The Third Man:
Love and Masculinity in Levinas

If a thing loves it is infinite---William Blake
Philosophy is the wisdom of love in the service of love---Levinas[1]

Toxic masculinity is an extension of the attributes we normally associate with the masculine, The supermarket is an ideal place to observe the culture of your community. Here are three examples of how masculinity displayed itself at my recent visit to our local supermarket: (1) As you walk through the supermarket aisles, men will be oblivious to their surroundings and to people trying to get by or to their favorite food item on the shelves. Women, on the other hand, were always aware, looking around to see if they are in someone's way or if there are other people trying to get by. (2) As I was walking down a wide aisle that was completely empty, I was on the left side, and a man came towards me in the opposite direction. He moved to the left, and I was on the left, and we stopped in front of each other and stared, neither one of us willing to move out of the way, until finally we awkwardly parted ways. (3) As I returned my shopping cart to the store, I encountered a couple—a man and a woman—who were just about to take a cart from the pile at the opening to the store. I offered my cart to the couple, and the woman immediately accepted the offer and took my cart. The man, however, refused to take the cart, instead getting his own cart from the pile and making the woman return my cart to the pile.

What can we make of these curious incidents and what they tell us about masculinity? While these incidents don't seem to bear the marks of the types of toxic masculinity that we most often hear about (aggression, violence, interruption, taking up more space than necessary, misogyny), they do reveal some basic characteristics of how masculinity encounters the world and other humans within it. In the first case, it seems obvious that the privilege of a man as a

[1] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 162.

center of ego, secure in his negotiation of rights within the public sphere, has no need to encounter the other imposing itself upon his sphere. The woman, who often encounters the public sphere from a position of vulnerability, has developed a habit of looking around and seeing the way in which others impinge upon the needs of their ego. In the second case, we can see how the encounter with another immediately devolves into a negotiation of rights, with each side unwilling to cede its rights to another without negotiation or struggle. I found the third case to be most interesting and revealing. Here, the man is unwilling to accept help or generosity, since it would involve him in a personal relationship that might require gratitude or vulnerability, or pierce the fragile shell of ego behind which they possess rights and privilege.

In each case, masculinity has learned to define itself as an independent ego, valuable in its ability to fend for itself and secure rights and space and privilege in the negotiation between other persons in their society. The toxicity of some forms of masculinity arises from the way in which this kind of mentality is brutally enforced in male groups and in cultures as a way of policing this concept of the male, so bullying and aggression and constant testing require the assertion of masculinity in ways that become toxic.[2] The Levinasian distinction between the ethical response to the Face in love versus the insulated ego that protects itself from vulnerability gives us a natural way of understanding the way that toxic masculinity arises and how to frame a healthier alternative.

I will argue that one can find a way to use Levinas to elucidate the distinction between healthy and toxic masculinity by looking at the different senses of love in his work, which correspond to the Face and the social relations involved in the "Third". There are two ways that

[2] It is instructive to compare this to the way that Kate Manne has defined misogyny as the policing of the constraints of patriarchy, for example in Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Levinas talks about love as: (1) vision or awakening to Face and infinite responsibility,[3] and (2) the indifferent measuring and balancing of perspectives involved in the presence of the Third.[4] Toxic masculinity involves the reduction of Other to self and assertion of rights arising from the balancing of interests in justice and the third. A healthy masculinity is always vulnerable and open to the destabilization of every claim to privilege by the presence of the Other in the Face.

Levinas was wary of the concept of love as a basis for human social life. I think that it is possible to articulate a Levinasian way of understanding love that can form the basis for the solidarity of human social life, as well as an ideal of healthy masculinity. Some commentators think that Levinas's concept of love was too tied to Platonic concepts of need or desire to express the infinite responsibility one has for their neighbor.[5] Others take Levinas's comments about love being too intimate to form the basis of social relations as evidence that only references to the "third" and justice can form the basis of social relations.[6] In the first section, I trace the different ways Levinas uses the term "love" to find two distinct concepts that correspond to two senses of masculinity.

The Face not only destabilizes the self, but also reveals it as always already situated in relationship to a world of other persons, and allows us to feel that this solidarity is a precondition of our having a self. Dostoevsky had suggested that social isolation and hate were caused by a "laceration" arising from our inability to face the infinite responsibility for the other and that love is an acceptance or openness to our responsibility to all for all. Toxic masculinity arises

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[3] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 103.

