Avi Sagi

Living With the Other

The Ethic of Inner Retreat

Translated by Batya Stein

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Living With the Other

The Ethic of Inner Retreat

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

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The protagonist of ethic, particularly of the deontological ethic that places the concept of duty at its center, is the moral subject. The moral subject's action is based on the recognition of the duty that, as a rational being, he discovers autonomously. This ethic marks the culmination of the individual's process of empowerment as an active agent and, in a deep sense, ascribes to her some of the characteristics ascribed to God—a free being who legislates her moral duties for herself and by herself.

In the context of this ethic, which is quintessentially represented by Kant, the object of the duty or of the moral action is the other. From this perspective, ethic focuses on the subject and her duties rather than on her mutual relationships with the other. Ethics has no particular interest in a concrete other; its concern is the other—any other—as an object of the general duty. Even when the ethic does create mutual duties, these are poured into a unique construct and run along parallel and complementary courses: every individual is a subject, since the moral duty is incumbent on him, and every individual is also an object, as the target of the other's moral action.

The domain that is created, if at all, through the actions of the various subjects is not one of encounter, dialogue, or reciprocity, but one common to different subjects whose actions sometimes coalesce. Thus, for example, if it is my duty to prevent an injustice done to the other and the other is obliged to prevent an injustice done to me, even if these injustices occur simultaneously and a reciprocal action for preventing injustice is performed—creating a joint struggle against injustice is unnecessary. From each individual's perspective, action is a duty incumbent on him, independent of the duty to act that is also incumbent on the other.

This basic construct of ethic, which preserves the asymmetry and the lack of reciprocity, is particularly important in moral terms, representing the principle of independence from the other in fulfilling moral duties—moral responsibility is absolute.[1] Independence from the other and from the other's concrete manifestations represents, in Kantian ethics, the perception of the other as an object of moral duty.

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[1] *Cf.* Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 84–88.

This description is correct even when we take into account the third formulation of the Kantian categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means."[2] According to this formulation, the other is perceived not only as an object, as a means to my action, but also as an end in itself, as a being "for himself." Kant's formulation is clear-cut: "Man, however, is not a thing and hence is not something to be used merely as a means; he must in all his actions always be regarded as an end in himself."[3] Kant, then, characterizes the other as a being who is valuable per se.

Kant's contribution to the recognition of human beings' intrinsic value can hardly be overstated but, even in this formulation, the other is still an object because, despite Kant's qualified formulation, he is still a means to an end in a dual sense. First, the duty is imposed on the agent, who applies it to the other—the obligation is incumbent on the active being while the other is the one who is activated and, as such, an object. Second, the moral agent is the one who ascribes individual value to the other. The other, then, is assigned value, even independent value, within a system constituted by the subject, who is the sovereign. In terms of phenomenological existentialist tradition, the other is valuable "for" the subject, given that he is epistemically dependent on him. The other, then, cannot as such impose her own value—she is not "for herself" and, in an ethical context, she will always be the object of the moral action.

This analysis indicates that the standard ethic is founded on the subject-object relationship—the "self" is sovereign and active, the constitutive entity, and the other is the constituted one. Ostensibly, this determination is too radical because the constitutive relations between subject and object belong to the epistemological domain—the subject, through her consciousness, constitutes the object. In the ethical context, however, the other is a constituted being, found "out there."

In what sense is the other constituted? The answer to this question is a function of what is meant by the constituting act. This act locates a raw datum (the other) within an independent, existent epistemic scheme, and only this scheme endows the raw datum with meaning and value. A similar mechanism is at work in the ethical act: the other is "the datum" that exists "out there." From the perspective of an ethic of duty, however, the other does not create the duty that is imposed on me; instead, I have to activate the conscious mechanisms by which I judge the duty toward the other that is imposed on me. These mechanisms enable me to transcend the actual manifestations of the other and locate her within the suitable moral context. The other, then, is only the object of the duty, and her standing in the determination of the duty depends on my previous network of meaning as a moral agent. The other's independence is not given a priori and is not imposed on the moral agent; instead, it is constituted out of the categorical imperative and its justifications.

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[2] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, ID: Hackett, 1993), 36.

[3] Ibid.

According to this analysis, the ethic is correlated with our standard patterns of knowledge. In both these realms, the subject-object relationship is ruled by a hierarchical and asymmetrical network of meaning; in both these realms, the sovereign subject enjoys a unique status that the object (even the human "object") does not have. In the ethical realm, this relationship is embodied in the attitude to the other as a concrete entity. According to the original formulation of the categorical imperative, the determination of the duty toward the other derives from the ability to generalize: "We must be able to will that a maxim of our action become a universal law."[4] According to this formulation, which is characteristic of the ethic of duty, my attitude toward the other is not exclusively determined by his situation—his concrete personality, his suffering, and his distress—but rather the opposite—I must judge the other and his situation in light of the general legal system. In this sense, my attitude to the other is only a representation of my attitude to *all* others. Her uniqueness, if I cannot include her under a general principle, does not impose a special duty on me. The victory of the principle of generality uproots something essential from human existence because "the humanity" of each human being is not only the universal foundation common to all but also, and mainly, the element that differentiates them from one another. Uniqueness is what fixates them as concrete individual entities.

