

HELLENIC AND JEWISH IN LEVINAS'S WRITINGS

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SÍNTESE – O artigo mostra que o “grego” está presente no pensamento “judaico” de Levinas e que os escritos “gregos” possuem uma dimensão “judaica”: *Yafet* é recebido nos alojamentos de *Shem* e vice-versa. A tese aqui formulada é que os escritos confessionais desenvolvem-se paralelamente aos escritos profissionais. Embora o discurso seja marcadamente diferente em cada uma das obras, e apesar de Levinas não tentar harmonizá-los ou conciliá-los, ele se esforça por “enunciar em grego os princípios que a Grécia não conhece”. A sua filosofia se desenvolve paralelamente à redescoberta daquilo que o Ocidente esqueceu e reprimiu: que o ser humano é criado “na imagem de Deus”. Em um pensamento de estilo inclusivo, Levinas é aqui apresentado como um viajante freqüente entre Atenas e Jerusalém, como um filósofo e um judeu; um “grego”, mas um “grego” indiscutivelmente judeu.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Pensamento “grego”. Pensamento “hebraico”. Levinas.

ABSTRACT – The article shows that “Greek” is present in Levinas’s “Hebrew” thinking and that the “Greek” writings have a “Hebrew” dimension: *Yafet* is received in the tents of *Shem* and vice versa. The thesis formulated here is that the confessional writings run parallel with the professional writings. Although the discourse is quite different in both writings, and although Levinas certainly does not attempt to harmonize or to conciliate, he endeavors to “enounce in Greek the principles Greece did not know”. His philosophy was paralleled with the re-discovery of what the West forgot and repressed: that the human being is created “in God’s image.” In an inclusive thinking, Levinas is presented here as a frequent traveler between Athens and Jerusalem, as a philosopher and a Jew, a “Greek,” but undeniably a Jewish one.

KEY WORDS – “Greek” thinking. “Hebrew” thinking. Levinas.

Beginning 1981, Levinas answered a question of Philippe Nemo concerning the “phenomenology of the face” as follows: “Je ne sais si l’on peut parler de phénoménologie du visage, puisque la phénoménologie décrit ce qui apparaît. De même, je me demande si l’on peut parler d’un regard tourné vers le visage, car le regard est connaissance, perception. Je pense plutôt que l’accès au visage est d’emblée éthique.[...] le visage est ce qui nous interdit de tuer. “

Therefore, the “face” is not a mere phenomenon, it does not merely appear. It is rather what turns to me, appeals to me, faces me and resists my possession. Consequently, the Other is not know, grasped and conceived; he is irreducible to

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the self with its all encompassing knowledge. In the face there is instruction; something demanding is expressed in it as from high. The Other is in this sense my master, although or precisely because he is the poor, the widow and the orphan. He pulls me out of myself and I am obliged to give with full hands. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas brings phenomenology to the point that it has to deal with the “*épi-phanie*” of the face as the appeal of the Other disturbing the interesting movement of the I that reflects the being and perseveres in it. Also in the Jewish tradition the attention to the Other is primordial and justice comes before knowledge that wants clarity above all. The hunger of the Other, Levinas writes, is sacred.

A second term which Levinas discusses in *Totality and Infinity* is the subject. The I is conceived not as reflecting the Being (Heidegger) or as mainly constituting the world (Husserl). The I is rather constituted by the Other, awaked by him. The I, very concretely in the world, is called by the Other. Levinas describes the possibility of going beyond *Sein*, beyond the reducing movement of one’s interested existence. This description stems from a deeper attention to the I that performs the phenomenological reduction and to the phenomenon of the Other: it points to an I that receives its meaning not from being, but from that which is not reducible to being. The I that comes into the focus is an I that listens to what is beyond being, to what is other than being. Beneath my consciousness, I am moved and touched by the Other, there is a disturbance that provokes my care. The subject is accused, subjected to the Other with his infinite demand; he has the Other in his skin. I am obsessed by the infinite in me. The I is thus first of all created, addressed, called by his or her personal name. It is not the neutral *Dasein*, but elected before his own consciousness and reason.

I resume: In Levinas’s thinking, the face is more than phenomenon and the I is touched before it gives meaning. The thesis that I want to develop in my lecture is that these insights in Levinas’s philosophy run parallel with what he writes in his Jewish essays, which contain the divine command “Thou shalt not kill” and an approach of the I as “called.” More specifically, I want to show that Levinas confronted philosophical, “Greek” thinking with “Hebrew” thinking: there is a “Hebrew” dimension in his “Greek” thinking. At the same time, “Greek” is present in his “Hebrew” writings.