[4] Emmanuel Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20.

[5] Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love: The Question of Invisibility* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 43; and M. Jamie Ferreira, "Kierkegaard and Levinas on Four Elements of the Biblical Love Commandment," in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religio*n, ed. J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 85.

[6] Emmanuel Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20; Anne-Marie Sondergaard Christensen, "Logstrup, Levinas and the Mother: Ethics, Love, and the Relationship to the Other," *The Monist* 103, no. 1 (2020). 8.

from this laceration. The acquiescence (in the sense that Spinoza or Simone Weil used the term) to our infinite responsibility is a Levinasian understanding of love that reveals that our individuality only exists in relation to our always already existing responsibility to an Other. In Section II, I try to show how the infinite responsibility of Levinasian ethics opens us up onto our presence in a greater world, a solidarity in a community, and the healthy attitudes that make a good man or woman or person.

The solidarity of infinite love requires that we take the value of human life to be infinite in a way that precludes the balancing rationality of justice. Simone Weil suggests a conception of justice as redress of harm that involves a substitution that allows equality of treatment even when there is an imbalance of strength.[7] While we must also be open to the impossibility of finding a rational decision procedure that tells us how to live together, the solidarity of love can be used to suggest practical guidelines that can shape a social order. I summarize these as "Love Here; Love More; and Love Stronger." Love the Face of the Other as it presents itself in proximity; Work to expand the range of one's proximity, be open to the encounter with more and more faces; Aim at openness and interactions that increase the strength and efficacy of one's reactions to our responsibility to the other. This resolve to remain open and true to our infinite responsibility, to never flee it or close ourselves off, is a Levinasian sense of love that can form the basis of our solidarity and provide a guide for our social order. It also defines a healthy sense of the ideal of what it means to be a man. In Section III, I try to develop a Levinasian sense of solidarity based on love and a healthy masculinity and humanity as its foundation. Love, properly conceived, forms the ground of all human solidarity and sociality.

[7] Simone Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," in *Waiting for God* (New York: Putnam's, 1951).

These three sections roughly correspond to the three theses of this paper:

1. **Double Dialectic and Ambiguity**: A reminder that the other side of the crushing infinite responsibility presented by the face is our awareness of a vulnerable grounding in an already existing world and language. Ambiguities in the meanings of love and solidarity arise from this doubleness.

2. **Phenomenology of Responsibility**: Our awareness of the face is not all disturbance and weight. We feel the call of an "otherwise than being," the horizon of an openness that grounds our social being, ties us to the Other that threatens our subjectivity, and presents to us as a kind of ecstasy.

3. **Wisdom of Love**: The aim of human politics and sociality, of a healthy masculinty, should be to advance and preserve the situations in which love can operate, in which the face to face and our response to it can flourish and grow. The service of love is not the Third or justice—the indifferent reconciliation of points of view—but increasing the domain in which love can operate. Integrating Simone Weil's view of justice as redress of harm that preserves the infinite worth of all parties can elucidate the view of community solidarity already present but hidden in Levinas.

I: **Two Senses of Love**

There are two senses in which Levinas uses the word love: (1) The encounter with the Other, a vision or awakening to the Face and infinite responsibility. (Love-O) (2) Love with interest or concupiscence. (Love-S) This includes love of neighbor based on interest or proximity or relationship and involves the reduction of Other to the same. Here is how Levinas talks of Love-O:

> From the start, the encounter with the Other is my responsibility for him. That is the responsibility for my neighbor, which is, no doubt, the harsh name for what we call love of one's neighbor; love without Eros, charity, love in which the ethical aspect dominates the passionate aspect, love without concupiscence. I don't very much like the word love, which is worn-out and debased. Let us speak instead of the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other.[8]

Love-S is a society of two, determined by proximity. The Morality-S of Justice presupposes the morality of Love-S (and both of these presuppose Love-O). Here is how Levinas describes this other sense of love:

