

we ask how to solve that problem in concrete human circumstances. And it's in concrete human circumstances that we live our lives and in which we must solve it. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

EVAN THOMPSON

00:36.21

Thank you very much, Jay, for that very stimulating and fast-paced presentation. Very good - finished on time. Our first respondent is Professor Edith Wyschogrod. Professor Wyschogrod has been the Croghan Visiting Professor of Religion at Williams College, a guest Professor of Philosophy at Villanova and is currently the J. Newton Rayzor Professor of Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University.

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:36.47

Emerita.

EVAN THOMPSON

Emerita at Rice University.

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:36.51

Ok, thank you. I'm going to speak about the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who's not exactly

a household word. He is, in many ways, a successor of Heidegger. He belongs to the phenomenological tradition and the story in brief, is what was lacking in Heidegger, according to many, was an ethics, for reasons too complex to go into.

00:37.23

But Levinas is seen as supplementing that defect. Don't read the word supplement in Derrida's sense because Derrida means by supplement, cannibalized and that is not what I mean. What I want to do is to show the ways in which Levinas's thought would be augmented by - not supplement by, not replaced by, but augmented by - an encounter with Buddhism.

00:37.54

Heidegger had written a bit about Zen. Not awfully much, but enough for us to know about his acquaintance with it. Now, no such reference occurs in Levinas. Now, I fully agree - thank you, better? I fully agree with Jay Garfield's warning against reverting to the practice of

setting up East-West parallel claims by laying out columns, as it were, of resemblances that swallow up one conceptual or the other.

00:39.30

Still, if benefits are to accrue, we must begin by identifying some affinities. Good. Ok. Ok? Y'all hear me? Ok. All those here from Texas, I say y-apostrophe-a-l-l. In responding to Jay I hope to address two issues in the philosophy of Levinas, especially the account of self and his ethics of solicitude for the other.

00:39.00

Each of which, as I've said, can be augmented by appealing to a Buddhist analysis of consciousness, the skundas (ph), and especially the depiction of the Bodhisattva. I shall be eclectic, I shall pillage texts from different aspects of the tradition to do this.

00:39.20

Now, I am trained in philosophy, especially phenomenology and I'm not trained in Buddhist- I'm an amateur in two senses. In the sense of

being a lover of that tradition and in the sense of not controlling the languages. So, when I pronounce things in an odd way, it will be as my Hungarian speaking family speaks English, so please forgive. Um, ok.

00:39.45

Levinas- for Levinas philosophy is, what he calls, an egology. An egocentric philosophy focusing on the ego or subject. Egocentrism is expressed in the pursuit of material pleasures, the exercise of power, exploitation of persons and resources relying on both empiricist and rationalist accounts of cognition.

00:40.13

Levinas is not arguing for an epistemology of irrationalism, but for a way of undermining rationality's egological outcomes. Now, what is he do? He appeals to the sheer existence of the other person. When I see the other person, the other - with a capital O - impacts upon the self and undoes this egological structure.

00:40.43

It's incumbent on the self to surrender itself in the interest of the other. You can think of this as a kind of radical altruism. I prefer thinking of egology in terms of popular culture as the Miss Piggy view of the self. Those of you who have been schooled to that particular cartoon will know exactly what Miss Piggy means when she says "moi," and that's what Levinas is opposing.

00:41.13

The relationship between the other - I'm citing a Levinas scholar here - between the other and me reveals an asymmetrical relation which precedes every possibility of choice or decision. The tension between this asymmetry and the economy of the ego's enjoyment of the world is, for him, unfolded in analyses of all the topics of 20th century philosophy -

00:41.42

freedom - Continentally construed - language, the body, sensibility, emotion, work, history, love, death and many consequences for a radical transformation of philosophy are made explicit.

