

# Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Hello, everyone.

00:00:01 Speaker 1

Welcome to week two of our seminar.

00:00:05 Speaker 1

Before we begin, just a reminder that our next meeting will be tomorrow.

00:00:10 Speaker 1

Same time, same room, same room, same room.

00:00:14 Speaker 1

In 24 hours, we will have Professor Bashir Bashir.

00:00:19 Speaker 1

For today, we have Professor Elad Lapidot.

00:00:24 Speaker 1

Elad Lapidot is a professor for Jewish thought at the University of Lille.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

His work is guided by questions concerning the relation between knowledge and politics.

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Among his many publications, *State of Others*, *Levinas and Decolonial Israel*, which I believe we will hear about today, *Politics of Not Speaking*, which we will not speak about today, but it sounds super interesting.

00:00:55 Speaker 1

both from 2025, *Jews Out of the Question*, *A Critique of Anti-Anti-Semitism* from 2022, and Hebrew translation with introduction and commentary of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, *Des Gestitus*, *Gestis*, sorry, from 22, 2020, sorry.

00:01:17 Speaker 1

Thank you very much, Professor Apidot, for coming, and the floor is yours.

00:01:21 Speaker 2

Thank you very much for the lovely introduction, and thank you for the invitation, and thank you all for being here.

00:01:27 Speaker 2

I'm very happy to be here and to be able to speak to you here in lovely Oxford.

00:01:40 Speaker 2

Yes, so as it's clear the introduction, I'm going to talk about the book project that is already out a few months ago.

00:01:51 Speaker 2

But in a sense, that is just one expression of some ideas from a larger intellectual journey that has been ongoing for more than that, and hopefully far from its end.

00:02:12 Speaker 2

And I will try to share with you some

00:02:18 Speaker 2

some basic thoughts from the book.

00:02:20 Speaker 2

It's a philosophy book, so there are many aspects to it.

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And sometimes they go very deep into Levinas' philosophy, and sometimes you need to really want to know what Levinas says to enjoy all the parts of the book.

00:02:36 Speaker 2

But there is also a bigger claim that it's not only about Levinas, it's a bigger issue.

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So I'm going to share with you some thoughts that relate

00:02:47 Speaker 2

to the larger issue at hand, Levinas and the decolonial and Levinas and Israel and Levinas and decolonial of Israel.

00:02:59 Speaker 2

So I'm going to start by one reflection that captures, that takes 2 very obvious motives from Levinas's project.

00:03:12 Speaker 2

You don't need to know a lot about Levinas.

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I mean, I don't know.

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For those of you who haven't heard about Levinas, he's one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the 20th century.

00:03:31 Speaker 2

One of these Jewish thinkers that we say is an important Jewish thinker, not only because he was Jewish, but he was actually, his thoughts were Jewish in the sense of that he engaged with both Jewish tradition and

00:03:47 Speaker 2

different Jewish phenomena of modernity of the 20th century specifically and spoke also directly to Jews.

00:03:57 Speaker 2

So in this sense, he's a Jewish thinker in all the different senses of the word.

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And one of the important ones of the 20th century at that going, you know, a career going from the late 20s to the early 90s.

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So he's kind of went through

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all of the different big events of the 20th century, big in general, and of course the Jewish, big Jewish events, and was thinking about them as well.

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So he's an interesting thinker to engage with.

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And he's quite, he's one of these thinkers that he's an important Jewish thinker, he's in all the different terms of it, but he's also an important philosopher

00:04:42 Speaker 2

who has been acknowledged as one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, regardless of whatever aspect of Jewishness his thoughts have, to the point of that there are people who deal with Levinas and don't feel the need in any way to connect him to Jewishness.

00:04:58 Speaker 2

And it's actually connected to what I'm going to say.

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So it's an interesting phenomena.

00:05:04 Speaker 2

So it's an important philosopher.

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It's an important Jewish thinker.

00:05:08 Speaker 2

And

00:05:10 Speaker 2

What I wrote here are two of the main gestures of his thought that go from the beginning to the end.

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And when you say Levinas today, it's one of these two sentences that you connect him with.

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And I put it one next to each other, and I think there is a certain tension or a question that is raised by these two motifs.

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The first motif, I can call it the philosophic, purely philosophical, conceptual.

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And this is what philosophers know about Levinas.

