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ADIEU
TO EMMANUEL LEVINAS

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Henceforth, the commitment has been made. Since 1948. But everything has only just begun. Israel is no less isolated in its struggle to complete its extraordinary task than was Abraham, who began it four thousand years ago. This passing remark on the isolation of Israel can be disputed, indeed it is to my mind disputable, but since it is not strictly essential or necessary to the argumentative structure that interests me here, I will simply leave the question open. But this return to the land of our ancestors—beyond solving any specific problems, whether national or familial—would thus mark one of the greatest events of internal history and, indeed, of all History.

These are the final words of "The State of Caesar and the State of David." They speak of an unconditional commitment, to be sure, but, like the description of the political event, the interpretation of its future remains couched in the conditional. (We will return to this. We will also return, in conclusion, to the parenthetical remark with which I allowed myself to draw off my own parenthetical remark, thereby detaching it from the argumentative structure that we have privileged and are trying to follow here.)

"Politics After!": under this title, a cautious interpretation of Zionism attempts to distinguish, rightly or wrongly, between two major phases. But is it a question of phases? A question of a historical sequence? Or is it, on the contrary, a question of two worlds? Of two competing and irreconcilable figures? Of two Zionisms that forever fight over the same time?

Levinas clearly privileges diachrony: there would be first of all a realist Zionism, more political and, perhaps, "inadequate to the prophetic ideal." Perhaps more inclined to the current nationalism, this political Zionism would explain, in pre-Hitlerian Europe and sometimes still today, a reticence on the part of certain Jews who align themselves with a "universalist finality." A second Zionism would be more open to the eschatological vision of a holy history, or else, and indeed through this—a politics beyond the political—to what Levinas calls a "political invention."

Whether or not one endorses any of these analyses of the actual situation of the State of Israel in its political visibility (and I must admit that I do not always do so), the concern here is incontestable: on the one hand, to interpret the Zionist commitment, the promise, the sworn faith and not the Zionist fact, as a movement that carries the political beyond the political, and thus is caught between the political and its other; and, on the other hand, to think a peace that would not be purely political.

Assuming that these two distinctions make any sense and can be used (concesso non dato), in neither case does the beyond of the political, the beyond of the purely political, gesture toward the non-political. It announces another politics, messianic politics, that of the State of David as opposed to the State of Caesar, that is, as opposed to the classical and hegemonic tradition of the State as it is found in what we must try to identify, with all requisite precautions, as our poliology, the discourse of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition on the political, the City, the State, war and peace. This assumes, of course, that short of identifying such a thing as Western politology with itself—something we must keep from doing, especially under the imperial rather than democratic figure of the State of Caesar—one can nonetheless recognize a dominant tendency, one that is closer to Caesar than to David and that would make democracy itself imperialist.
in vocation. So many hypotheses, and the question of what is to be understood by this word "political," and whether the borders of this concept today resist analysis, remains open. We cannot directly approach this question here. We would need a guiding thread or touchstone in the context that concerns us. The idea of peace, for example, in its obvious and continuously reaffirmed affinity with hospitality. Is peace something political? In what sense? Under what conditions? How are we to read Levinas's "suggestion," in his words, "that peace is a concept that goes beyond purely political thought]? 87

Levinas makes a "suggestion," just a suggestion, at once confident and uneasy. He does not assert that peace is a non-political concept, but suggests that this concept perhaps exceeds the political.

What does this imply? A difficult division or partition: in sum, without being at peace with itself, such a concept of peace retains a political part, it participates in the political, even if another part of it goes beyond a certain concept of the political. The concept exceeds itself, goes beyond its own borders, which amounts to saying that it interrupts itself or deconstructs itself so as to form a sort of enclave inside and outside of itself: "beyond in," once again, the political interiorization of ethical or messianic transcendence. (And let us note in passing that each time this interruption of self takes place or is produced [we have been following a few examples of this for some time now], each time this delimitation of self, which might also pass for an excess or transcendence of self, is produced, each time this topological enclave affects a concept, a process of deconstruction is in progress, which is no longer a teleological process or even a simple event in the course of history). As if the word "suggestion" did not suffice to signal a vigilant circumspection, Levinas goes on to specify that, in part, "peace is a concept that goes beyond" not the political, but "purely political thought." This insistence bears everything: it is necessary to insist upon purity.