> The affective warmth of love is the fulfillment of the consciousness of that satisfaction, that contentment, that fullness found outside the self, eccentric to it. The society of love is a society of two, a society of solitudes, resisting universality. Its universality can be constructed only in time, by successive infidelities, by the change of friends. This is the love of one's neighbor, determined by chance proximity, and, consequently, a love of one being to the detriment of another; always privilege, even if it is not preference. The morality of respect presupposes the morality of love. Love blinds respect which, impossible without blindness with regard to the third party, is but a pious intention oblivious to real evil.[9]

Love-O of neighbor is a responsibility makes this Love-S possible: “A responsibility that harbors the secret of sociality, the total gratuitousness of which, though it be ultimately in vain, is called the love of one's neighbour, love without concupiscence, but as irrefrangible as death.”[10]

Ambiguities of Solidarity and the Social: There will, likewise, be an ambiguity in the kinds of social realities that arise from these two kinds of love. Sociality-S would be solidarity as a member of type or as having a common interest. This is the sociality of justice, an indifferent measuring and balancing of perspectives (the Third). But there is a more basic relation within a

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[8] Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 103.
[9] Emmanuel Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20.
[10] Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and Transcendence,” in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 30.

society, Sociality-O, which is the infinite background of all social relations in world and language not our own, the "otherwise than being" that we awaken to in the Face, the ground of all personal relations. "Sociality is that alterity of the face, of the for-the-other that calls out to me, a voice that rises within me before all verbal expression, in the mortality of the I, from the depths of my weakness. That voice is an order."[11] The intersubjective relation of Love-S is the negation of Society-S (Justice). The tunnel vision of the interest driven obsession of the lover, in this sense, with the beloved, excludes a wider society: "Within society, the emotion that establishes a society that is master of all that it involves is love. To love is to exist as if the lover and the loved one were alone in the world. The intersubjective relation of love is not the beginning of society, but its negation. And that is certainly an indication of its essence."[12] Whereas, Sociality-O is the best of the human, the primary good and aim of Sociality-S (Justice). Justice (which can offend the face) must be founded on Love-O arising from the face to face: "Sociality, for me, is the best of the human. It is the good, and not the second best to an impossible fusion. In the alterity of the face, the for-the-other commands the I. Ultimately it is a question of founding the justice that offends the face on the obligation with respect to the face; the extraordinary exteriority of the face."[13] The ambiguity between the different senses of love leads to a similar confusion in the way we talk about society, justice, and its foundations in love and the relation to the Other.

Levinas's Reciprocal Dialectic: It may help our understanding of the relation of these two different senses of love to remind ourselves of the way the dialectic of Levinas's phenomenology

[11] Emmanuel Levinas, "Proximity of the Other," in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 103.
[12] Emmanuel Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20.
[13] Emmanuel Levinas, "Proximity of the Other," in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 103.

works. There will always be a double dialectic or two layers to the phenomenological descriptions in Levinas. Instead of the traditional structure of the transcendental arguments of phenomenology, so clearly exposited by Charles Taylor[14], where an analysis of experience opens up onto the transcendental ground or necessary conditions for that experience, each level of the analysis grounds the other and the transcendental arguments work in both directions. In this case we have: (1) the bounded abstractions that arise from the condition of separated consciousness (ego) necessary for us to exist as subjects; and (2) the more fundamental reality of these things that exist in relationship to the Other and the Face.

Here is how Levinas describes this Reciprocal Dialectic: "The whole of this work aims to show a relation with the other not only cutting across the logic of contradiction, . . . but also across dialectical logic, where the same dialectically participates in and is reconciled with the other in the Unity of the system."[15] "Thus the idea of infinity, revealed in the face, does not only require a separated being; the light of the face is necessary for separation."[16] So here is an example of the familiar dialectic development that takes place in *Totality and Infinity*:

Reciprocal Dialectic
Representation: Reduction of Other to Same
⇓⇑
Self that constitutes things
⇓⇑
Enjoyment: a position to live from within the Elemental
⇓⇑
Face: Ethical encounter with the other

Each part can be traced to the other in a phenomenological reduction or transcendental argument, yet each part also serves as the ground of and is unintelligible without that which gives rise to it.

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[14] Charles Taylor, "The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Anchor Books, 1972).
[15] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 150.
[16] *Ibid.*, 151.

