study of the possible radical change of moral beliefs. It may even serve as an attention-grabbing, short case study in moral motivation. But it appears very much out of place as one of the main readings in a philosophy text. For students who have little idea of what the methodology of the discipline is, the appeal of Ellis’ confession, which is mainly emotive and descriptive, is not the best introduction to philosophical argumentation.

Other selections appeal to horror and wit. For example, the use of excerpts from Edward Abbey’s *The Journey Home* (entitled “The Great American Desert,” 58–63 in Weston), doesn’t really constitute an argument for the value of the environment, properly speaking. Instead, it serves more as a sarcastic thought piece exalting the frightening desolation of the desert and railing against the bourgeois hiker’s disrespectful use of it.

However, with the recent inclination towards teaching cross-listed, interdisciplinary courses in American universities, this book should be a very attractive option. Students will also likely be receptive to Weston’s efforts to show more direct relations between philosophical skills and the moral issues that do concern them. For the ever-growing number of instructors who wish to avoid stale readings entrenched in the canon of the discipline, Weston’s text offers an excellent alternative.

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**Levinas and the Political**

Howard Caygill

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ERIC S. NELSON

Howard Caygill’s *Levinas and the Political* is a provocative and rigorously argued introduction to the political philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) written from the perspective of the question of political judgment. It is an excellent resource for any course addressing Levinas’s political thought and its contexts, since it provides the most comprehensive and accessible account of the content and development of Levinas’s political thought to date. Furthermore, Caygill’s work is to be recommended for clearly demonstrating the significance of Levinas as a political thinker. He shows Levinas to be a profound critic of National Socialism and totalitarianism in the name of its victims as well as someone who challenges and calls us to rethink the conditions of modern moral and political philosophy.

Caygill argues that the political, in its questionability and violence, deeply informed Levinas’s ethics. The political confronted Levinas as a dilemma and predicament. Caygill traces this confrontation from Levinas’s early embrace,
as a young émigré from Lithuania during the 1920s, of the liberal French republican tradition—oriented by the ideas of '89 of freedom, equality, and fraternity—through the presentiment, experience and memory of the Nazi horror and finally to his late remarks on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the collapse of the Soviet Union. For Levinas, the political cannot simply be rejected or embraced, since it is an interweaving of self-interest and the interest of the other, war and peace, horror and promise. Caygill illuminates how this ambivalence is present in both his philosophical and religious writings as well as his occasional statements about political events. Levinas is not the naïve sentimental moralist of the other but a conscientious yet realistic thinker willing to confront issues of war, violence, domination, and annihilation.

Caygill begins with two examples that set the stage for this study of political judgment. Levinas questioned whether the Palestinian can be considered the neighbor and remarked that “in alterity we can find an enemy” in response to the massacres at the Chatila and Salora camps in 1982. This raises questions about how Levinas conceptualized the other and who counts as the other. In reaction to the end of the USSR, he commented that the Soviet Union—despite its horrors—suggested the possibility of hope since the promise of liberation and justice remained included in its very idea. Like Kant’s interpretation of the French Revolution, Levinas censured the failed practice while pointing to the promise immanent in its ideas and our responses to it. The proximity of ethics and violence, justice and war, is not accidental. Levinas’s critique of war and hope in the promise of peace did not lead him to endorse pacifism. According to Caygill, this proximity is intrinsic to the strategy, stakes, and essence of Levinas’s very thinking of the ethics and religion.

Instead of reducing politics to ethics or reducing ethics to politics (thought of as a dimension of calculation, prudence, and self-interest), Caygill follows a more rewarding strategy of arguing that Levinas’s ethics is already informed and oriented by the political. Caygill consequently clarifies how Levinas’s ethics is constantly troubled by and responds to the question of the political. Ethics cannot avoid the predicament of politics, because the ethical is itself a response to the political. From the Dreyfus Affair to the Shoah to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Levinas raises the question of whether ethics can appropriately respond to, if not overcome, the political. Caygill consequently asserts that this political realism places Levinas into proximity to thinkers such as Clausewitz and Carl Schmitt. Although he evades the amoralism and leviathanism of such thinkers, the works of Levinas resonate powerfully with the fate and mourning of the victims of political realities.

Caygill articulates the import of liberal political philosophy and republican institutions and practices to Levinas’s thought, which has been underemphasized in previous studies of Levinas. He is highly indebted to this tradition even as he critiques and transforms it with the resources of phenomenology and Judaism. This debt has remained obscure, however, because of Levinas’s notable divergence from mainstream liberal political philosophy with its em-
phasis on questions of normativity and justification. This critique of autonomy and the constructivist recourse to the autonomous self, along with his use of messianic and prophetic language derived from the *Torah* and *Talmud*, are the most important obstacles to the Anglo-American reception of Levinas. Nevertheless, it is this very divergence that makes Levinas a noteworthy alternative for rethinking contemporary liberalism.