Here, then, is a "concept," peace, the thought of which would go beyond any thought that would wish to remain purely political. A "purely political thought" would be inadequate to this concept. To think this concept of peace, it would be necessary to leave not the order of the political, but the order of what Levinas calls the "purely political." To know what the political is, we would need to know what the "purely political" is. A fiction for which Levinas in fact, in another place, excludes the possibility of ever taking shape, of ever being embodied, of ever taking on a real body, since, as we have heard, "the City in its simplest sense is never this side of the religious." Indeed, he speaks of this not purely political peace in the context of inventing the political, of a "political invention," more precisely, of "creating on its land [the land of the State of Israel] the concrete conditions for political invention." 88

Has this political invention in Israel ever come to pass? Ever come to pass in Israel? This is perhaps not the place to pose this question, certainly not to answer it; we would not have the time, and indeed not just the time, for all the requisite analyses—but does one have the right here to silence the anxiety of such an interrogation, before these words of Levinas, and in the spirit that inspires them? Would such a silence be worthy of the responsibilities that we have been assigned? First of all, before Emmanuel Levinas himself? I am among those who await this "political invention" in Israel, among those who call for it in hope, today more than ever because of the despair that recent events, to mention only them, have not attenuated (for example, though these are just examples from yesterday and today, the renewed support of colonial "settlements"
or the decision by the supreme Court authorizing torture, and, more generally, all the initiatives that suspend, derail, or interrupt what continues to be called, in this manner of speaking, the "peace process").

In any case, even if this suggestion of Levinas remains, in the end, enigmatic, it gestures toward a peace that is neither purely political, in the traditional sense of this term, nor simply apolitical. It belongs to a context where the reaffirmation of ethics, the subjectivity of the host as the subjectivity of the hostage, broaches the passage from the political toward the beyond of the political or toward the "already non-political." Where are the borders between the "already" and the "not yet"? Between politics and the non-political? A few pages earlier Levinas writes:

From the outset, self-assertion is responsibility for everyone. Political and already non-political. Epic and Passion. Irrepressible energy and extreme vulnerability. After the realism of its political formulations at the beginning, Zionism is finally revealing itself, on the scale of substantial Judaism, as a great ambition of the Spirit.89

What does "already" mean in the expression "and already non-political"? How might this "and already non-" eat into what it still is, namely, "political"? Or how might it let itself be eaten into by what it already no longer is, that is, "political," by what is still eating into it? What does "political" mean when one appeals to a peace whose "concept . . . goes beyond purely political thought"?

These words belong to a text entitled "Politics After!," published in 1979 in *Les temps modernes* and reprinted in 1982 in *L'au-delà du verset* [later translated as *Beyond the Verse*]. Followed by an exclamation point, the title "Politics After!", seems clear: let politics come after, in second place! The primordial or final injunction, what is most urgent, would not be first of all political, purely political. Politics or the political should follow, come "after"; it must be subordinated—whether in logical consequence or chronological sequence—to an injunction that transcends the political order. As far as the political order is concerned, we will see afterwards, it will come later; politics will follow, like day-to-day operations: "Politics After!"

"We are following in the wake of Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, an act of quasi-messianic audacity, hailed as this "exceptional transhistorical event that one neither makes nor is contemporaneous with twice in a lifetime . . . All the impossible becoming possible."90

One might be tempted to transpose or reverse things today. This expression—"all the impossible becoming possible"—does not sound like a merely fortuitous echo of the "possibility of the impossible" of which "Substitution" speaks with regard to an absolute passivity, which is not that of death (in the Heideggerian sense of the possibility of the impossible), but the condition of the hostage, of the "I am a hostage" and of the "infinite responsibility" that obligates me toward the neighbor as the third, a "passivity that is not only the possibility of death in being, the possibility of impossibility, but an impossibility that is prior to this possibility, the impossibility of slipping away." Our responsibility, in short, before or prior to death, standing before death, before the dead, beyond death, Here, now, the impossible has become possible. Since the coming of Sadat to Jerusalem. Did not Sadat in fact understand the opportunities opened up through friendship with Israel—or simply through already recognizing its existence and entering into talks—and all the prophetic promises that are hidden behind the Zionist claim to historical rights and its contortions under the political yoke? All injustices, capable of being put right.
Levinas continues:

