one’s possibilities, and situation” (Levinas, 1969, p. 154). Recollection produces distance between me and that which I recall.

In recollecting sensible enjoyment in separation, the self discovers that the intimacy of dwelling presupposes the other. Levinas writes that “Recollection ... no longer deriv[es] its freedom from the agreeableness of the elements, ... the intimacy which familiarity presupposes is an intimacy with someone” (ibid., p. 155). The familiarity with this someone does not obliterate the separation the self achieves in enjoyment. This intimacy occurs as an intimate hospitality, a welcome whose presence is achieved in withdrawal and absence. He calls this “field of intimacy” the feminine. This welcoming intimacy cannot be represented in terms of usability. The feminine is not yet language as such, but “an expression in a secret”. The separation and distance that is made concrete through this intimacy discloses new relations with elements.

The distance disclosed in the intimacy of home makes labour, possession, and representation possible. Here, immediate enjoyment is delayed without obliterating the original relation. Labour draws things from the elements and thus discovers the world. The home transforms the self’s relation to the elements. Here the self breaks with natural existence in the sense that “it

has a street front” but also its secrecy, its interiority. Yet, Levinas (ibid., p. 117) writes:

Labour ... already requires discourse and consequently the height of the other irreducible to the same, the presence of the Other. ... already [the self] leaves pure nature by virtue of the human body raised upwards, committed in the direction of height. This is not an empirical illusion but its ontological production and its ineffaceable testimony. [original emphasis]

Labour presupposes what Levinas calls “the face”.

3. The “Face”: the Ethical Relation

After having described how the self as sensible being achieves separation, Levinas turns to describing how the self concretely encounters another person. While my sense of self is constituted in enjoyment, when I face another person, I encounter a certain resistance. The other is somehow different from me. The way I experience the other is also very different from the way I experience the qualitative elements. This radical difference is manifest in the other’s face. When I encounter the face of another, it refuses to be encompassed by my own ideas and tastes, by my own intentional experience. The face presents itself as refusing to be made present. I cannot exhaust or encompass the uniqueness and otherness of the other through analogy to another image, or even by reference to what she says. When the other speaks to me, she absolves herself from the theme she presents. My encounter with the face opens upon the infinite. The other is never reducible to the ideas and concepts we employ to communicate. The other is transcendent and alien to my experience, never utterly comprehended or subsumed by my experience. Rather than construing this difference in terms of absurdity or any type of mystical encounter, Levinas designates this non-comprehension as ethical.

The face resists my powers of possession, whether in terms of enjoyment or knowledge. This resistance occurs when the other speaks to me. The theme she presents in conversation retains a trace of this transcendent alterity; that is to say, when the other speaks, she says, “you shall not commit murder”. This command designates the height of the other, as she is irreducible to my intentional experience. This command, the height of the other, precisely appears in her destitution. Rather than occurring under threat from on high, the height of the other appears through the nudity and destitution of the defenseless. The other who commands from on high is none other than the widow, orphan, and beggar, the stranger who

needs assistance, the naked who needs clothing. This is what makes the face so uncanny. It presents the unrepresentable, it is the presence of that which is always absent from me, and it is the resistance of that which has no resistance: the ethical resistance of the hungry and orphaned. It is this very distance and respect established by the epiphany of the face that objectivity and justice presuppose.

As noted, Levinas does not advocate an absurdist or mystical sense of non-comprehension. These positions efface the alterity of the other in a way very similar to that of traditional metaphysics: evaporating the self and/or other into each other, into a context, or rendering them illusory in the ubiquitous break-up of context. The non-comprehension in the ethical relation, the distance and respect it establishes, informs the work of justice and knowledge. Ethics informs knowledge of the self's expropriation, bringing in the question of justice. Levinas describes this as occurring with the entrance of a third person, another other with whom I am an equal in responsibility. Here, I realize that, if I utterly divest myself before the face of the other, I have nothing left to give the other other. Hence, economy, being, reciprocity - all the central terms of western Metaphysics - become important. The movement of consciousness is, then, conditioned upon the separation of the self, its infinite responsibility before the face, and the work of justice which requires measurement and reciprocity.