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The word Jewish doesn't appear there, it doesn't have to, and for some of them, they don't see it.

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So this is the philosophical Evinas, and his project is an ongoing deep critique against what he thought is a major tendency, the defining tendency of the entire tradition of Western philosophy, of focusing on the question of being.

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And

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And the technical terminology in the language of philosophy for speaking about being is ontology.

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It means the discourse about being.

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So he thought that philosophy from its very beginning, the entire Western philosophy was focused about the question of being.

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And he thought it's a problem.

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It's a problem because it loses sight of moral questions.

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To say it quickly.

00:06:33 Speaker 2

And so against this tendency, the ontological tendency of philosophy, he offers a different tendency or a different basic direction for philosophy and thinking in general that is not focused on ontology, not on the question of being, but is focused on ethics, which for him meant the question not of the being, but of the other person.

00:06:55 Speaker 2

More specifically, our responsibility toward others.

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So he thought that this is the main question.

00:07:01 Speaker 2

of philosophy and not the question of being, but the question of the other, the responsibility for the other.

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So against ontology, Levinas is the philosopher of ethics.

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And if you wish, the ethics of the other.

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That's like 101 Levinas, the philosopher one.

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Now, the second statement is also a way of saying what is Levinas, which corresponds to the first one, but it's from a different perspective.

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It's not purely philosophical.

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You could call it now historical, cultural, Jewish.

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And in this perspective, in this prism, Levinas is a thinker that positioned himself against Western philosophy.

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We already know as an ontology.

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And against Western philosophy, he affirmed another tradition of thought that he himself called Jewish.

00:08:00 Speaker 2

thought.

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So against philosophy, and I'm starting to move you towards the enigma or the paradox or that point, he affirmed an otherness, a certain other tradition to the West.

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The Jew or the Jewish as the other of the West.

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So he affirms the Jewish as the other of the West, and he says that philosophy should be based on responsibility toward the other.

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So the Oxfordian philosopher that we are, should we therefore not say that in a sense what Levinas is saying is that the Jews are the others.

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The Jews are the other of the West toward whom the West needs to think on the basis of a responsibility towards Jews.

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And if this is what Levinas is saying, then what does it mean about his ethics?

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What does it mean about his politics?

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What does it mean about his point or stance towards other others?

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Levinas and the other others.

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So with this little reflection, I bring you, I introduce you to a larger now debate that has been ongoing for several decades concerning the work of Levinas.

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and all the different others.

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So he's, without a question, the philosopher of the ethics of the responsibility to the other, but who are the others?

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So there have been ongoing debates about the different others in Levinas and what is the relation between them, more specifically the Jewish others and the other others.

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It's a broad field.

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in which my work intervenes, and I'm going to just quickly give you a certain schematic model of the discussion that has been ongoing.

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I will speak about what I identify as three basic currents in this debate.

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All of them have a critical stance toward Levinas on this question.

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So the first current of criticism toward Levinas

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I call it the Universalist, and I think one of the important representatives is Judith Butler.

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Another important one is Sara Hamberslag.

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Both of them will protest that I say that they're Universalist, but I think they are.

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But let's see, it's a discussion.

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I think the gist, the essence of what they're saying after all the discussions, I think the essence of what they're saying is that

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a certain Jewish particularism in Levinas undermines his what needs to be a universalist thought.

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And politically, the problem manifests itself in the Jewish nation-state, the state of Israel, that oppresses the non-Jews, the Palestinians, and which a project that Levinas supported, and I will get to that.

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And they think this is the problem, and therefore the answer to that would be to universalize Levinas

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which means de-Judaize Levinas.

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It's too Jewish.

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Okay.

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Second current, I call the post-colonial.

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Fred Moten and John Rabinsky are two of the important voices of that debate, of that current.

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And their point is almost the opposite, almost.

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They say the problem is not the particularism of Levinas.

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The problem is his universalism.

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which is a Judeo-Christian kind of universalism that undermines all the other particular cultures.

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And politically, this is the ideology of European colonialist power that, in the name of representing universality, oppresses all non-European cultures.

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So the remedy to that would be to decolonize the Vinas,

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However, they join the universalists by saying, this too needs to be, this to happen through the de-Judaization of Latinas.

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We need to make him less Jewish.

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The third current, I call Jewish post-colonial, and Samuel Moen and Leo Botnitsky are two important representatives.