All the impossible becoming possible. Which less lofty minds among Sadat’s enemies in the Near East, or his friends in our proud West, have never sensed, plunged as they are in their political bookkeeping, “A State like any other” and a lot of eloquence? Oh really! So there would be no alternative between recourse to unscrupulous methods whose model is furnished by Realpolitik and the irritating rhetoric of a careless idealism, lost in utopian dreams but crumbling into dust on contact with reality or turning into a dangerous, impudent and facile frenzy which professes to be taking up the prophetic discourse? Beyond the State of Israel’s concern to provide a refuge for men without a homeland and its sometimes surprising, sometimes uncertain achievements, has it not, above all, been a question of creating on its land the concrete conditions for political invention? That is the ultimate culmination of Zionism, and thereby probably one of the great events in human history. For two thousand years the Jewish people was only the object of history, in a state of political innocence which it owed to its role as victim. That role is not enough for its vocation. But since 1948 this people has been surrounded by enemies and is still being called into question [this “being-in-question” defines, we recall, the subjectivity or ipseity of the hostage: persecution, obsession, or obsidionality, responsibility for all], yet engaged too in real events, in order to think—and to make and remake—a State which will have to incarnate the prophetic moral code and the idea of its peace. That this idea has already managed to be handed down and caught in full flight, as it were, is the wonder of wonders. As we have already said, Sadat’s trip has opened up the unique path for peace in the Near East, if this peace is to be possible at all. For what is “politically” weak about it is probably the expression both of its audacity and, ultimately, of its strength. It is also, perhaps, what it brings, for everyone everywhere, to the very idea of peace: the suggestion that peace is a concept which goes beyond purely political thought.

What is peace? What are we saying when we say “peace”? What does it mean “to be at peace with”—to be at peace with someone else, a group, a State, a nation, oneself as another? In each of these cases, one can be at peace only with some other. So long as what is other as other will not have been in some way “welcomed” in epiphany, in the withdrawal or visitation of its face, it would make no sense to speak of peace. With the same, one is never at peace.

Even if this axiom appears impoverished and abstract, it is not so easy to think through. What is the semantic kernel, if there is one and if it has a unity, of this little word paix [“peace”]? Is there such a semantic kernel? In other words, is there a concept of peace? One that would be one, indestructible in its identity? Or must we invent another relation to this concept, as perhaps to any concept, to the non-dialectical enclosure of its own transcendence, its “beyond-in”?

Just as we should have asked what we mean when we say “to welcome” or “to receive”—and all of Levinas’s thought is, wants to be, and presents itself as a teaching (in the sense of magisterial height that he gives to this word, and that he confers upon it in a magisterial way), a teaching on the subject of what “to welcome” or “to receive” should mean—so we should ask what the word “peace” can and should mean, as opposed to war or not.

As opposed to war and thus to hostility or not, since this opposition cannot simply be assumed. To war or to hostilities, to hostility itself, that is to say, to a declared hostility that is also, it is often believed, the contrary of hospitality. Now if war and declared hostility were the same thing, and if they were the opposite of peace, then one would also have to say that peace and the hospitality of welcoming also form a pair, an inseparable pair, a correlation in
A Word of Welcome

which one of them, peace, is on a par with the other, hospitality, and vice versa.

We must perhaps problematize, disturb, trouble, or suspect all these pairs of concepts, which are assumed to be synonymous, co-implicated, or symmetrically opposable. It is not certain that "war," "hostility," and "conflict" are the same thing. (Kant, for example, distinguishes between war and conflict.) It is also not certain that hospitality and peace are synonyms. One can imagine a political peace between two States where no hospitality would be offered to the citizens of the other State, or where strict conditions would be placed on any hospitality. In fact, this is what most often happens. War and peace are also too often thought to form a symmetrical pair of opposed concepts. But give to one or the other of these two concepts a value or position of originarity, and the symmetry is broken.

If one thinks, like Kant, that everything in nature begins with war, then at least two consequences follow. First, peace is no longer a natural phenomenon, one that is symmetrical and simply opposable to war; it is a phenomenon of another order, of a non-natural nature, of an institutional (and thus politico-judicial) nature. Second, peace is not simply the cessation of hostilities, an abstention from making war or an armistice; it must be instituted as perpetual peace, as the promise of eternal peace. Eternity is then neither a utopia, nor a hollow word, nor some external or supplementary predicate to be attached to the concept of peace. The concept implies, in itself, analytically, in its own necessity, that peace is eternal. The thought of eternity is indestructible in the very concept of peace, and thus in the concept of hospitality, if this can be thought. The Kantian argument is well known: if I make peace with the thought in the back of my mind of reopening hostilities, of returning to war, or of agreeing only to an armistice, if I even think that one day, more or less in spite of myself, I should let myself be won over by the hypothesis of another war, this would not be peace. There may then, never be any peace, one might say, but if there were, it would have to be eternal and, as an instituted, juridico-political peace, not natural.