When the third person enters the drama of ethics, this person in a sense "corrects" the incessant height, the asymmetry, in which the face is looked at. The height and command of the other, in relation to the third party, discloses that I am even responsible for myself. Yet this self-responsibility can only surface in that, with the entrance of the third person, I am even responsible for the other's responsibility! Levinas employs words such as "obsession", "trauma" and "disturbance" to describe affectively how this unlimited responsibility is inscribed:

In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness. ... The neighbour who obsesses me is already a face, both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are visible in the concern for justice. (Levinas, 1981/1997, p. 158)

The disturbance and "obsession" the other engenders recalls the *jouissance*, the affective participation, in which the self is separate as sensible being.

Affectivity includes suffering as well as enjoyment. With the event of the face, the entrance of the third person, and the unlimited responsibility she engenders, the primordial sense that is given in all sense, prior to representation, is shown to be that the self is irrecusably for the other; all sense retains a trace of the ethical. Levinas calls this relation "substitution". Sensibility's signifyingness is "... the one-for-the-other itself - the pre-original signifyingness that gives sense, because it gives" (*ibid.*, p. 78). In the one-for-the-other, the self "substitutes" itself for the other as "responsibility for the responsibility for the other".

Substitution operates in every communicative expression. As noted above, when the face speaks, it refuses to be absorbed into the theme. Levinas deepens this account by explaining that the "saying" of the other is what retains a trace of this radical, unlimited responsibility. What is "said" by the other, the content of her expression, is already the domain of representation and the conscious, intentional subject, already subject to verification, measurement, and so forth. With the other's saying, however, passes a trace of the disturbing and irrecusable responsibility that is the condition for separation and respect. Though the self is always separate and unique in its separation in sensible enjoyment, the event of the face and its expression is shown to have always already opened the self to the other. Sensibility is still the fundamental region of this drama. The vulnerability the self experiences allows it to give to the other - even the bread from its very mouth. This vulnerability illumines a deeper sense of separation and uniqueness. The self is irreplaceable in its unlimited responsibility, in that "[no] one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all" (*ibid.*, p. 126).

Levinas's descriptions seem to be very excessive. The emphasis on unlimited responsibility, an ethics that refuses to evaporate in representation or ontology, requires such excess. Responsibility is unlimited, infinite, and prior to the mastery of intentional consciousness. Yet, in my responsibility, the other is proximate even in her height and distance. Levinas (*ibid.*, p. 124) writes:

[T]he proximity of the neighbour in its trauma does not only strike up against me, but exalts and elevates me, and, in the literal sense of the term, inspires me. Inspiration, heteronomy, is the very *pneuma* of the psyche. ... Substitution frees the subject ... from the enchainment to itself ...

To use the language of TI, the self is free in its

dependence. This inscription occurs too in infinite responsibility, rendering the self's freedom finite yet infinitely meaningful. In its traditional treatment, freedom is either reduced to the arbitrary or to a node in a system. Freedom then becomes a calculation of rights, and this calculation defines "justice". Levinas asserts that "Freedom in the genuine sense can be only a contestation of this book-keeping by a gratuity" (ibid., p. 125). Freedom is in giving deeply, gratuitously, apart from a calculation between two "freedoms". Finite freedom is not only gratuity, but the "inspiration, heteronomy, ... the very pneuma of the psyche". In this trauma, the Good "reabsorbs, or redeems, the violence of non-freedom" (ibid., p. 123) - a purchase, in effect, in which the Good buys back economy as such. This buying back, this redemption, enables one to "catch sight of and conceive value" (ibid., p. 154). The trauma of the other not only wounds, but elevates, exalts in pathos and inspiration; a subjection and elevation "... in allegiance to the Good" (ibid., p. 126). Thus, the unconditional responsibility for-the-other is a modality of freedom. In the work of justice, which is the very task of consciousness, "my responsibility for all can and has to manifest itself also in limiting itself [and] ... in the name of unlimited responsibility, be called to concern itself with itself" (ibid., p. 128).