So the self of the ego can only exist on the grounding of the Otherwise than being that arises in the Face, and yet we come to our awareness of this Otherwise by focusing on the amphibolies with the self's experience:

Reciprocal Dialectic
Matter: Alterity within the world that gives rise to and supports us
⇓⇑
Self: Separated representation reducing other to same
⇓⇑
Face/Ethical: Infinite perception too large for me. Responsibility

Sociality, the Self of Love-S, and infinite Other involved in Love-O stand in such a reciprocal dialectic of grounding and being grounded as well:

Reciprocal Dialectic
Sociality: Justice and the Third: indifferent reconciliation of the demands of multiple perspectives
⇓⇑
Self: Egoistic or concupiscent love of neighbor
⇓⇑
Face/Ethical: Love as openness to infinite responsibility, the "otherwise than being"

So Love-S is a bounded abstraction arising from the condition of separated consciousness (ego) necessary for us to exist as subjects, while Love-O is the more fundamental reality of these things that exist in relationship to the Other and the Face. But these are two sides of the same coin or two moments in this reciprocal dialectic, which makes it natural for us to slip into using the same term, love, for these two sides of the transcendental dialectic. Love is the opening of self that comes from confrontation with an infinite Other, but love is also the way that the ego or self reduces this otherness to same. Each is a side of the human. Levinas's work aims at detangling the transcendental fabric of human experience and weaving it back together with the unspeakable Otherwise than Being now lurking behind awareness. It is a persistent theme in Levinas that when the self forgets its grounding in the confrontation with the Other that it

becomes unethical. Toxic masculinity is the decoupling of the man from his grounding in the Other.

II. Phenomenology of Responsibility

Once we understand the difference between Love-O and Love-S we can see the way that they ground different senses of the social and how they suggest different responses to the weight of the infinite responsibility arising from confrontation with the Face. We will also better understand the different ways that masculinity (and other forms of identity) respond to the challenge of this weight.

Love-O experiences the ethical as an awakening, not merely as an infinite unbearable weight: "The other involves us in a situation in which we are obligated without guilt, but our obligation is no less for that. At the same time it is a burden. It is heavy, and, if you like, that is what goodness is. The trace of the infinite is inscribed in my obligation toward the other, in this moment that corresponds to the call."[17] It is an awareness of a connection behind the self, apart from the lonely segregation of sensation within ego: "Love is not consciousness. It is because there is a vigilance before the awakening that the cogito is possible, so that ethics is before ontology. Behind the arrival of the human there is already the vigilance for the other. The transcendental I in its nakedness comes from the awakening by and for the other."[18] It is the awakening into this relation and the openness to it that defines the human, and the closing off of it is what feeds toxic inhumanity in us:

[17] Emmanuel Levinas, "Proximity of the Other," in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 106.
[18] *Ibid.*, 98.

> What is important is that the relation to the other is awakening and sobering up that awakening is obligation. You say to me: Isn't that obligation preceded by a free decision? What matters to me is, in the responsibility for the other, something like an older involvement than any rememberable deliberation constitutive of the human. It is evident that there is in man the possibility of not awakening to the other; there is the possibility of evil. Evil is the order of being pure and simple—and, on the contrary, to go toward the other is the penetration of the human into being, an "otherwise than being."[19]

The Unbearable Lightness of the Face: The weight of infinite responsibility and the height of the other has a horizon that opens onto our existence in a world and language that precedes us and onto an "otherwise than being" that dissolves and enlivens each concrete perception. With the terror comes a kind of joy. Love-O is the opening (always incomplete, but always still opening) of our self to the Other in our experience of the infinite responsibility we confront in the face to face. Dostoevsky saw the ecstatic opening that is the other side of the infinite responsibility that comes from awareness of the Other: "Life is Paradise. It is hidden in all of us if we but will to reveal it. . . . And that we are all responsible to all for all, apart from our own sins, you were quite right in thinking that, and it is wonderful how you could comprehend it in all its significance at once. And in very truth, so soon as men understand that, the Kingdom of Heaven will be for them not a dream, but a living reality."[20] Here is part of a poem that expresses this succinctly:

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[19] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 114.

[20] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), VI, iic.