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They agree.

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that the problem is not a particularity, but the universality or the Judeo-Christian universality that Levinas represents, and that it undermines particular cultures and tradition of thought.

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However, what they say, Judeo-Christian universalism, the first particularity that it oppressed is the non-Christian Judaism.

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Jews, so to speak, were the first victims, are the first victims, conceptually, if not historically, of Judeo-Christian colonialism.

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So if you want to decolonize Judeleinas, we don't need to de-Judaize him, we need to re-Judaize him.

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I think they all have a point.

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In a sense, there is truth in each one of these currents of criticism.

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What my book does is I'm saying this is not a new debate.

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We, all these people are, you know, in the last decade it has become an issue, Levinas and the other, and the decolonial, and the Eurocentrism of Levinas.

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I say this is not a new debate.

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The debate took place already with the rise of decolonial thought in the 50s and the 60s.

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... tied to the rise of the colonial politics in the 1660s.

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And one of the first places where this discourse took shape is France.

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And Levinas lived there, next, in the main scene in Paris, where all these theories were developed, and he knew very well what's going on.

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So what I'm saying, he was actually, he knew, he knew all these claims and all these debates as they took shape in the first

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... wave of decolonial later to be post-colonial theory.

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And he reacted to that.

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And not only reacted to that, he reshaped his whole thinking based on that.

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So in a sense, all these critiques are already integrated in Levinas as positions that he's taking.

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So what I'm suggesting is that there is a decolonial Jewish thought in Levinas.

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So in a sense, he's a founder or one of the founders or an important seminal voice of decolonial Jewish thought and more specifically, decolonial Jewish state thought.

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And if you want to take it short, you can call it Decolonial Israel.

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Levi Nas and Decolonial Israel.

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That's the title of the book.

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And that's the subtitle.

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The title is State of Others.

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State of Others is precisely the paradox that comes from taking the ethics of the others and use it as a philosophy that justifies the existence of a certain state, in this case the state of Israel.

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An ethics of the other that justifies the Jewish state, a state of others.

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That's the book.

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So that's now I'm going to tell you a little what is happening in the book and what I did again, the main outline.

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So in order to understand what I'm saying in the book, I need to say two things about the so-called methodology.

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So what is my work doing in the field of Levinas studies?

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And it's a

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It's a big field.

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As I said, he's one of the important philosophers.

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There is already many generations of writing on Levinas.

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There is entire geopolitics of writing about Levinas.

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There are different perspectives, debates.

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It's an ongoing thing.

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So my work also intervenes in that.

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And it's important that you understand a little what I'm doing.

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And in what way I'm

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I therefore am pushed to say things that have not been said, I think, the same way.

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So I'm doing mainly 2 new things.

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The first new thing that I'm doing is I'm bringing together the different bodies of Levinas, or more specifically three of them.

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I think there are more.

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There are at least three important bodies, namely bodies of work, that if you wish, of subjectivity, of project, of consciousness, the Levinasian being.

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So there are three genres or bodies of writings that are separate, are separate not only because they are thematically different, because also they are stylistically different.

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And he published them even with different publishers and they have a different voice.

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And he was aware of that and he said it in interviews.

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So it's an open, it's a feature of his work that there are different bodies.

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He's not the only one, but it's a feature.

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So

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Obviously, there is one very central body of the Vinasian work, which is philosophy.

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More specifically, within philosophy, he belongs to what we call phenomenology.

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Not important now, but this is the way he's writing philosophy.

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And there are shorter, longer texts.

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There are two basic big books.

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The book

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two big books of Levinas.

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The most important and famous one is Totality and Infinity.

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This is the French version.

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And this is 1 Levinas.

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And as I said, there are some people, this is the Levinas that they know.

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They know that, they are aware that there are other texts, but for them this is what is important.

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Now there is another, at least for me, for Marsec, two others.

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Bodies of Levinas.

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The second one is what I call Jewish essays.

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I call it because this is how we call it, Jewish essays.

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It's not books.

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He never wrote.

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He's the most important or one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the 20th century.

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He never wrote one book about Judaism.

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He only wrote short, shorter and shorter texts that usually he published in Jewish publications, sometimes in Christians one.

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almost always reacting to some question of the hour.