Although Levinas’s Jewish writings greatly differ from the professional ones, they have also much in common. Both writings express a beyond, that transforms the I into an animated being, and shed light on the loftiness of an existence in humble service of the Other. Susan Handelman has noted that all of Levinas’s key philosophical ideas are found in the Jewish writings. Indeed, many terms and ideas of Levinas’s ethical metaphysics return in his Jewish writings. Vice versa, the philosophical writings contain words that stem from the Jewish heritage, such as the the command “Thou shalt not murder” and the declaration “Here I am,” “*me voici*”, “*hineni*.”

Robert Gibbs has observed that the Jewish dimension of Levinas's thought has been largely ignored, or honored by a mention and then ignored. Sure, Levinas did not see himself as a Jewish theologian, but he *was* a Jewish thinker whose texts on Judaism and Talmud run parallel with his philosophical works. The Jewish aspect of his thought has not received appropriate attention. Scholars such as Shalom Rosenberg, Shmuel Wygoda, Catherine Chaliel or David Banon revealed the importance of Levinas's thought for the understanding of Judaism today. One has indeed to assign to Levinas an eminent place in the pantheon of contemporary Jewish thinkers. But, until now, no encompassing work has been written on Levinas's Jewish texts and their relevance for his philosophy. This is surprising, since in both types of his writings, Levinas points to real human transcendence in the ethical relation to the non assumable Other.

Levinas expresses his view on Judaism in his Talmudic readings and in essays as those of *Difficult Freedom*. In his Jewish writings, he continues to speak "Greek," of course not as explicit as in the professional writings. He does not speak here the language of the pious or of the theologian, but neither does he speak the unequivocal language of the philosopher. He wanted to receive Yafet in the tents of Shem. The tradition of Athens is in service of the tradition of Jerusalem as "wisdom for love." The logic of the Greek brings an understanding between human beings, but one must *agree* to speak. For Levinas, it is the obliging Divine word that makes Greek universalism possible. In philosophical terms: the obsession by the other precedes consciousness and reason. Dialogue or better address precedes logic.

Difficult Freedom, upon which I will focus for a moment, reformulates religious life in terms of an answer to the demand of the Other, which opens the perspective of the infinite. The book discusses general themes concerning religion and ethics, but also specific Jewish themes such as sacred history, election and Messianism.

In the first article, Levinas writes that for a long time Jews thought that religious situations gained their spiritual importance from ethical relations. When Judaism entered the community of nations in the 19th century, moralism was perceived as the *raison d'être* of Jews. Jewish atheists joining the liberal and social movements testify to a religious tradition of a demanding justice. On the other hand, the Jew, who had just entered the general world and had begun to use the language and thought of the surrounding world, was already opposed to it.

Further along the article, Levinas writes about the face of the Other resisting the grasp; and thus about the necessity of breaking away from violence through conversation, establishing face-to-face contact. All these themes are of course eminently present in the philosophical writings. Conscience is defined as the ethical impossibility of murder, and religion should not be conceived differently. The Other is not known, he is saluted. Looking at a look is being confronted by a demand. The Other "regards you," his eyes as the most exposed part of the body are unprotected. Yet they resist possession. They demand: "Thou shall not kill" – positively: perform social justice. The themes of language, of the face, from which one receives a command, and of the Other who is not known, are all central in *Totality and Infinity*.

The second text in *Difficult Freedom* is the famous article “A Religion for Adults.” From the outset, Levinas writes on human autonomy, based upon supreme heteronomy. This reminds us of the I of Levinas’s philosophical writings that is moved by the Other before consciousness. Moreover, Judaism is presented as a particularity promoting universalism. It disenchants the world; instead of the numinous and sacred violently transporting man beyond his own power and will, it stresses the freedom and rationality of the human being. Philosophy is therefore akin to the non-violent rationality of Judaism.

As is well known, every detail in Judaism finally expresses for Levinas the ethical: justice brings the human being closer to God. As a good Lithuanian Jew, he also stresses education, which is instruction; the ignorant cannot really be pious. Moreover, there is only recognition of the face of the Other when difficult rules are set upon one’s own nature. Ritual law is “the rigorous discipline tending towards this justice.” The originality of Judaism lies in the combination of much goodness and much legalism.