. . .I am responsible for everything:
the worms wriggling in the warm soil
of the flower garden I could hold them in
my hands if only I had dug in the dirt
villagers in Qixingguan driven from their land
the sad loneliness of my neighbor and the power
a kind word can have police in Iowa
looking twice at car that doesn't belong
the fear that follows them along the dusty
broken white lines so much the deep blue
sky and the numberless stars even hidden by
clouds that I could have caressed in my mind
so much it would drown you so much that
it floods and washes away the ordinary evils
all I do to hide from it so much that I could
never make up for it.

But then I think of what it means to have a heart
an infinite will capable of holding all those oughts
what it means to be connected to so many things
gnawing the tiny lines that tie me to this world and I
feel the current of it all connecting me to this world
wanting to sweep me away flowing through me as if
I were nothing transparent permeable as the very air
I breathe I feel it finally bearing me away
into the immensity joining it finally and discharging
my debt.[21]

We feel the vulnerability, the nakedness before matter, in the body that becomes ours. Is the burden of responsibility an imposition that isolates us and assaults our freedom? In opening ourselves to the vulnerability of the Other, in becoming that body in need of my aid, in feeling the command from a height to protect them, I open onto the joint ground of our being in the "otherwise than being" always infinite and never absorbed in (and therefore transcending) any characteristic of the face I share or fail to share. The joy of love is in the letting go of the sediment of self accumulated in the construction of ego.

[21] David Banach, "Ethics," *Ars Sententia* 1, no. 2 (June 2024).

Forgiveness is a way of expressing this fundamental kind of sociality that arises from Love-O. Forgiveness is not a forgetting or re-entering into Social-S relations with an offender. Love-O insults the indifferent balancing of Justice and the Third by drawing us into a shared vulnerability and establishing us as joint members of the same world. (Think of the man who resists taking a cart offered to them, preferring to get his own.) Yet, it is also not a resolution through love into a totality I share in, as in some religions. Forgiveness is the triumph of future over past. It is the possibility of going on, facing the reality of what was, and facing the infinite responsibility at the heart of our being.

Forgiveness is a form of Love-O, a kind of infinite religious experience that preserves the reality of each infinite other. The Face demands that you must not kill the transgressor. They are a Face. You are them in their vulnerability. You are responsible for them, the world that contains you both, and the past in which you are enmeshed. Simone Weil (as we shall see in the last section) suggests that attention, not retribution is what we owe to the Third, an entering into the face to face, not a flight from it. The release and freedom we feel upon forgiveness is this opening onto the more than self, without which we cannot be at home in the universe, without which we are always alienated from the ground of ourselves:

> . . . what else can it be if not a responsibility for others, for what others do, even to the point of being made responsible for the very persecution it undergoes. According to Lamentations 4:30, “He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him; he is filled full with reproach." Not because suffering has any supernatural power whatever; but because it is still I who am responsible for the persecution I undergo. The self is the passivity on the hither side of identity, that of the hostage.[22]

Grief is not the self-interested frustration of desires, nor the pain of loss of a thing or person in which I have an interest, nor is it resentment at trespass upon my rights. It is the

[22] Emmanuel Levinas, “A Man-God?,” in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 59.

complete dissolution of self in the face of the loss of what is me, and the going on with the self in openness to this loss. Forgiveness is the triumph of future over past, of going on over remaining that injured ego..

III. Love and Justice

The aim of the social life ought to be to promote and protect situations where the face to face is possible and to empower our openness and responses to them. This is not the system of balancing of rights and egos involved in what Levninas sometimes calls justice or the Third. It involves an openness to the kind of vulnerability the Face engenders. Levinas, of course, recognizes this foundation of the social the way it always struggles against the demands of ego: "I am not at all certain that the "otherwise than being" is guaranteed to triumph. There can be periods during which the human is completely extinguished, but the ideal of holiness is what humanity has introduced into being. An ideal of holiness contrary to the laws of being."[23] There is an openness that grounds all social relations: "All encounter begins with a benediction, contained in the word 'hello'; that 'hello' that all cogito, all reflection on oneself already presupposes and that would be a first transcendence. This greeting addressed to the other man is an invocation. I therefore insist on the primacy of the well-intentioned relation toward the other."[24] A social system, or type of masculinity that is always guarded and asserting its rights prevents his more fundamental kind of Justice-O: "But, on the other hand, it is in terms of the relation to the Face or of me before the other that we can speak of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the state. A state in which the interpersonal relationship is impossible, in which it is directed