4. Summation

Levinas gives us a novel and interesting account of intersubjectivity. The self forms in its affective participation in the world. As the sediments of this participation are unearthed, the other person is shown to be the condition for this happy and suffered participation. The other opens the self in inscribing it with an unlimited responsibility. This responsibility introduces meaning into being while rendering being subordinate to and exceeded by the ethical relation. The responsibility inscribed in this relation, the height, distance, and destitution of the other, are conditions for the objectivity sought in knowledge and justice.

As noted above, friendship involves a certain sense of "fraternity", and thus can be useful in discussing justice and politics. As we have seen, however, politics and justice are dependent upon a more fundamental drama between the happy self and the enigmatic other. Personal and intimate friendship would represent a type of intermediate region between the ethical drama and the task of justice that is, as noted, the movement of consciousness. Here I will seek to describe this relation, in the wake of the ethical relation as Levinas describes it. I will show that personal friendship appears as an excess reducible to neither ethics nor enjoyment, while nevertheless passing through ethics and enjoyment.

Friendship marks a space of non-violent familiarity and exteriority, a site of solidarity between identity and difference.

Phenomenology of Friendship

'Friendship' marks a region in the task of justice, that is to say, marks a space of conscious relation. This does not render 'friendship' a ruse of intentional consciousness. As with eros, friendship takes-place "beyond the face", that is "outside" or otherwise than the straightforwardness of the face, without effacing the face. 'Friendship' is a trope that traces a certain "taking-place" as it occurs in inter-subjective relation. Yet its taking-place speaks of an anterior occurrence, a past, a memory, a recollection: the recollection of home in the separation of self. 'Friendship' brings to mind that "gentleness of being" that accomplishes habitation as the "site the I acts from" and from which it "commences". It recollects that "personal and intimate alterity" that is the condition of possibility for labour and representation, themselves the conditions of the task of justice. Thus, in 'friendship', the other is beyond welcome in my home. My friend re-minds me, incites a recollection of self as separated being. My friend, as a "personal alterity" with whom I have intimacy and a sense of familiarity, graces interiority. The friend re-minds me that enjoyment is a "... grace of life", and only is violent in un-attendance to the other. The friend is a "resident alien" in my home - my house is his house in a way more intimate than the hospitality due to the stranger. The friend, the best friend, is told where the pantry is located - told with a smile, "go get it yourself".

The taking place of 'friendship' exceeds recollection as such. The Friend, while inciting a recollection of the intimacy of home, concretely repeats the event of the face. Thus the Friend reasserts her irreducibility to the play of the same even as she enjoys the welcome of residence, not merely as a guest, but as a luxury, an "honour", an "honorary member" of my house. The Friend is apart from my home and a-part of my home. It must be stressed that the Friend is not a function in a dialectic nor assimilable in a third term. The friend is not assimilable as "other-self", the conjunction of autonomous "virtues", a difference of mere degree. The Friend is the other otherwise, the other-beyond-welcome, who is a part of my home, yet is served by my house. An intimacy that is neither required for ethics, nor required for the separation of the same - a gift, a luxury, a pure grace. Here I will examine this gifting more closely.

The Friend brings to remembrance separation and concretely repeats the event of the face. Yet the occurrence of friendship - the event of the Friend -

takes-place as a gifting. The Friend, as other, moves-toward-me - as if he's descending from his height, yet always remaining in height. The Friend, as other, moves-toward-me - as if arising from destitution, yet always a stranger, always naked and poor. The vector of his movement, as movement-toward-me, takes-place, and in so doing **takes-space**. The Friend discloses distance in drawing close to me. My friend takes-space in my dwelling as a luxury of rest, a friendly visit, the friend stops-by, Just-passes-through. This taking-place occurs at the other's invitation: the other invites me to be at home in my dwelling, that is, to sit and enjoy-with him, to enjoy his company.

Home is the site where I give, attend the other, cover their nudity, and so forth. The Friend invites me to receive his or her hospitality as the Friend, to rest in my very own dwelling. This is the very 'intimacy' of friendship: the Face to whom I am infinitely responsible identifies with me as responsible; this identification, as a Just-passing-through, appears as a descent and ascent, a gratuity that neither ameliorates the primacy of ethics nor reduces the other to the same. This movement-toward-me, this descent and ascent occurs as a simple "after you, Sir" directed at me. Yet, beyond this 'vous', the Friend addresses me as 'tu'. Not as payment or "return", not because they have to, but because they somehow enjoy my company.