- 00:42.01 He is in debate with Heidegger against Heidegger's account of being, arguing instead for what he calls the primacy of metaphysics, which he interprets as ethics. Ethics before ontology or being.
- 00:42.21 In our relation to the other person, I am addressed by a being who's absolutely exterior to mine and whom I experience at the appearance of the face of the other. I don't experience the face as a form, but as an absolute negation of my power.
- 00:42.45 Levinas is aware that we may enter into relationships with others based on power, chicanery, deception, physical violence, but if we do so, then the face has not appeared as a face. We have not discovered the other in his otherness. We have not experienced what he calls, the nudity of the other's look. The primary

phenomenon upon which all other forms of shame are based.

00:43.19

Our powers are paralyzed before the appeal of the other's defenselessness. We abandon the will to power. We will not to will. Fast forward to a text - and again, I appeal to the apology that my Hungarian friends offer when mispronouncing - Machimanikaya (ph), book one, eight. And I argue that this is a strong parallel, but would also helpfully augment Levinas's account of self in that context of the egology.

00:44.10

An uninstructed ordinary person is not wisely reflecting if he thinks in the past was I, was I not and what was I. What was I like? Having been what, what was I? Or if he thinks in the future - will I be? Will I not be? What will I be? What will I be like? Having been what, what will I be?

00:44.37

Or if he's subjectively doubtful now in the present and thinks - Am I? Am I not? What am I?

What like? Whence has this being come? Where going will it come to be? To one who is thus not wisely reflecting some speculative use may arise as though it were real and true and I'm skipping now.

00:45.08

Simply by self am I aware of not-self. Simply by not-self am I aware of self. The ordinary uninstructed person is not free from yes, birth, aging, dying, grief, sorrow and the like. In sum, as we have all noted, she/he is not freed from suffering.

00:45.36

Now, moving along with Levinas, suffering and its alleviation are absolutely crucial in Levinas. And here to appeal to Buddhist doctrines would further Levinas's account. I will not read any account or citation of the four noble truths - we've heard them over again here, but an appeal to the four noble truths would help to unveil the way in which suffering arises.

00:46.17

And that account is really not present in Levinas's philosophy and one would like to see more there. In fact, what Levinas appears to be advocating could be expressed in the following way - every man and woman a Bodhisattva. Now, when I visited with Levinas what I noted - I sort of was spying out what he had in his bookcase, schronk (ph) as it was known, novels of Dostoyevsky, whose accounts of suffering and responsibility was central to- from the literary standpoint to his depiction of responsibility.

00:47.07

And if- he's not alive anymore, but were he alive, I think I would present a gift in the French sense of no return of a copy of some Buddhist texts. Ok. I'm going to skip a bit. The notion of the following text could have been written by Levinas.

00:47.36

All that mass of pain and evil karma, I take in my own body. I have resolved to save them all. I must set them all free, for all beings are caught

in the net of craving. And there are a number of epistemological texts that I could appeal to, but I shall not do that. I shall instead, very quickly, go to the doctrine of karma.

00:48.09

Clearly, there could be nothing in Levinas that would replicate in any way or parallel the notion of karma as that which accrues to any action and one which explains how action arises from the consequences of preceding actions.

00:48.34

Now, I would argue that not only for Levinas, but for the phenomenological tradition as a whole, the account of the weight of history in Hegel, in Heidegger suggests affinities to the notion of karma.

00:48.53

A very quick allusion to a text – shall we say – this is Levinas speaking, not me. Shall we say that the world with all its sufferings and failings weighs on the ego because the ego is a free consciousness? And in sum, what he is after

- I won't go through the whole thing - is that history is a weight upon us that we cannot escape.

00:49.32

The historical- we are hostages to history. We cannot avoid the consequences of our collective karma and we all collectively pay the price for our collective karmic actions.

00:50.01

There's much more that I would like to say, but I just had my time notice.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:50.06

Thank you very much.

APPLAUSE

Our next respondent is Gareth Sparham. He was a Buddhist monk for many years - from 1973 to 2001 - and now teaches Tibetan language at the University of Michigan.

GARETH SPARHAM

00:50.32

Ok and thank you very much to the organizers for organizing this conference and- Again, thank you very much to the organizers for organizing this