[23] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 114.
[24] Emmanuel Levinas, "Proximity of the Other," in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 98.

in advance by the determinism proper to the state, is a totalitarian state. So there is a limit to the state."[25] The basic realities of the social occur in the face to face, even at the supermarket: "Every attempt to organize the human fails. The only thing that remains vigorous is the goodness of everyday life. Ikonnikov calls it the little goodness."[26]

When Levinas discusses the Third and Justice, and even when he talks of Philosophy, he talks of a standing apart from this vulnerability to a kind of objectivity and weighing of interests: ". . . for every being is unique; every other is unique. In that necessity of being concerned with justice that idea of equity appears, on which the idea of objectivity is based. At a certain moment, there is a necessity for a "weighing," a comparison, a pondering, and in this sense philosophy would be the appearance of wisdom from the depths of that initial charity; it would be—and I am not playing on words—the wisdom of that charity, the wisdom of love."[27] Yet even this objectivity, Justice-S, is founded in and is in the service of Love-O: "Philosophy is called upon to conceive ambivalence, to conceive it in several times. Even if it is called to thought by justice, it still synchronizes in the said the diachrony of the difference between the one and the other, and remains the servant of the saying that signifies the difference between the one and the other as the one for the other, as non-indifference to the other. Philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love."[28] Even the weighing of Justice-S requires Love-O: "I must judge, where before I was to assume responsibilities. Here is the birth of the theoretical; here the concern for justice is born, which is the basis of the theoretical. But it is always starting out from the Face, from the responsibility for the other that justice appears, which calls for judgment and comparison, a

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[25] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 105.
[26] Emmanuel Levinas, "Proximity of the Other," in *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 97.
[27] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 104.
[28] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 162.

comparison of what is in principle incomparable, for every being is unique; every other is unique."[29] In this quote Justice-S is grounded in the face to face, we give justice to the collective that arises from reducing the other to same: "I wanted to describe the relation of man to man. Justice does not constitute it; it is what makes justice possible. One renders justice to the totality."[30]

Face to Faces: We can see that, even though it is obscured by these ambiguities of love, the social, and justice, Levinas is working towards a wider conception of the social grounded in Love-O. There can be a solidarity in the reciprocal face to face. The asymmetry of the relationship to the infinite grounds a community in which each individual retains their reality and infinite value. There is a phenomenology of Family and Friendship waiting to happen based upon this wider understanding. One thinks of Camus's statement in *The Rebel*: "I rebel, therefore We exist."[31] The We here is not the collective or a totality, but the underlying shared world and vulnerability that grounds our social life, along with the continued openness to that grounding in each other.

Levinas recognizes that there is a We that is not the plural of I, a set of opposing interests and powers. The face commands without abasing. (It accepts proffered shopping cars without humiliation.) It is an equality born of reciprocal infinite commands and openness to them:

[29] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 104.
[30] Emmanuel Levinas, "The I and the Totality," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 25.
[31] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 22.

> The face to face of language admits of a more radical phenomenological analysis. To respect cannot mean to subject oneself, and yet the other commands me. I am commanded, that is, recognized as capable of a work. To respect is to bow down not before the law, but before a being who commands a work from me. But, for this commandment to entail no humiliation—which would deprive me of the very possibility of respecting the commandment I receive must also be the commandment to command the one who commands me. It consists in commanding a being to command me. This reference of a commandment for a commandment is the fact of saying We, of constituting a party. By reason of this reference of one commandment to the other, We is not the plural of I.[32]

In some ways this is a fundamental feature of Levinas's philosophy, the attempt to find a way of describing the essentially human without reducing it to a totality. There is a society of the human that preserves the humanity of each member by preserving that vulnerability to the infinity of each human person: "One last thing that is very close to my heart. In this whole priority of the relationship to the other, there is a break with a great traditional idea of the excellence of unity. The relation would already be a deprivation of this unity. That is the Plotinian tradition. My idea consists in conceiving sociality as independent of the 'lost' unity."[33]

Love Now; Love More; Love Stronger: The difficulties in developing and maintaining a society that is built on Love-O, of preventing justice from being merely the competition between interests, of developing a healthy masculinity, are all tied to the difficulty of living with and in the infinite responsibility that comes from confrontation with the Other. How does one actually live without being crushed by that responsibility or immobilized by it, or closing oneself off within Sociality-S as masculinity has tended to do? I think that a Levinasian ethics, while never

[32] Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 35
[33] Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Entre Nous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 112.

promising to tell you what is the right thing to do, as philosophical ethics does, leads to these three practical maxims:

1. **Opportunity**: Do the good you can, when you can do it and where you can do it.