Receiving this gratuity does not alter my responsibility and is posterior to the separation of self. It concretely recollects separation and concretely repeats the event of the face: a simultaneity that occurs as a 'present', a gifting that de-phases 'self-presence'. In this simultaneity, enjoyment and ethics occur as a said that says 'tu'. The contemporaneity of a said as 'tu' and saying creates an ambiguous space distinctive for its indeterminability: if I determine this taking-place as home, home pure and simple, I reduce the other to a commodity in my economy; if I determine this taking-space as the face, the face pure and simple, I deny-the-other an activity, a movement that invites a response, a response that I may refuse or accept.

This invitation is not ethical in the sense that I can refuse or accept responsibility, for responsibility is before any activity of the I. This invitation invites me to be acknowledged as 'tu'. This acknowledgement does not 'accomplish' or 'constitute' a freedom; freedom is already accomplished in responsibility (the I is free as created and irrecusably responsible). This acknowledgement receives the other as taking-place in my home, taking-space in my home. As I receive the 'tu', the Friend is an other-beyond-welcome,

beyond-being-as-welcome in my home. My friend is apart from my home, and a part of my home. He is apart in being a-part, that is, within yet beyond, in relation while separate. And this invitation addressed to me is a grace, a specific Just-passing-through, a gift that cannot be "produced", only received or refused. This choice is beyond ethics, beyond the face, it cannot negate or affirm ethics, it is ambiguously in-between, a pure excess that is an indeterminable space, and determined as indeterminability. Receiving, as an activity, is conditioned upon responsibility: I can only have the Friend through the face, through moral responsibility. Yet, beyond this responsibility, I may receive or refuse the other's 'tu'. Any move to determine my friend, encompass him in either enjoyment or ethics reduces the relation to an economy, that is, bestows a "use" upon it. My friend is enjoyed, I am responsible to and for him, and yet he relates to me in a way irreducible to both (and thus indeterminable). As a movement-toward-me, this activity of taking-place constitutes a non-extensive space, an 'alien-intimacy'. My friend is apart from my house such that he is a-part, yet in his a-partness he offers and invites, that is, descends and ascends. His invitation offers a 'friendship' of enjoyment and ethics. He invites me to receive, in all my opulence, even me! He invites me to rest in my very house. He offers me hospitality in his very height and destitution. He speaks to me, he says 'tu'. This pure excess is the ambiguous mixture of enjoyment and responsibility that refuses a determinate structure. The distinctive character of 'friendship', intimate friendship, is its uselessness, a pure gift in its indeterminability, in its weird admixture of enjoyment and ethics.

It must be stressed that this is not a dialectical or ontological participation. The non-reciprocal "reciprocity" is (hyperbolically) contingent upon a movement of incommensurable terms, beyond yet through the drama of ethics. The other moves toward me in saying 'tu', even as I address them as 'vous', as if they descend from their height, as if they ascend as destitute. In my absolute responsibility, in my respect and attendance to the other, my friend invites me to be attended, treats me as a height. This movement of the other occurs as a gift, in that it is extraneous to the responsibility of ethics and the intimacy of eros. It is a non-extensive space, a taking-place that is conditioned upon the 'activity' of my reception. For the friend to be my friend I must receive him beyond receiving him in my home, a receiving as my home, as apart from my house in his a-partness.

The Friend, when his invitation is taken up, becomes my friend. My enjoyment of this intimacy induces wonder in that the me and my I utter in saying "my

friend”, in saying “me?” to his invitation, recalls the trauma of exposure. In receiving the Friend, the self is dis-rupted all over again: obsessed, traumatized, and hostage. The my of friendship recalls the my of substitution. This “exalts and elevates” the very self in the wonder that my friend, who is the other to whom I am infinitely responsible, enjoys me.