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Holocaust, racism, Israel, discussions in the Soviet Union, from a Jewish perspective.

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And it's written as from a Jewish perspective, it's a Jewish positionality.

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The author is a Jew.

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This is the text.

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And he's speaking to other Jews, usually, sometimes to Christians, but always as a Jew.

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Jewish essay, the most important collection of these texts is De Ficille Verte, or it's translated as Difficult Freedom.

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It's the most important collection of texts.

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It's a different genre and a different editor, as the publisher, as the philosophy books.

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Now, there is a third genre that, again, he called

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Talmudic readings that of course are Jewish.

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He it's text, it's basically transcripts of Shirurim of Talmud sessions that he gave in annual meetings of French Jewish intellectuals in a Jewish setting.

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But nonetheless, they are not Jewish essays.

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They have a very specific format.

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It's kind of a Talmudic

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reading.

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He brings a passage of the Talmud, and through this passage he deals with the issues of this year's, that year's conference.

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And he develops a whole style, and at a certain moment it becomes a series of publications, once again at a different editor, a publisher, that are always called Lecture Talmudic, or something like this.

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And they build a certain corpus in the Levinasian work, which is different than the other two.

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And as I said, they are very often read separately.

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Most, the big separation is usually between the philosophers who sometimes simply don't read.

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They're aware or just kind of, they know of, but they don't really take the Jewish or Talmudic readings as relevant.

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And from Jewish perspective, you know, people are aware of the philological text.

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They read it, but okay, it's not the important thing.

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So they read separately.

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Now, what I claim in the book and what I'm doing is that

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I'm saying in Levinas's philosophy, separation is the basic model of relation.

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All relationship is based on separation.

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There is no, if there is no separation, there is no relationship.

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There is one thing.

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So in order to be a relationship, there needs to be a separation.

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So the fact that there are three separated body of text doesn't mean that they are not related.

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actually the condition for that.

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So what I'm saying is actually this separation is the articulation of the Levinasian project as a relation between all these texts, between philosophy, Jewishness, and Talmud.

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And more profoundly, or more basically, I'm saying his entire project is a confrontation.

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is a staging of a separation and a relation, which is confrontational, if you remember the first slide I showed, between the tradition of philosophy and the tradition of Jewish thought, and more specifically in Jewish thought, of Talmudic thought.

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I think this is a basic tension in the entire Levinasian project, philosophy versus Talmud.

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I call it a conflict between different worlds of thinking,

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or worlds of knowledge.

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And again, to use a more technical language, inter-epistemic conflict between different epistemic systems, systems of knowledge.

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That's the one thing that I'm doing with Levinas.

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Three bodies brought together.

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The second thing that I'm doing is I'm talking about two lives of Levinas.

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So not only many bodies, also different lives.

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Trinity has true manifestations or true dispensations.

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So commonly, Levinas is understood to be a thinker who had one important question that he developed more and more and more.

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So his earlier, so his later work is more complicated because he just knew, understood more and became more radical sometimes, reformulated.

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I am saying no, it's not just a continuous

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complication and dual radicalization.

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But as other thinkers that Levinas can be related to, most importantly, his main teacher and rival, Martin Heidegger, you can actually detect a break, a rupture in his work, a turn.

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In Heidegger, we still call it Kher, Kher.

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The entire work turns.

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He called it like this.

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And I think Levinas too, there is a turn.

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There is an earlier and later that are not just continuation, but the later is a self-critique of the earlier.

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I positioned the turn around the year 67, 68, what I call 67 after 68.

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What I mean by that is a Jewish turn, the 60, the six day war in 67.

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That is obvious for everybody who's dealing with Jewish.

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Jewish thought that it was an important date, important turn, something happened.

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However, I connected with another turning point, 68, as a symbol for the rise of a decolonial discourse.

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Sometimes it's called New Left.

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There are a different way of calling what happened in 68, it's a huge debate.

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But for my sake, I say where the decolonial discourse has become a main discourse.

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It was not only specific

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thinkers, but it became a main discourse.

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So 60-day war, six-day war, it's too short, 6.

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It was so important.

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It was really only 6.

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Seen from a decolonial perspective or anticolonial perspective.

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That's the event I'm talking about.

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Obviously,

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Obviously, it's not that in two years Levinas change completely everything he said and start completely writing different things.

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It's a process.

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I'm simplifying it.