Of course one has to be careful not to draw too much parallels between Levinas’s philosophy and his Jewish writings. Not as in his philosophical writings where “God” is the always far away *Illeity* – the infinite suggested in the face of the Other – Levinas writes about God’s “presence,” that is felt in relationship with human beings. Yet, again as in his philosophy, where service to the Other is not servitude, the contact with an exterior voice does not compromise a human being’s sovereignty or enslave him. Levinas explains that the self-consciousness is inseparable from the consciousness of justice and that by relating to the Other, one relates to God. To bring about a just society is an eminently religious act. The implementation of such a society is Jewish Messianism.

For Levinas, election is not a privilege, but a responsibility; it is the nobility of entering into an unequal relationship. Moral conscience is thus consciousness of election. This position, “apart from the nations,” is for Levinas realized in Israel, which is first of all a moral category.

One of the strong characteristics of Judaism for Levinas, is that, before landscapes and towns, the Jew discovers man. The world becomes, in Jewish perspective, intelligible in the human face, not in houses, temples and bridges. In all his writings, Levinas celebrates this exilic situation. Moreover, he maintains that morality creates freedom from history, a right to judge history. Anonymous history does not have the right of judgment.

It would be easy to continue and point to the presence of other philosophical notions in *Difficult Freedom*. So for instance, the notion of the uniqueness of the subject as responsibility for the Other, the concept of a humanizing Law, or the “miracle of exteriority,” in which man is capable of listening to what comes from outside.

All the articles in *Difficult Freedom* deal with *Judaism* as an *ethical experience*. In his philosophy too, duty as infinite duty is central. Through the answer “Here I am” to the unlimited appeal of the Other, one testifies to the infinite. This is parallel with Levinas’s writing on the “infinite” of the infinite in me. In Levi-

nas's writing on the prophets and again in his philosophy, the access to the "face" means access to the idea of God, because the relation to the infinite remains a "Desire," that challenges the sovereignty of the ego. There is fear of God in the fear of the Other. The ethical demand is also the basis for Jewish *tolerance*, which bears the weight of the others. This tolerance is for Levinas Jewish *and* profoundly human. Jewish identity is patience and the fatigue of a responsibility, a stiff neck that –like Atlas—supports the universe.

Difficult Freedom contains a particular concept of God as *ha-Qadosh*, the Holy/ the separated, which one also finds in Levinas's general writings under the name "infinity." The God of Israel who is separated, permits human being's freedom. Direct contact with Him is absent; the mediation of reasons and of a teaching, of the Torah, is required. In this way, a place is created for consciousness and knowledge. The idea of a God who does not forgive in place of the other man is parallel with the Cartesian idea of the infinite, much appreciated by Levinas. God is not powerful, but powerless, His kenosis is the humility of leaving His trace in the Other, without forcing man to respond. This leaves man with his entire responsibility for creating a world beyond the necessary political, social and economic organization. In this way, man becomes responsible for the infinite and God's humility appears to be greater than His greatness.

In Levinas's interpretation of the Jewish tradition, God comes to the mind in the wrinkles of the face, in the face that cries for help and reminds me of my infinite responsibility. In the never ending movement of the Other's demand, infinity comes to the mind. The only thing one "knows" about God is that He commands, but His commandment comes before my hearing of His voice. Something prior to my consciousness awakens my consciousness. God causes my non-indifference, brings in contact with the other man. The idea of God comes to the mind when the Other affects me, before I answer his demand for help.

Also Levinas's concepts of *freedom and holiness of man* as they are discussed in the articles of *Difficult Freedom*, return in his philosophy. For Levinas, man is a free, separated being and his self-consciousness is immediately consciousness of the moral self. "Holy" is the person who is more attached to the being of the Other than to his own. Holiness is man's proximity to the Other. This approach to holiness runs parallel with Levinas's protest against the Heideggerian myth of nature in which man's uniqueness stems from reflecting the Being, and not from his being touched by the Other.

The preeminent Jewish type of the Pharisee establishes contact with God without merging with God. Through his study of Torah, he listens to what comes from the outside. The Pharisee combines goodness and laws. But is not every man called upon to combine love and Law? Judaism appears here as pioneer of a mature humanity.