2. **Engagement**: Love as much and as fully as you can. Express your love as fully as possible to as many of its objects as possible

3. **Efficacy**. Express your love where it can act most potently and act so as to increase the power of one's love.

And our individual efforts, not restrained by fear of the impossibility of fulfilling our obligations, will tend to produce a Social life that fosters Love-O, that is **More Direct, More Inclusive,** and **More Open:**

1. Social situations should allow and aim at the face to face.

2. They should aim at allowing as many people as possible into this direct interaction and at forcing us to see all persons.

3. They should aim at fostering and empowering our ability to be open to the Other and to respond to our responsibility.

The Wisdom of Love is not the philosophical balancing act of Justice and the Third, but the production, protection and maintenance of conditions in which love and the face to face are possible. The wisdom of love in the service of love means fostering the conditions where the Other can be faced and developing our ability to respond. It means making a world where love has a place and hate has no home.

Conclusion

The different senses of love and justice that cause Levinas such difficulty in framing a conception of the social based upon love are more clearly recognized by Simone Weil:

> This profound and childlike and unchanging expectation of good in the heart is not what is involved when we agitate for our rights. The motive which prompts a little boy to watch jealously to see if his brother has a slightly larger piece of cake arises from a much more superficial level of the soul. The word justice means two very different things according to whether it refers to the one or the other level. It is only the former one that matters.
>
> Every time that there arises from the depths of a human heart the childish cry which Christ himself could not restrain, 'Why am I being hurt?', then there is certainly injustice. For if, as often happens, it is only the result of a misunderstanding, then the injustice consists in the inadequacy of the explanation.[34]

The sense of justice of the child wanting its fair slice of cake is Justice-S. The sense of justice as redress of harm, of the child crying "Why am I being hurt?" is Justice-O; it is what love cries out for. From the point of view of the Third, confronted with a multitude of infinite demands, there can be no Justice-O. The poor will always be with us, and there are always more mouths to feed. This sense of justice separates Justice-S and Love-O to allow the ego to carve out space to co-exist with others. Philosophical theories of ethics tell you what you have to do to be just, saving you from the never-ending maw of infinite responsibility of all for all. But that cuts these theories off from their foundation in the Face

This becomes most clear when we see the relations of power involved Justice-S. Every act of kindness becomes a gift, requiring gratitude, submission, or humiliation on the part of the recipient: "Only the absolute identification of justice and love makes the coexistence possible of compassion and gratitude on the one hand, and on the other, of respect for the dignity of

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[34] Simone Weil, "Human Personality," in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George Panichas (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 72.

affliction in the afflicted—a respect felt by the sufferer himself and the others."[35] (Why would you accept the gift of a shopping cart under these conditions?) Weil makes this most clear in her discussion of the Melian Dialogue from Thucydides: "When there is a strong and a weak, there is no need to unite their wills. There is only one will: that of the strong. The weak obeys. Everything happens just as it does when a man is handling matter. There are not two wills to be made to coincide. The man wills, and the matter submits. The weak are like things. There is no difference between throwing a stone to get rid of a troublesome dog and saying to a slave, 'Chase that dog away.'"[36] Power makes of the person a thing, subject to necessity, and Justice-S is a matter of negotiations mediated by power and consent constrained by power. Or at least, it would be if it were not grounded on and always disrupted by Love-O.

Weil finds a model for a kind of social existence and justice grounded in love in the type of Pythagorean harmony that exists in friendship. The friend consents to the independent existence of the other and exists in a kind of equality arising from the equal infinite responsibility of each for each, and the consent each gives to the other. You consent to the existence of the other, never reduced to same: ""Friendship is an equality made of harmony," said the Pythagoreans. There is harmony because there is a supernatural union between two opposites, that is to say, necessity and liberty, the two opposites God combined when he created the world and men. There is equality because each wishes to preserve the faculty of free consent both in himself and in the other."[37] There is a society that comes from giving up the struggle to reach the infinite, to fulfill the responsibility, and finally rest in being good; a society built from resting in and loving difference, and in preserving that difference in recognition of the the way that

[35] Simone Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 140.
[36] *Ibid.*, 142.
[37] *Ibid.*, 204.

otherness makes us no longer alone, the way it ties us to a world, always flowing through us, never resting in hate and resentment.