Some might conclude from this that there never is and never will be such a peace. A purely political peace might always not take place in conditions adequate to its concept. Henceforth, this eternal peace, purely political as it is, is not political, or the political is never adequate to its concept. Which, in spite of all the differences to which we must be attentive, would bring Kant closer to Levinas when, in "Politics After!" the latter takes note of this concept of the political, of its inadequation to itself or to its infinite idea, and of the consequences that Kant is forced to draw from it in his "Third Definitive Article for a Perpetual Peace": "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality." This generous article is in fact limited by a great number of conditions: universal hospitality is here only juridical and political; it grants only the right of temporary sojourn and not the right of residence; it concerns only the citizens of States and, in spite of its institutional character, it is founded on a natural right, the common possession of the round and finite surface of the earth, across which humans cannot spread ad infinitum. The realization of this natural right, and thus of universal hospitality, is referred to a cosmopolitical constitution that the human species can only approach indefinitely.

But for all these reasons, which indefinitely suspend and condition the immediate, infinite, and unconditional welcoming of the other, Levinas always prefers, and I would want to say this without any play on words, peace
now, and he prefers universality to cosmopolitanism. To my knowledge, Levinas never uses the word "cosmopolitanism" or adopts it as his own. I can imagine at least two reasons for this: first, because this sort of political thought refers pure hospitality, and thus peace, to an indefinite progress; second, because of the well-known ideological connotations with which modern anti-Semitism saddled the great tradition of a cosmopolitanism passed down from Stoicism or Pauline Christianity to the Enlightenment and to Kant.

Whereas for Kant the institution of an eternal peace, of a cosmopolitical law, and of a universal hospitality, retains the trace of a natural hostility, whether present or threatening, real or virtual, for Levinas the contrary would be so: war itself retains the testimonial trace of a pacific welcoming of the face. In the beginning of section 2 of Perpetual Peace, Kant declares war to be natural:

The state of peace among men living side by side is not the natural state (status naturalis) [Naturzustand]: the natural state is one of war [Zustand des Krieges]. This does not always mean open hostilities [literally: even if there is no outbreak of enmity, of hostility: wenngleich nicht immer ein Ausbruch der Feindseligkeiten], but at least an unceasing threat [Bedrohung] of war.92

For Kant, and this must be taken seriously, a threat of war, a simple pressure—whether symbolic, diplomatic, or economic—is enough to interrupt the peace. Potential or virtual hostility remains incompatible with peace. This goes very far, and penetrates very deeply, rendering every virtual allergy, whether unconscious or radically forbidden, contradictory to peace. The first appearance of any threat would be incompatible with peace, the immanence and not just the imminence of a negativity in the experience of peace. Only this allows Kant to conclude that there is no natural peace, and that, as he says immediately thereafter, the state of peace must thus be "instituted" (founded, gestiftet).

But as soon as peace is instituted, politically deliberated, juridically constructed, does it not indefinitely and inevitably retain within it a trace of the violent nature with which it is supposed to break, the nature it is supposed to interrupt, interdict, or repress? Kant does not say this, but can it not be thought, either with or against him, that an institutional peace is at once pure and impure? As an eternal promise, it must retain, according to a logic that I tried elsewhere to formalize,93 the trace of a threat, of what threatens it and of what threatens in it, thus contaminating the promise by a threat, according to a collusion that is deemed, particularly by the theoreticians of the promise as speech act, unacceptable, inadmissible, and contrary to the very essence of the promise. Kant continues:

A state of peace, therefore, must be instituted [es muss also gestiftet werden], for in order to be secured against hostility it is not sufficient that hostilities simply be not committed; and, unless this security is pledged to each by his neighbor (a thing that can occur only in a civic state [in einem gesetzlichen Zustande]), each may treat his neighbor, from whom he demands this security, as an enemy.

If everything begins, as nature and in nature, with a real or virtual war, there is no longer a symmetrical opposition between war and peace, that is, between war and perpetual peace. Hospitality, which would retain the trace of a possible war, can then only be conditional, juridical, political. A Nation-State, indeed a community of Nation-States, can only condition peace, just as it can only limit hospitality, refuge, or asylum. And the first—indeed the only—con-
cern of Kant is to define limitations and conditions. We know this only too well: never will a Nation-State as such, regardless of its form of government, and even if it is democratic, its majority on the right or the left, open itself up to an unconditional hospitality or to a right of asylum without restriction. It would never be "realistic" to expect or demand this of a Nation-State as such. The Nation-State will always want to "control the flow of immigration."