Also the idea of *election* which is expressed in the articles returns in Levinas's philosophy. Israel's election far from contradicting universalism, is a function of it. Being elected is not consciousness of exceptional rights, but of exceptional tasks: it is the prerogative of moral conscience itself. The Jewish concept of elec-

tion, far from being anterior to a universalism, where all differences are blotted out, includes this abolition of differences as a condition, yet is indispensable to it. Also in Levinas's philosophy, the I is "elected."

In his Jewish writings Levinas uses the language of Shem, but also that of Yafet. He talks 'Greek' in his "Hebrew." Nonetheless, this "Greek" speech about a disturbance in the I and on an asymmetrical relation is not far from the "Hebrew" one, in which Levinas talks about a transcendent God and about man as "creature." Although he does not entirely succeed, he avoids using mere theological language.

Levinas makes the ancient Jewish texts 'speak,' making them relevant for today. This is much more than actualization or apologetics. For Levinas, "Hebrew" requires "Greek," philosophical reasoning. I agree with R. Gibbs, who maintains that the best reading of "Hebrew" for Levinas is the one in "Greek," in a universal language. Yet, another, more colorful and metaphoric language is possible in which many things come into expression that are repressed and forgotten in the universal language. If this Semitic, polysemic, particular language is critical towards the universal Greek one, the study of it becomes important and vital for "Greek" itself.

In his confessional writings, Levinas opened up Judaism to philosophy. He thought that philosophy as universal discourse and rational Judaism were not far from each other. Nevertheless, in Judaism something comes into the fore that is not to be subsumed in the universal discourse. In his professional writings, on the other hand, Levinas wanted a philosophy that becomes 'other.' He put "Hebrew" in the Greek discourse, leaving something untranslatable in the language in which everything is translated.

In Levinas's view, philosophy is not a humble servant to a religion, which offers answers for everything and comfort for everybody. Neither is religion "*aufgehoben*," taken into account and neutralized in philosophy. Philosophy and religion speak different languages which, however, are not unrelated. God is linked to "difficult freedom." Levinas conceived Judaism as the prototype of a disturbance in the I that does not allow the withdrawal from the responsibility for the Other. He perceived it as an invitation to listen to what is always exterior to totality, exterior to what cannot be synthesized. The Jewish experience of the Other precedes and informs Levinas's philosophy. Judaism is the message of the I as a welcoming host and even as "hostage," it is the anti-Ulysses movement of Abraham, which implies not being rooted, but being transplanted in the realm of the Other. Not at home, anti-identitarian, the bearers of the Law are the contrary of the same, they are the opposite of a *force qui va*. They distance themselves from the one and for all accomplishment of the infinite in the finite and recall the disproportionality of the infinite in the finite. They dynamically represent a protest against the fullness of redemption here and now, because they remain in hope for the wholly other that is yet to come. In an anti-totalizing move, Abraham set off from Ur never to return; he is called and listens to a voice, which opens a future unknown, unseen and unforeseeable. He goes to u-topia, to the *non locus*, to what

has never been there, to what is absent and still approachable. Levinas's Jewish thought testifies to this positive absence. In the twentieth century that saw totalitarisms and the Shoah, he reinterprets Judaism as a rupture of totality, as suspicious of the ideological, nationalist and imperialist totalitarities that endanger the human being. Judaism is a being moved by the Other causing a move out of the self.

In the philosophical landscape of France, Levinas was one of the philosophers who was not afraid using the word "God." In all of his writings, he linked the term to what unsettles the settled I and brings it out of himself. "God" is what makes possible the exodus of the I out of the sameness as the land of slavery.

Being a religious person comes to being vulnerable and exposed, to the point of substitution. The eminently religious act consists in the welcoming of the Other who modifies the Same. Religion itself is interestingly defined as the relation between the same and the Other without totality. In a time that Marx, Nietzsche and Freud buried God, after Nietzsche's solemn declaration of the "death of God," Levinas again spoke about Him, or better towards Him, *à-Dieu*. The I may become a pure present for the Other. This pure welcoming asks however for organization, which can potentially oppress the Other, but also guarantees the rights of the other man. Peace is higher than truth, proximity higher than knowledge; at the same time, peace and proximity ask for truth and knowledge, that remain under the scepter of ethics.

Levinas's God is not the big eye that sees and is himself unseen. He is not the pro-vidence that foresees all. He is rather the unforeseeable, the invisible that is to be approached, and not seen, in proximity to the Other. The other man is so to say the "apple of His eye." "God" is the unlimited in my limited world, the infinity in my finite enclosedness, linked to the always exterior, to the not representable call that brings me out of myself. He is not contaminated by being; He "is" not, He is otherwise than being, which is not being otherwise. God's name, which is not to be pronounced, points to His absolute transcendence. In my move towards the Other, this name is at stake.