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I'm trying to, you know, as historians do, point at certain tendencies in a much more complicated reality.

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So I'm talking about a term that I think crystallizes around 67, 68, but obviously there is not a clear cut.

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Now, just to give you a little illustration of

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why I think there is indeed a turn.

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If you just look at the history of publication of Levinas, you will see that there is a Levinas of before 68, his big philosophy book, Totality and Infinity, is from 61.

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His second important philosophy book is from 74, Beyond, or Otherwise in Being, Beyond Essence.

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That was nonetheless, he started to write, well, the first

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document that we have of this book is a lecture that he gave in 68 in Leuven.

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In the Jewish writings or the Jewish essays, the same thing.

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There is 1 important collection, Difficult Freedom.

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It has two editions, one before, one after 68.

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And the Talmudic lectures, although he starts giving them in 59, the first time that he published them as Talmudic lectures, Talmudic readings, lecture of Talmudic, is 68.

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So I think 68 is very present in the book.

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And therefore it's around these dates that I structure my entire reading of the Zevinasyan project.

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And now I'm going to tell you what I see in this project and what is the turn about.

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Now I'm going to make it very simplified because it's a lot of things and a lot of elements.

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So in the discussion we can elaborate certain points, but I'm just going to give you the very simplified outline.

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So I'm going to tell you before and after.

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And in each before and after, I'm going to tell you what is happening in philosophy and what is happening in his Jewish thought and how they are related.

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The basic principle of this parallel between philosophy and Jewish thought, that in philosophy, what is happening is a thought that is based on the condition of the individual person.

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the individual human being, the individual subject.

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It's A phenomenology, it's a description of the way that individuality, subjectivity is constituted.

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This is the concern.

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This is what is happening in the philosophy, in mythology, all around the question of ethics.

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What is happening in Jewish thought is the discourse becomes political and historical.

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It's no longer about individual subjects.

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It's about communities, collectives, peoples, Jews, Christians, Romans, Greek, Americans, Israelis, Arabs, Palestinians, French, of course, and on and on.

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It's on that level the discourse becomes

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historical and political.

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It's there that you will find interventions on actual political occurrences, but also on bigger questions concerning politics and history.

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So in a sense, and I'm trying to show the parallel between the individual, the analysis of individual subjectivity, and bigger questions.

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So what happens before 67, 68?

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I suggest that before 67, 68, in his philosophy, he's telling us

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how ethics, namely each one of us responsibility to other people and we acknowledge that this responsibility, ethics, the ethical relation is the basis for our being.

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So it's not ethics against being.

00:29:54 Speaker 2

It doesn't say that ethics replaces, we don't need to ask the question of being anymore because we're now talking about ethics.

00:30:00 Speaker 2

No.

00:30:01 Speaker 2

He's saying ethics is the foundation of being.

00:30:07 Speaker 2

Namely, at the basis of our existence, of our consciousness, of our subjectivity, there is this acknowledgement of our responsibility to others.

00:30:17 Speaker 2

Once we gained this acknowledgement, we exist and now we, so to speak, perform our being.

00:30:26 Speaker 2

Now, this performance of our being is an affirmative one.

00:30:31 Speaker 2

The subject in his early philosophy is a joyful subject.

00:30:35 Speaker 2

His rational subject, a generous subject, thinks in general terms and in generous terms.

00:30:46 Speaker 2

And the ethics of its foundation manifests itself in its ability to bring into the world justice.

00:30:59 Speaker 2

That's, you know,

00:31:01 Speaker 2

quick formulation of very complex analysis, but just to give you the easy version.

00:31:07 Speaker 2

So this is the Levinas philosophy in 467-68.

00:31:11 Speaker 2

What's happened in Jewish writings of Levinas on his Jewish thought?

00:31:16 Speaker 2

What is happening is parallel.

00:31:18 Speaker 2

You remember on the first slide.

00:31:21 Speaker 2

So what is happening is that the affirmation of Jewish thought is not being done against

00:31:29 Speaker 2

Western philosophy.

00:31:30 Speaker 2

He doesn't suggest that Jewish thought should replace, Talmud should replace philosophy.

00:31:34 Speaker 2

No.

00:31:35 Speaker 2

What he's saying is in a sense, Jewish thought provides the basis for philosophy.

00:31:43 Speaker 2

Like ethics provides the basis for being.

