

Rel. 667: The Problem of God in Levinas

Fall, 2004 – Syracuse University

Dr. John D. Caputo

Required Texts

On Escape (Stanford UP ppbk)

Existence and Existents (DuquesneUP, ppbk)

Time and the Other (Duquesne UP ppbk)

Totality and Infinity (Duquesne UP ppbk)

Otherwise than Being (Duquesne UP ppbk)

Of God Who Comes to Mind (Stanford UP, ppbk.)

Reserve Room

The best introduction to Levinas=s thought is by Levinas himself, a collection of interviews entitled *Ethics and Infinity* (Duquesne UP). For a relatively simple and clear introduction, see Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to Levinas* (Purdue UP). Edith Wyschogrod=s recently revised *Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (Fordham UP) is particularly good on *Totality and Infinity*. Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame UP) is reliable. For a more advanced study, see John Llewelyn, *Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (Routledge) and for Levinas=s relationship to Derrida, see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Blackwell).

Course Requirements

3 Research Papers (of equal value)

These papers should be approximately 3,500 words long. They should be prepared in accordance with a standard style sheet and should be correctly documented (notes and bibliography).

The first paper should address the question of escape/transcendence in the early writings and is due October 1.

The second paper should address the question of God in *Totality and Infinity* and is due November 12.

The third paper should address the question of God in *Otherwise than Being* and *The God Who Comes to Mind*. I have no problem with your taking an official AIncomplete@ (which will be without prejudice) and handing the work in to me by January 7, 2005. If you want to get it into me in time to avoid an incomplete, feel free to do so.

Keep in touch with me by email about developing topics and of course feel free to make an appointment to talk it over.

Office (HL 431)

Although I have scheduled office hours BTuesday, 3:00–5:00, Wednesday, 1:00–3:00Byou should, for safety's sake, make an appt by email at johncaputo@comcast.net or jcaputo@syr.edu.

Topic

Levinas describes the ethical relation in terms that are clearly adapted from the Hebraic model of the transcendence of God, so much so, that one wonders what is left of God once the language of divine transcendence has been expended on the other person. I will pursue that question by following the trajectory of Levinas=s major writings, beginning with *On Escape* (1935), an early work that anticipates a good deal of his later work, two works of the post-war years, *Existence and Existents* (1947) and *Time and the Other* (1947), which contain famous analyses of the *Ail y a.* Then I will turn to his two major works, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974), which I will treat at greater length and conclude with *A God and Philosophy* (1975) and other essays in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, along with *ADiachrony and Representation* (1983) in *Time and the Other*.

The first half of the session will be largely lecture (with questions of course), the second half will be devoted to seminar discussion.

SYLLABUS

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| August | 31 | Introduction. <i>On Escape</i> |
| September | 7 | <i>Existence and Existents</i> |
| | 14 | <i>Time and the Other</i> |
| 21 | | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , II, A, B |
| 28 | | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , II, C, D, E |
| October | 5 | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , III, A, B |
| 12 | | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , III, C |
| 19 | | <i>Totality and Infinity</i> , IV |
| 26 | | <i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i> , Chapter 1 |
| November | 2 | <i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i> , Chapter 2 |
| 9 | | <i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i> , Chapter 3 |

16 *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Chapter 4

23 Thanksgiving

30 *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Chapters 5, 6

December 7 A God and Philosophy, @ *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, pp. 55–78
and A Diachrony and Representation, @ *Time and the Other*, pp. 97–120