One could object that one has to separate the philosophical discourse from other ways of talking. Yet, these different languages, although distinguished, are also linked to each other in a subtle manner. One cannot put aside Levinas's pre-philosophical Jewish experiences that are the *Sitz im Leben* of his philosophy. In *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas maintained that the biblical and the philosophical thinking are not contradictory. The texts of the great philosophers and their interpretation are close to the Bible and its multiple interpretations. Levinas never used biblical verses as an argument in his philosophical discourse. Yet, the God of the Bible remains for him in philosophy the criterion of the spirit. Levinas explicitly states that philosophy is not the place of the original significance of human existence.

Scholarly works on Levinas did not sufficiently investigate what is the exact nature of the relationship between Judaism and philosophy in his writings. Whereas others excluded biblical thinking from thinking, Levinas brings both together. The

experience of the meeting with the Other, who is always at distance, is the experience of the absolute, of the separated, of the holy. Biblical thinking is thus seen by Levinas as a source of thinking. His ethical metaphysics runs parallel with his thinking about Abraham, who “leaves his country for ever to go to a still unknown land.”

Levinas’s translation of the message of Jerusalem in terms of Athens is not merely the formulation of the terms of the religious discourse in those of a secular, rational discourse for all mankind. He reflects upon a life that is exemplary universal and as such important for philosophy itself. Levinas connected the Saying of ethics with the said of philosophy. Every translation is a treason, but nevertheless necessary. There is a clear relation between Levinas’s pre-philosophical experience and the conceptual thinking. Hebrew and Greek, ethics and cognition, are different languages, but not without relation. In his philosophical work, Levinas tries to formulate something that is not adequately expressible in the logical terms of reason, he formulates otherness in terms of sameness.

One cannot fully understand the professional writings without linking them to the confessional ones. True, Levinas took great care not to publish his confessional writings in the same publishing house as the professional writings. Yet, in his entire oeuvre Athens and Jerusalem fructify each other.

In an interview with Shlomo Malka, who asked Levinas concerning the relationship between his philosophical oeuvre and his “religious” works, Levinas answered that he will not be the historian of his own philosophy. He nevertheless added that in his philosophical work there are “memories of an experience that is not rigorously intellectual” and that, in the end, one has to come to the universal language of “Greek.”

Levinas endeavored to “enounce in Greek the principles Greece did not know.” He built a philosophy and a Jewish thought that make explicit a life, to which Jewish singularity witnesses. Levinas’ is a loyalty simultaneously toward “Greek” and “Hebrew.” He opens up the philosophical rationality toward a source of thinking that is long ignored. He never wanted to “harmonize” or “conciliate.” Philosophy is not the locus of the first meaning, the place where meaning starts. This place or non-place is the signifyingness of ethics as opening to the other man, ethics that shines in the founding documents of Jewish tradition. Levinas sheds his philosophical light on this ethics, called an “optics” in both of his writings.

Should one not take rabbi Akiva as serious as Plato? Levinas thought that the religious meaning of Talmudic texts is “not only transposable into a philosophical language, but refers to philosophical problems”. He claims that “the thought of Doctors of the Talmud proceeds from a meditation that is radical enough also to satisfy the demands of philosophy.” The Talmudic texts discuss problems with philosophical significance. There is even an advantage in the language of the Sages, since “ideas do not become fixed by a process of conceptualization which would extinguish many of the sparks dancing beneath the gaze riveted upon the Real.” Contrary to Hegel, Levinas was convinced that Judaism was not to be surpassed by philosophy. Jewish wisdom would even have advantages over the “Greek” one. And reason is born out of the need to justify something before someone else.

The philosophical movement out of the anonymous "Being" that masters the *Dasein* and out of the enclosedness of the I that prefers the phenomenological reduction was paralleled with Levinas's re-discovery of what the West "forgot" and "repressed": the being-for-the Other or the being created "in God's image," attested to in the writings of Bible and Talmud. His metaphysics was born in the need for a thought that would remind philosophy of what was frequently "forgotten". The message of the Talmud as the eminent Jewish library which was often burned, remained in the minds of great masters from whose humanity the West may learn. Levinas rediscovered the importance of the message of Jerusalem for Europe. He formulated this message in the non-metaphoric language of Greece. It remains difficult, but necessary to formulate eminent otherness that escapes objective description in the language of sameness. "Greek" language itself had for Levinas its source in the Saying, which transcends every said.