00:31:46 Speaker 2

Because Jewish thought is the thought of the ethics.

00:31:50 Speaker 2

And philosophy is the thought of being.

00:31:52 Speaker 2

So like ethics is the basis of being, Jewish thought is the basis of Western philosophy.

00:31:57 Speaker 2

Which means

00:31:59 Speaker 2

Jews, or the Jewish tradition, or the Jewish thought, is internal to Western thought, and in a sense constitutes its most fundamental and authentic, if you wish, version.

00:32:13 Speaker 2

Politically, what it means is the Jewish project, both epistemical, cultural, and political, is the model for the European project.

00:32:31 Speaker 2

And in more specific terms, the central state Jewish project, the state of Israel, is a certain avant-garde of European humanity outside of Europe, in the Middle East.

00:32:50 Speaker 2

And in a sense, you could call his position, he's not doing it himself,

00:32:57 Speaker 2

I'm doing it for him, a colonial version of Zionism, which you will find, for example, also in Buber, the idea that Jews bring with them some new concept of humanity that for different reasons takes place outside of Europe, but in a sense is a light for all the non-Jews and basically thinking about Europe.

00:33:21 Speaker 2

So I'll call it a colonial version of Zionism.

00:33:24 Speaker 2

Now, to give you

00:33:25 Speaker 2

a sense, what I'm calling, why it's, why although Levinas doesn't say exactly, he does also acknowledge this, that it's a colonial project.

00:33:33 Speaker 2

I'm just quoting quickly from 65, there is a Talmudic reading that's called Promised Land and Permitted Land.

00:33:40 Speaker 2

It's a passage that he reads from the Talmud dealing with the episode of the explorers, of Moses' spies, that he sent 12 spies and they're coming back and they

00:33:51 Speaker 2

almost the entire project is collapsed because they are very pessimistic.

00:33:55 Speaker 2

Anyway, it's about the idea of conquering the Holy Land.

00:33:59 Speaker 2

That's the issue in 65.

00:34:02 Speaker 2

So in the quote, he's facing the issue of the conquest of the Holy Land and why it might be a problematic concept in itself and in the 60s.

00:34:11 Speaker 2

You will say that everyone can imagine that he's founding a just society.

00:34:16 Speaker 2

and that he is sacralizing the earth, and will that encourage conquerors and colonialists, says Levinas.

00:34:22 Speaker 2

But here one must answer, he has an answer.

00:34:26 Speaker 2

The first teaching of Judaism is the following.

00:34:28 Speaker 2

A moral teaching exists, and certain things are more just than others.

00:34:34 Speaker 2

A society in which man is not exploited, a society in which men are equal, a society such as the first founder of the kipputzim wanted it.

00:34:44 Speaker 2

And it is in the name of this universal justice, and not in the name of some national justness or other, that the Israelites lay claim to the land of Israel.

00:34:53 Speaker 2

He's talking about Moses and the Israelites, but of course he knows what he's talking about.

00:34:58 Speaker 2

Those who are about to conquer a country the way heaven is conquered, those who ascend are already beyond delicate tears.

00:35:08 Speaker 2

Okay, you want to bring justice to the world, you have to cut some trees.

00:35:14 Speaker 2

That's, and he specifically understands that it's a colonial set of mind.

00:35:18 Speaker 2

He thinks, however, that it's justified.

00:35:19 Speaker 2

So this is why I'm calling colonial Zionism, which again would not shock any of the founders of Zionism.

00:35:27 Speaker 2

Herzl was thinking very clear about colonialism.

00:35:30 Speaker 2

Today, it has become a, you know, a word, a mind.

00:35:35 Speaker 2

But in the history of Zionists, thought it was obvious.

00:35:39 Speaker 2

So I think Devinas belongs to that before 67, 68.

00:35:44 Speaker 2

Now what happens after?

00:35:46 Speaker 2

What happens after is a double movement once again.

00:35:49 Speaker 2

In the philosophy, ethics is no longer the basis of being.

00:35:54 Speaker 2

It's not affirming ethics.

00:35:57 Speaker 2

To affirm being as the basis of being, to secure being.

00:36:02 Speaker 2

But what happens is actually that ethics becomes the other of being.

00:36:08 Speaker 2

This is the name of the second book, other than being.