A centerpiece of Caygill’s argument is that Levinas’s ethics emerges out of the ambiguity of and need to reconceptualize the republican trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This trinity is restructured by Levinas through a radicalized understanding of fraternity. For Caygill, Levinas’s reinterpretation of fraternity on the basis of alterity and difference promises a new politics of liberty and equality. This politics is oriented and informed by—even if irreducible to—ethics via the notion of justice and the third. This strategy of reconfiguring liberal politics and republicanism in the name of the other person is not without its risks. Based on his early experience of the Dreyfus Affair, where Christian fraternity aimed its hostility at Jews and the republicanism that promised their liberty and equality, and its consequences, Levinas focused on the problem of fraternity. Fraternity raises all the issues of identity, solidarity, and community that the dominant tendencies of liberal political theory attempt to bracket. For Levinas, more appropriate concepts of liberty and equality cannot be articulated without fraternity. Levinas’s questioning of national and religious self-assertion through his explorations of fraternity—with all of its promise (solidarity, love of the neighbor, etc) and danger (exclusion, forced assimilation, and annihilation)—also suggests Levinas’s relevance for our situation with its resurgent fundamentalism and nationalism.

Caygill interprets Levinas’s ethics as a response to the dominance of self-interest and war that characterizes the political and even western ontology itself for Levinas. Levinas connected his critique of politics with the critique of western ontology. This strategy began to emerge in response to the rise to power of National Socialism in the 1930s and his disappointment in Martin Heidegger’s early support of it. Levinas’s essays of the 1930s criticize the unethical paganism of National Socialism and Heidegger’s ontology from the perspective of the ethical and the possibility of a united front between Judaism and Christianity. These early confrontations with politics and ontology would be relentlessly radicalized and reconfigured throughout his later works, such that one can take the link between politics and ontology as a common trajectory from works such as *On Escape* through *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. The Judeo-Christian “common front” against National Socialist paganism unfolds into the critique of western ontology as identitarian and totalistic, from the ‘one’ of Parmenides and ‘unity in strife’ of Heraclitus to modern totalitarianism. For the postwar Levinas, this included the more Greek than Judaic Christianity complicit with the Holocaust. The political is therefore not marginal but at the very center of Levinas’s thinking. Levinas’s attitude towards Heidegger needs to be seen in this context. Heidegger is a
primary example of the dangers of subordinating the ethical to ontology. But the threat of reducing the other to the same and infinity to totality is inherent in western ontology and consequently the political itself.

The ambiguity of fraternity, its fragility and its vulnerability to becoming exclusive and violent, is vital to the problem of fascism and the difficulty of political judgment for Levinas. He explores in his later work how identity is possible after the Holocaust and whether there can be identity without murder. Identity is no longer to be found in the ruthless logic of the same but in alterity, just as community is rearticulated in relation to difference. Levinas challenges standard notions of identity in order to rethink identity from the perspective of the other person, of the alterity that ethically challenges being subsumed into the same. He accordingly shifts the question of community from one common earthly characteristic, such as blood and soil or the body, to the possibility of difference. In his critiques of National Socialism and totalitarianism, Levinas confronts the leviathan of earthly powers and the state with the religious language of the messianic promise of the community to come and the prophetic demand for justice for the least amongst us. The ethical sense of this religious language of alterity—which addresses us in the name of the widow, the orphan, the stranger and is already present in the *Torah* and *Talmud*—only emerges more forcefully as the ethical became identified with an-archy, infinity, and the good beyond being.

Caygill’s work also challenges standard interpretations of Levinas by exploring the Eurocentism and Orientalism present in some of his statements that evoke a distrust of the Asiatic in general and the Arab world and Islam in particular. Levinas failed to include Islam within the Judeo-Christian ethical paradigm and never engaged in works of comparative thought. These limitations need to be borne in mind in order to conceptualize a Levinasian politics that is true to its ethical calling.

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**The New Kierkegaard**
Elsebet Jegstrup, ed.

**J. AARON SIMMONS**

Some philosophers are so often mentioned in continental philosophy that it seems as if engagement with their thought is something of a prerequisite for thinking “continents.” Figures such as Freud, Nietzsche, Marx, Hegel and Kierkegaard would definitely be on this list. However, given the extent of their influence on the contemporary philosophical conversation, what can often