The French professor was at the same time a great Jew whose life was "dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror" and who reflected upon his tradition in which he discovered the humanism of the other man. The ancient Babylonian Academies were for him not less important than the Academy of Athens.

Humanism and Judaism were not opposed, neither were they harmonized. Levinas saw Judaism as a kind of corrective of a humanism that considered freedom as the highest value, forgetting that responsibility is the foundation of freedom itself. In its "difficult freedom," Judaism has a special contribution to humanity. Levinas expressed in his *entire oeuvre* the truth of an inescapable responsibility. He revealed how Jewish life is a particularity that makes universality more human, by introducing the ideas of an election, which makes unique and of a God whose infinity ruptures the totality of the same. All this influenced his philosophical thinking, in which he attempted to formulate that otherness is never to be contained in the same and that the I is primarily touched by the Other. Levinas's philosophy of engagement toward the Other and solidarity with him, is nurtured by his pre-philosophical Jewish experience. There is no clash between philosophy and the "Saying" that stems from the Other's face. The ethical approach of the Other and the demand for holiness are two types of speech that refer to each other in a complex and refined dialogue. When I interviewed Levinas in 1992, he told me that one has to know how to translate.

Levinas, a master in translating, was the first to disclose in modern times the relevance of Talmudic thinking for the world at large. He opened up the Jewish world to philosophy and was well aware of the problem of a "Greek" translation that does not adequately render "Hebrew," which respects the disproportion between the signifier and the signified. He traveled between Jerusalem and Athens, for the great benefit of each of these cultures. It is an act of great peace to bring different worlds and languages together, in "hospitality." Levinas easily could talk in the universal language of Greece about a way of life that is not exclusively Jewish, but nevertheless eminently so.

Against an entire philosophical tradition in which the Other is leveled down, “known,” Levinas –living in the Jewish tradition-- introduced a new approach to the Other. This approach is well documented or better: testified to in the Jewish literature. The Other in Jewish tradition and in Levinas’s ethical metaphysics, does not ask to be known, but to be greeted, with “*Grüss Gott*” and “*à-Dieu.*” The I in both parts of Levinas’s writings is constituted by the Other.

Levinas does not consider the Jewish heritage as something entirely untranslatable and idiomatic. True, the Jewish tradition *is* singular, yet, it is a singularity that fructifies universalism. Levinas argues that nothing in the Jewish tradition is less than at the universal level. The Jewish heritage is more than universal, it is an excess to this universality, a surplus of which universality is in need of. Jews are pioneers in rupturing totality.

Judaism is finally hospitality. To be a Jew is to become a stranger to yourself, even in your own land in order to listen to an ever exterior voice. Levinas’s double panel of Jewish and philosophical thinking is a challenge and urgent invitation to listen to a humanizing voice. Judaism and in fact humanity that reaches maturity equals to be exiled from the own assurances and safety and to risk the adventure of Abraham.

The Jewish, prophetic God who cares, suffers, and counts our tears, is not the unmovable God of Aristotle. Nevertheless, Levinas wanted to cast the biblical God in the philosophical language, which in a way is allergic to the Other. Did he try the impossible? Levinas knew that the philosophical language is inadequate to translate the welcoming of the Other, but there was no choice. “Hebrew” had the first word, but he had to speak “Greek” afterwards. Levinas was a great European in defining Europe as constituted by the Bible and the Greek: both are constitutive for the old continent.

The ethical, “Hebrew” sensibility required “Greek” organization and discussion. The Saying required a said that is incessantly unsaid. Greek is necessary in order to understand the Bible, but the Bible with its prescriptions precedes the description. Also in Plato’s *epikeina tes ousias* and in Decartes’ idea of the infinite, Levinas found a lofty thinking that is parallel with the biblical thinking and he concluded that one has to justify his being. Both Judaism and philosophy demythologize the world and ask for a rational approach of reality. In Jewish texts, Levinas found a Saying that leaves its traces in the said. In his *inclusive* thinking, Judaism and philosophy were linked to the humanism of the other man. He was a frequent traveler between Athens and Jerusalem, a philosopher and a Jew, a Greek, but undeniably a Jewish one.