00:36:11 Speaker 2

Ethical existence

00:36:14 Speaker 2

goes against being, against existence.

00:36:18 Speaker 2

Ethical existence is not a joyful subject that brings generosity and justice and hospitality to the world.

00:36:27 Speaker 2

It's a subject that is suffering.

00:36:31 Speaker 2

A self-sacrificing, suffering, victimized, all the words that Evanass is using.

00:36:36 Speaker 2

It's not interpretation, this is the book.

00:36:38 Speaker 2

It's A phenomenology of a suffering subject.

00:36:41 Speaker 2

Ethics is to deprive oneself of being.

00:36:47 Speaker 2

This is the philosophy, again, very quickly said.

00:36:51 Speaker 2

The parallel in the Jewish side, the Jewish thought, is no longer the basis of Western humanity, of Western philosophy.

00:37:00 Speaker 2

Now, Jewish cultures and the Jews are no longer presented to the avant-garde of Europe.

00:37:06 Speaker 2

but as the victims of Europe.

00:37:08 Speaker 2

They are the avant-garde of the anti-European movement, the decolonial movement.

00:37:16 Speaker 2

The state of Israel is not the base, the frontier base of Europe.

00:37:24 Speaker 2

It's now the resistance to Europe.

00:37:26 Speaker 2

It's the refuge for the Jews who had to leave Europe, they were persecuted.

00:37:33 Speaker 2

It's a state for the victims of Europe.

00:37:35 Speaker 2

Namely, it is a model, what we will call decolonial nation state.

00:37:42 Speaker 2

And therefore, I call this movement of Levinas, a decolonial turn in his Zionism, a decolonial Zionism.

00:37:50 Speaker 2

And to give you a quick text about that, it's a reading from four years later, 69, a year after 68.

00:37:58 Speaker 2

It's the first Talmudic reading after 68.

00:38:00 Speaker 2

It's called Judaism and Revolution because the annual conference of that year dealt with 68.

00:38:06 Speaker 2

It was about Judaism and 68, Judaism and Revolution.

00:38:09 Speaker 2

And Levinas quotes a letter from a friend of him, the French writer Blanchot, where Blanchot writes, I ask myself, why these young people, the students of 68,

00:38:24 Speaker 2

operated on thoughtlessness, on the usage of empty concepts, imperialism, colonization, and also on the feeling that it is the Palestinians who are the weakest.

00:38:36 Speaker 2

And one must be on the side of the weak, in parentheses, as if Israel were not extremely dreadfully vulnerable.

00:38:44 Speaker 2

And Levinas quotes that and then adds, the two Israel, I think, Mr.

00:38:50 Speaker 2

Israel, the Jewish people, and the state of Israel.

00:38:54 Speaker 2

for Israel, also the state, is vulnerability itself.

00:38:59 Speaker 2

I take this as a moment, you know, one moment that just shows how he moves from the idea of Israel representing justice, which justifies colonialism, to Israel as representing weakness, vulnerability, victimhood.

00:39:19 Speaker 2

It's A decolonial project, not a colonial.

00:39:23 Speaker 2

Now, I want to finish my talk and open a discussion by quickly just saying what it means for the Vinas and the Palestinians.

00:39:34 Speaker 2

The crux of the matter at the end of the day is, you know, what is the position about the conflict, about the issue, about the violence around the project of the state of Israel, you know, the shadow, if you wish.

00:39:51 Speaker 2

So the question of the Palestinians, what is the Vinas position about that?

00:39:54 Speaker 2

So there is a whole debate about the Vinasian Palestinians that has for the most part revolved around one statement that he made.

00:40:04 Speaker 2

In an interview 10 days after Sabra and Shatila massacre, he was interviewed to a Jewish radio in France.

00:40:12 Speaker 2

In Shlomo Malka, the interviewer asked him at a certain point, Emanuel Vinas, you are the philosopher of the other.

00:40:18 Speaker 2

In history, is politics not the very place where the other is encountered?

00:40:22 Speaker 2

Is the other for the Israelis, not first and foremost a Palestinian?

00:40:26 Speaker 2

So you talk about the responsibility to the other.

00:40:29 Speaker 2

Doesn't it mean that Israel is responsible to the Palestinians and therefore responsible for the masculine Shabar and Jatila?

00:40:35 Speaker 2

Levinas gave, I will not read it.