This does not level the asymmetrical space, the height and destitution of the other. In my wonderment, I ascend, am lifted up in pathos, even as my friend descends and says ‘tu’, invites me to enjoy-with. In my shame, in my obsessive and traumatic responsibility, I descend to attend to the destitution of the other, to cover his nakedness, even as my friend ascends and says ‘tu’, identifies with-me as responsible. This identification is non-ontological, it is an ethical identification. As such it is an unstipulated grace, a mystery. This movement-toward-me of the other and my exultation and shame do not result in a “linking up” or “fusion” between me and my friend. The vector of our movements occurs as a passing, a Just-passing-through. Not a passing through as “mystic union”, a Just-passing-through the non-extensive space that occurs as a taking-place of my friend as a-part of my home; initiated by the other and not a condition for either selfhood or ethics, a pure and excessive gift. To speak in ontological terms, this passing is a “happy accident”. It is not “necessary”, in that it is unnecessary to ethics, the advent of self, and the task of justice (thus its “uselessness”). Friendship is contingent upon the grace of my friend’s descent from height and ascent in destitution; is contingent upon my ascent in attending to the imperative of his height and the pathos of elevation; and contingent upon my descent in attending his destitution and nudity. The Just-passing-through of these movements is an “accidental reciprocity”. The purity of this excess is precisely in its impurity, the ambiguous indeterminability of a simultaneity of ethics and enjoyment in a non-extensive space. In this “accidental” Just-passing-through of me and my friend passes a trace of a ‘friendship’ of ethics and enjoyment.

‘Friendship,’ the Friend, my friend is a good-gift, a gift of the Good, a smile in the work of justice. In this ‘beautiful trauma’ I undergo a “subjection and exultation” that speaks of my freedom in responsibility. The other’s movement-toward-me invites an activity-of-reception. This activity is posterior to the advent of consciousness and thus does not efface my infinite responsibility. This invitation invites me to a relation that contests calculation and yet is conditioned upon my reception. (“Freedom in the genuine sense can be only a contestation of this book-keeping by a gratuity” [ibid., p. 125].) The

gratuity with which I give the bread from my mouth, in ‘friendship’, occurs as a gratuity directed at me, even me! This gift is not a return or else it would establish an economy. This gift is unconditioned, a good-gift, a gift of the Good. It is extraneous to my responsibility or to the accomplishment of the self (I am always and ineffaceably singular and responsible, singular as responsible in the one-for-the-other). The “inspiration, heteronomy, ... the very pneuma of the psyche”, in this trauma of the Good “reabsorbs, or redeems, the violence of non-freedom” (ibid., p. 123). My friend reminds me that the Good buys back economy. In friendship, me and my friend repeat a tracing of ‘friendship’ between ethics and enjoyment, an ambiguous Just-passing-through of freedom and responsibility. Redemption, the Good, is the condition of possibility of the ‘friendship’, the Friend, my friend.

My friend is hope in the task of justice, hope for a justice to come: the trace of ‘friendship’ between ethics and enjoyment, of freedom and responsibility. My friend occurs as a luxurious Just-passing-through, a non-extensive space of taking-place and the reception of this intimate yet indeterminable gift with-in yet beyond-welcome in my home. My friend is a consolation of the Good, a smile that refuses totalization or any abjection of responsibility. My friend is a gift! She is ‘best’, my best-friend, signifying the infinite height of the Good, a good-gift that is the best of the Good, my friend, my very best-friend! Unspoken and unspeakable as indeterminability, yet read as a passing through, a trace of ‘friendship’ otherwise than political, a grace in the task of justice.

About the Author



Jack Marsh, a recent graduate of the University of North Carolina in Charlotte (USA), is a first-year graduate student at Boston College. He plans to continue his education in philosophy toward the professional end of teaching and continued research in the field. His current philosophical interests include phenomenology, deconstruction, hermeneutics, and critical theory. Jack has had a number of papers published in journals such as *Dialogue*, *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes* and the *American Philosophical Association Journal of Newsletters*.

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Notes

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (trans. Kathleen Blamey), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. For an excellent Levinasian response to and critique of *OA*, see Richard Cohen "Ricoeur and the lure of self-esteem," *Ethics, Exegesis, and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 283-325.

² Cf. Stern-Gillet, Suzanne. *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.