Now, could it not be said, inversely, that for Levinas everything begins with peace? Although this peace is neither natural (since, and this is not fortuitous, there is no concept of nature or reference to a state of nature in Levinas, it seems to me, and this is of the utmost importance: before nature, before the originarity of the archê, there is what works always to interrupt it, the pre-original anachrony of an-archy), nor simply institutional or juridico-political, everything seems "to begin," in a precisely anarchic and anachronic fashion, by the welcoming of the face of the other in hospitality, which is also to say, by its immediate and quasi-immanent interruption in the illeity of the third.

But the rupture of this symmetry, which seems to be the inverse of that described by Kant, has its own equivocal consequences. It suggests that war, hostility, even murder, still presuppose and thus always manifest this origin­ary welcoming that is openness to the face: before and after Sinai. One can make war only against a face; one can kill, or give oneself the prohibition not to kill, only where the epiphany of the face has taken place, even if one rejects, forgets, or denies it in an allergic reaction. We know that, for Levinas, the prohibition against killing, the "Thou shalt not kill," in which, as he says, "The entire Torah" is gathered, and which "the face of the other signifies," is the very origin of ethics.

Whereas for Kant the institution of peace could not but retain the trace of a warlike state of nature, in Levinas the inverse is the case, since allergy, the rejection of the other, even war, appear in a space marked by the epiphany of the face, where "the subject is a host" and a "hostage," where consciousness of . . . , or intentional subjectivity, as responsible, traumatized, obsessed, and persecuted, first offers the hospitality that it is. When Levinas affirms that the essence of language is goodness, or that "the essence of language is friendship and hospitality," he clearly intends to mark an interruption: an interruption of both symmetry and dialectic. He breaks with both Kant and Hegel, with both a juridico-cosmopolitanism that, in spite of its claims to the contrary, could never succeed in interrupting an armed peace, peace as armistice, and with the laborious process—the work—of the negative, "with a peace process" that would still organize war by other means when it does not make of it a condition of consciousness, of "object­ive morality" (Sittlichkeit) and of politics—the very thing that the dialectic of Carl Schmitt, for example, still credited to Hegel. For Levinas, peace is not a process of the negative, the result of a dialectical treaty between the same and the other: "The other is not the negation of the same, as Hegel would like to say. The fundamental fact of the ontological scission into same and other is a non-allergic relation of the same with the other."

These are the final pages of Totality and Infinity. They declare peace, peace now, before and beyond any peace process, even before any "peace now movement."

Where might we find a rule or mediating schema between this pre-originary hospitality or this peace without process and, on the other side, politics, the politics of modern States (whether existing or in the process of being constituted), for example, since this is only an example.
the politics underway in the “peace process” between Israel and Palestine? All the rhetorics and all the strategies that claim to refer to this today do so in the name of and with a view to “politics” that are not only different but apparently antagonistic and incompatible.

The final pages of Totality and Infinity return to the propositions that, in the chapter entitled “The Dwelling,” refer to language in terms of non-violence, peace, and hospitality. Levinas there speaks of what “is produced in language,” namely, “the positive deployment of this pacific [my emphasis] relation with the other, without any border or negativity.” Twice in a few lines, the word “hospitality” is identified with recollection in the home, but with recollection [recueillement] as welcome [accueil]: “Recollection in a home open to the Other—hospitality—is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent.”

The at-home-with-oneself of the dwelling does not imply a closing off, but rather the place of Desire toward the transcendence of the other. The separation marked here is the condition of both the welcome and the hospitality offered to the other. There would be neither welcome nor hospitality without this radical alterity, which itself presupposes separation. The social bond is a certain experience of the unbinding without which no respiration, no spiritual inspiration, would be possible. Recollection, indeed being-together itself, presupposes infinite separation. The at-home-with-oneself would thus no longer be a sort of nature or rootedness but a response to a wandering, to the phenomenon of wandering it brings to a halt.

This axiom also holds for the space of the nation. The ground or the territory has nothing natural about it, nothing of a root, even if it is sacred, nothing of a possession for the national occupant. The earth gives hospitality before all else, a hospitality already offered to the initial occupant, a temporary hospitality granted to the hôte, even if he remains the master of the place. He thus comes to be received in “his” own home. Right there in the middle of Totality and Infinity, the “home,” the familial home, “the dwelling” in which the figure of woman plays the essential role of the absolute welcomer, turns out to be a chosen, elected, or rather allotted home, a home that is entrusted, assigned by the choice of an election, and so not at all a natural place.

The chosen home [Levinas says, just after having spoken of hospitality as the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent] is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics. 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 marvelous concretizes “the infinite time of fecundity”—a non-biological fecundity, of course—“the instant of eroticism and the infinity of paternity.”

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”), the “Conclusions” of Totality and Infinity no longer relate