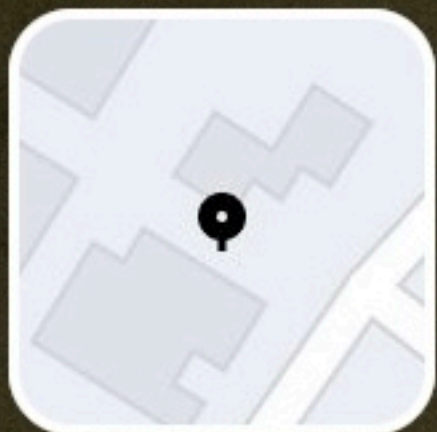


Help





(John 5), Jesus went to Jerusalem. During his stay there, the Jews were greatly offended that on one occasion he performed an act of kindness for a poor and sick person on the Sabbath. They regarded this as a desecration of their



- 89 holy / day, and thought that Jesus was presumptuously exempting himself from a God-given commandment, indeed usurping a right belonging only to God and equating his own authority with that of the Deity. Jesus told them: "When you regard your ecclesiastical statutes and positive precepts as the highest law given to mankind, you fail to recognize man's dignity and his capacity to derive from his own self the concept of divinity and the comprehension of the divine will. Whoever does not honor this capacity within himself does not revere the Deity. That which a human being is able to call his self, that which transcends death and destruction and will determine its own just deserts, is capable of governing itself. It makes itself known as reason; when it legislates, it does not depend on anything beyond itself; nor can it delegate a different standard of judgment to any other authority in heaven or on earth.

"I do not pass off what I teach as some notion of my own, as something that belongs to me. I do not demand that anyone should accept it on my authority, for I am not seeking glory. I submit it only to the judgment of universal reason, that it might determine each individual to belief or nonbelief. But how could you allow reason to count as the highest criterion of knowledge and belief, since you have never heard the divine voice, have never heeded the resonance of this voice in your hearts, and so now refuse to pay attention to someone who strikes this chord? For you fancy yourselves to be in exclusive possession of the knowledge of God's will, and make what is allegedly due to you in preference to all other human beings the special object of your ambition. You keep appealing to Moses, always to Moses, and so base your faith upon the alien authority of a single individual! Simply read your own holy books—supposing you have the spirit of truth and virtue—and you will find evidence of this spirit there. And you will also find an indictment of the pride with which you flatter yourselves; indeed your narrowness does not allow you to lift your eyes to anything loftier than soulless erudition and mechanical customs."



My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. {5:18} Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. {5:19} Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. {5:20} For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. {5:21} For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth [them;] even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. {5:22} For the Father

judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: {5:23} That all [men] should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. {5:24} Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. {5:25} Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. {5:26} For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; {5:27} And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. {5:28} Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, {5:29} And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. {5:30} I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. {5:31} If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

{5:32} There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. {5:33} Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. {5:34} But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. {5:35} He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

{5:36} But I have greater witness than [that] of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. {5:37} And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. {5:38} And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

{5:39} Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. {5:40} And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. {5:41} I receive not honour from men. {5:42} But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. {5:43} I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. {5:44} How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that [cometh] from God only? {5:45} Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is [one] that accuseth you, [even] Moses, in whom ye trust. {5:46} For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. {5:47} But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

In the final pages of *Totality and Infinity*, we find the same themes of hospitable peace and uprooted wandering. Bypassing the political in the usual sense of the term, the same logic opens a wholly other space: before, beyond, outside the State. But one must wonder why it now centers this “situation,” no longer on the femininity of welcoming, but on paternal fecundity, on what Levinas calls, and this would be another large question, yet another marvel, the “marvel of the family.” This marvel concretizes “the infinite time of fecundity”—a non-biological fecundity, of course—“the instant of eroticism and the infinity of paternity.”<sup>99</sup>

Though they are placed under the sign of a declared peace and hospitality (“Metaphysics, or the relation to the other, is accomplished as service and as hospitality”),<sup>100</sup> the “Conclusions” of *Totality and Infinity* no longer relate



this "hospitable welcome" to "the feminine being" ("the hospitable welcome par excellence," "the welcoming one par excellence," "welcoming in itself" of "The Dwelling") but to paternal fecundity, which opens up "an infinite and discontinuous time,"<sup>101</sup> and which, as we recalled above, has an essential, if not exclusive, relation with the son, with each son insofar as he is a "unique son," an "only son" [*fil unique*], a "chosen son." Where the feminine being seemed to be the figure of "the welcoming one par excellence," the father now becomes the infinite host or the host of the infinite.

It is a question of opposing to the State what is here inscribed on only one side of sexual difference, under the sole law of paternity, namely, the "infinite time of fecundity," and not the "egoist protestation of subjectivity." With this insistent gesture, with this protestation against subjective protestation, Levinas seems to want to distance himself from two thinkers who are very close to him: from both a certain Kierkegaard (whose interpretation of the "sacrifice" of Isaac and of the paternal figure of Abraham he contests elsewhere) and a certain Rosenzweig. Before both of them, he feigns to be tempted for a moment by the Hegelian argument that would favor the universality of the State. He feigns this, but only so as to let it be heard without feigning that one must not close oneself up in the subjective finitude of the *ego*—something from which "fecundity," precisely, the infinite time of the father-son relation, would protect us:

Against this egoist protestation of the subjectivity, against this protestation in the first person, the universalism of Hegelian reality will perhaps prevail. . . . The I is conserved then in goodness, without its resistance to system manifesting itself as the egoist cry of the subjectivity, still concerned for happiness or salvation, as in Kierkegaard.<sup>102</sup>