00:40:37 Speaker 2

He gave a complex answer, which basically means no.

00:40:42 Speaker 2

he doesn't want to accept that.

00:40:46 Speaker 2

There are different readings how we explain that it's cryptic.

00:40:50 Speaker 2

But the point is he said no.

00:40:52 Speaker 2

Now, there was a huge debate around this, and one of the most famous intervention is Judith Butler, who said basically what Levinas says, the Palestinians don't have a face.

00:41:03 Speaker 2

Why is it important?

00:41:04 Speaker 2

Because he said the responsibility to the other is my exposure to the face of the other.

00:41:08 Speaker 2

The face of the other is where I'm responsible to.

00:41:12 Speaker 2

It's the plea of the responsibility.

00:41:15 Speaker 2

So Judith Patel said what he says, the Palestinians don't have a plea.

00:41:18 Speaker 2

We don't, there is no response, they all don't have a face, so there is no responsibility toward them.

00:41:23 Speaker 2

A huge debate ensued, many interventions.

00:41:27 Speaker 2

Okay, I think Judith Patel's position was stated maybe too quickly, but I think in bottom line, she's right.

00:41:35 Speaker 2

I think that what Levinas is doing, and I analyze much more than the interview, I think you can find it all over,

00:41:46 Speaker 2

is that there are two phases for his understanding of what is Palestinians, and that these two phases correspond to the two phases of before and after 67, 68.

00:41:57 Speaker 2

So the first phase, the colonial phase, the state of Israel indeed brings Western humanism, universalism, justice to the Middle East.

00:42:09 Speaker 2

And the Palestinians, he doesn't call them at that stage Palestinians, they're Arabs, represent

00:42:15 Speaker 2

the claim and the link to the land.

00:42:18 Speaker 2

Namely, a kind of sedentary, immanent being that doesn't recognize the transcendence of Jewish ethics, not even the transcendence of Christian ethics.

00:42:35 Speaker 2

He never talks about them as Muslim, for someone who anchors ethics in religious tradition of monotheism.

00:42:44 Speaker 2

It's actually weird that he never, I'm not saying, like, Rosenzweig was considering Islam, you know, he didn't like it, but he considered it.

00:42:53 Speaker 2

Leviathan didn't consider Islam.

00:42:55 Speaker 2

Really weird.

00:42:57 Speaker 2

For him, the Arabs are basically pagans, Canaanites in the story of Moses, that ethically correspond to Hitlerism.

00:43:09 Speaker 2

So in a sense, the Arabs are a reincarnation of Hitler,

00:43:15 Speaker 2

And toward Hitlerians, he says at some point, there is no responsibility.

00:43:21 Speaker 2

This is before 67-68.

00:43:24 Speaker 2

After 67-68, there is a turn.

00:43:27 Speaker 2

So it's no longer colonial.

00:43:28 Speaker 2

This is decolonial.

00:43:30 Speaker 2

The state of Israel is not representative of European universalism.

00:43:35 Speaker 2

It's a shelter for the Jewish victims of Western imperialism.

00:43:41 Speaker 2

The role of the Shoah becomes very

00:43:44 Speaker 2

central.

00:43:46 Speaker 2

He is aware of the Shoah before, he speaks about it, but it becomes central after 1968.

00:43:52 Speaker 2

The Palestinians now represent the same imperialism and quest of territory and land as the West.

00:44:04 Speaker 2

So it's now the Palestinians who represent the West and the Jews, the state of Israel, that represents a resistance, an ethical resistance to the imperialism of the West.

00:44:13 Speaker 2

And there are different texts that talk about that.

00:44:16 Speaker 2

So I think I, it's 45 minutes.

00:44:19 Speaker 2

I've been speaking more or less.

00:44:20 Speaker 2

I think I said a lot.

00:44:22 Speaker 2

And I will stop here.

00:44:24 Speaker 2

And thank you for your attention.

00:44:25 Speaker 2

And I'll be very happy to engage on whatever questions and thoughts that you may have.

00:44:32 Speaker 1

Thank you very much.

00:44:33 Speaker 1

We are stopping the recording on 44 minutes and 20 in 40 seconds.

00:44:40 Speaker 1

So.

00:44:41 Speaker 1

Thank you.

00:44:42 Speaker 1

If you have 20 seconds that you want to...