Men, like all humans, have to struggle to allow themselves to not be alone, while also not losing themselves or losing hope among the great wash of needs and pains and responsibilities that are a human life. We should be careful not to duplicate Levinas's understandable misstep in identifying the nurturing aspects of the Home and the Elemental as a mother, as feminine, merely because it was associated with what our culture and patriarchy had identified as the appropriate role of women. There are, however, differences between all of us, and we love that there are. We are tall or short, strong or less strong in many different ways, fast or slow, smart or clever in so all these different ways. These differences give us a variety of differences in how we use our different amounts of power to help or harm, to connect ourselves or keep ourselves separate. So what we look for in healthy masculinity will not be the unique province of men; women or non-binary persons can develop healthy ways of having and using power. Toxic masculinity refers to patterns of power that accrued to mostly men because of the role culture assigned to them in patriarchy, but the existence of the "Karen" in popular culture shows that there can be similar patterns in women (with the addition of a sprinkle of misogyny in the way we regard these women who don't conform to what patriarchy expects of women, in virtue of the power of their privilege.)

With these cautions in mind, what can we say we have learned about toxic masculinity and what a healthy version would look like? Let's return to the supermarket. If we have allowed our power to insulate us in privilege coming from a secure place in a system of rights, we can wander blissfully unaware of how much space we take up or whose way we happen to be in. If we are always open to vulnerability, if we don't mind giving way with a smile and a laugh and a

comment to to these equal Others, if we consent to their independent existence without thinking we can ever fulfill or ignore the depth of their lives in the vulnerability we share with them, then we can feel the sense of what providing for our daily bread together gives us.

If we have raised ourselves in a system constantly testing and probing our power to maintain our rights and dignity, we will face other people always as a contest of power refusing to give way, honking our horns, and shouting out our windows. If we consent to our joint powerlessness in the human condition, think not of our rights but the joy of our joint responsibilities and the connectedness they bring, then we can laugh and give way and feel ourselves a family embarked upon the adventure of living together.

If we have survived a society that continually forces us to defend our rights with power, to test our strengths and define ourselves by our ability to defend ourselves in contest of competing interests, then not only will we treat others with contempt and harden our hearts to the joys of giving in, but even generosity will become a power play, will imply abasement and ceding of our rights, and every intimacy will be a pathway to weakness. A shopping cart offered in kindness demeans us and insults our place in the pack. If we have opened ourselves to the weakness of each of us in the face of our infinite responsibility to all for all, if we have not extinguished the spark lit in us by the approach of each Face, if we know that all of us have needs and things to offer, then we can have gratitude for the gift, not just of a shopping cart, but for relief from our aloneness.

What we recognize as toxic masculinity, the aggression, the misogyny, the violence: “I know my rights!”; the truck following too closely; the gun-toting fatigue dressed figure of menace in a public space; the inability to give in to intimacy, to yield the floor, to see another point of view; these all flow from the impulses identified in our simple supermarket examples,

and they all arise from the limiting of Love-S and Justice-O from their grounding in the real love and justice that forms the foundation of our selves and our society. They have become toxic mainly because of the ruthless enforcement of the power relationships necessary to gain status as a man, the bullying, fighting, testing and proving oneself that establishes one as a man defined as **not** the Other, the weak, needing protection, or open to exploitation. A healthy masculinity requires the hard habits of the face to face, of openness to vulnerability, but is compensated for by the awareness of belonging to a wider world and the ecstatic joy of responding to it. Every man, woman, or non-binary person can aspire to this belonging to a society founded on and open to the love that arises from confrontation with the Face. For those of us trapped in our histories, having been trained in the politics of power and the justice of negotiating interests, health requires the medicine of the face to face, of learning to live with that disquietude and disturbance of our power, and working to build social systems that allow us to be with each other without giving up on ourselves.

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