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Ethics And Infinity: Conversations With Philippe Nemo



Synopsis

A masterful series of interviews with Levinas, conducted by French philosopher Philippe Nemo, which provides a succinct presentation of Levinas's philosophy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An exceptionally lucid series of interviews with one of the most central, misunderstood and neglected thinkers of the 20th C. If you are looking to take a quick dip in the work of Levinas (something that may not be possible) I would council you to pick this up, it is the most easily accesible book to attempt a (cursory) look at some of Levinas' key points. The questions are interesting and (more importantly) not trivial... Levinas's responses are succint but also thorough and searching. I found this much more rewarding and illuminating than some of his more weighty tomage. Good for recovering academics, practicing theorists, intellectual diletantes and anyone else interested in adopting an ethically based philosophy that can stand up and go toe to toe with all those wily postmodernists with their impenetrable and convoluted jargon of hubris...

Emmanuel Levinas' books and articles are famously difficult reading, both because of their depth and because their themes, proposals and obessions manage to be breathtakingly against the grain of modernity and, simultaneously, postmodernity. This little book shows Levinas to be not only a great philosopher but also a good one--that is, an author genuinely concerned for his audience. In these transcribed interviews first broadcast on Radio-France, we meet Levinas the generous conversation partner who engages each question in a way that makes fresh understanding

possible. Overhearing this conversation is the shortest route to a basic orientation to this wonderfully disorienting thinker.

The influence of Levinas on Contemporary thought cannot be under-estimated. Many of the subtle and overt nuances in Derrida, Nancy, Deleuze and, on this side of the Atlantic, Lingis and Caputo, derive from Levinasian insights. Indeed, the French reverence for difference and alterity has its origin in the phenomenological findings of Levinas. With Levinas comes a dramatic shift from the Heideggerian cum Greek privilege of ontology. As Levinas suggests, prior to any investigation of Being we first encounter the Other. And it is this encounter with the other that commands me - a command whose first words are 'Thou shalt not kill'. Thus it is ethics that is first philosophy. This description, its reasons and implications, are many and complex. However, this wonderful little book gives a breadth and clarity that should prove invaluable to the scholar and dilettante alike. Nemo's questions are poignant and Levinas' responses are clear, precise and exhibit a genuine gentility and articulateness that is most appreciated in philosophical writings. In addition this book is a wonderful accompaniment to Levinas' two main texts: *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*.

Levinas is one of the finest thinkers to step out of philosophy since Søren Kierkegaard. With this book and his interviews with Nemo, the reader can gain a basic understanding that will urge (h)er further along the trace that Levinas leaves in the history of thought. Read this book, and be drawn into thinking of the Other.

A easier read than most of Levinas' books, Nemo's interview offers a brief but rich overview of the French-Jewish philosopher's work. Conversations range from the influence of Husserl and Heidegger on Levinas to Levinas' thoughts on being, being human, and God. Should serve as a wonderful introduction to those unfamiliar with one of the more important humanist thinkers of the 20th century.

Let's hope Emmanuel Levinas ISN'T right. For Levinas, face-to-face is the opening to the infinite, the human face withstanding and prevailing over our attempts to control (know) every facet of reality. It is during this expanded engagement with the human face that we take responsibility for the Other and experience a transcendent ethical state. E-mail doesn't count. Txting either. Facebook, with its endless stream of disembodied information, might be the worst. It's a nice thought, but it feels more like an elaborately constructed world of desire than an observable or actionable state of

affairs. Too bad. Heightened awareness sounds so much more inviting than the usual sausage we make of human relations. Constructed as a series of conversations, *Ethics and Infinity* is easier to comprehend than most of Levinas's writing and gets to various points quickly. Still, it's a long way from conversational, so buckle up. Levinas may be more visionary than philosopher, but maybe that's the point.

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