Contrary to this ethic, which takes the active subject as its starting point, is an ethic that begins with the unconditioned presence of the other. This ethic changes the ethical domain. Henceforth, rather than the subject being the autonomous agent who makes the other the object of her moral action, the other's presence precedes the constitutive act by breaking into the subject's existence and imposing itself upon it. I expand on this ethic in Chap. 3 below, and here I present only its basic assumption—the other is an entity that is "for himself" rather than a perception in the subject's primary conceptual network. The direction is the opposite: the other is the one who imposes a duty on the subject, and in Levinas' terms: "I analyze the interhuman relationship as if … the face signifies an order in my regard; this is not the manner in which an ordinary sign signifies its signified; this order is the very signifyingness of the face."[5] According to Levinas, "the first word of the face is the 'Thou shalt not kill.'"[6]

In a more moderate formulation, in the context of an ethics of presence, "the other" is the active being and "the self" is the activated one: the self can respond to the other's presence or refuse it. Whereas the standard ethic is based on the subject and on her will and reason, an ethics of presence is based on the appearance of the other. As shown in Chap. 3, Levinas describes this presence through a religious term—epiphany, meaning the "revelation" of the other, which transcends the scheme of subject-object relationships.

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[4] Ibid., 32.

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 97–98.

[6] Ibid., 89.

The deep vulnerability of this ethic is its epistemology. It creates a phenomenology of the other without a subject, that is, without an active judging being that locates the other within his world. How can the other become "other," a transcendent entity, without an active subject? If the presence of the other has any typical characteristics, if the other has a face that can be described, the traces of the describing and characterizing subject cannot be blurred! On the other hand, if the other is not characterized and she is a "pure presence"—what is the ethical meaning of her existence? Finally, how can any duty be constituted without an active subject who assumes it?

These two ethics face one another, each leading to an *aporia*. On the one hand is an ethic whose hero is the active subject, which turns the other into an object and denies him an essential element of existence; on the other is an ethic whose hero is the other, an ethic that grants no meaning to the subject, who appears as activated. The former ethic is based on the conceptual framework that constitutes the duty and the standing of the other, while the latter rests on the presence of the other first. Whereas the former ethic is found lacking in its excessive abstraction and its empowerment of the subject, the latter overstates the empowerment of the other and fails to locate her presence within the subject's conceptual framework, which is a condition of all conscious activity.

This book will offer an intermediate position, making both subject and other active and activated. It does support the view that the subject cannot be denied her sovereignty and standing, which is a condition of any act of judgment and commitment and, therefore, takes the subject's primary standing as its starting point. It also states, however, that this unique standing could create a hierarchy between the subject and the other and, therefore, assumes that the other does indeed transcend the subject. This transcendence is not merely a moral demand but a clear, multifaceted phenomenological datum. Epistemologically, the other is not fully known and invariably contains a residue that cannot be exhausted, evident in his refusal to be located as merely an object in the subject's world. This permanent refusal is expressed in the fact that all attempts to locate the other as object compel some kind of violence toward him—silencing him, excluding him, looking away, or viewing him as transparent. The other is as primary as the subject, but this primacy can be manipulated due to the fundamental attribute of the subject as a constitutive entity.

The tension between these two poles—the subject and the other—can be solved through the sovereign subject's special quality: the subject can retreat into herself—restrict and limit herself to enable the other's presence to appear. This act of contraction expresses the subject's sovereign character. As an active entity, he can direct his activity toward himself and relocate himself. When he situates himself as an open entity, attentive to what is present before him, the other's presence is not an imposition; indeed, it conveys the subject's openness toward the other and toward the transcendent. The subject is the one who enables this presence. In the context of this openness, the other is not "for me"; instead, the subject's self-location as an open entity conveys her readiness to accept what appears before her. This openness to what is enables the appearance of the other and, no less so—the appearance of the transcendent experience in general, of which the other's manifestation is a part. This

complex movement, described in detail below, is what I called "the ethic of inner retreat" or "the ethic of self-retreat."

The "retreat of the self" means that the sovereign retreats inwards, delays his activity, and locates himself in a position of openness to the other, a stance that compels him to attention, to self-criticism, and to constant reflection. The subject locates herself in a position typical of self-consciousness: she is the subject as well as the object of herself. She relates to herself, examines her activity, and retreats. Since in her consciousness the subject is identical to the object, and since the consciousness of self does not assume shape outside the subject's real existence—critical reflection leads to practical results when the sovereign subject relocates himself, restrains his tendency to view himself as the source and the justification of the moral action, relates to the other, and is open to what appears before him.

The ethic of inner retreat, rather than a one-time movement, is an existential voyage that the subject takes upon himself as an active agent. Moreover, it is a tense movement because the subject, who is not meant to renounce his active stance, shifts back and forth within a space whose borders are determined by two contradictory dangers: on the one hand, the danger of constituting the other, and on the other, the danger of the "other" violently overpowering the subject.

This book traces the contours of inner retreat and attempts to rethink it through its concrete performance in various realms, without seeking to offer a general theory of it. Each chapter focuses on a specific area and outlines the dialectical movement of inner retreat in various realms of life, with Chap. 3 presenting the core of the thesis in greater detail.

This is a personal, though not a private, book. It is personal because it conveys my prolonged reflection, as a real person, on my own concrete personal existence, as a being in touch with what is beyond him. It is not private because its insights, like insights generally, transcend the personal and suggest new possibilities. The book was born from my ongoing conversation with colleagues and close partners over many years—actual partners and texts behind which stand actual people. The approaches formulated in this book were woven in the course of our encounters, and readers are invited to join this exchange.

Living with the Other: The Ethic of Inner Retreat is devoted to the blessed memory of my illustrious teacher, Prof. Éliane Amado Levy-Valensi (Marseille 1919-Jerusalem 2006). Prof. Amado Levy-Valensi was an intellectual of uncommon stature, a scholar with an international reputation, an inspiring teacher, and a radiant personality who, in her many studies, combined different dimensions of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and Judaism. Her Zionist commitment led her from a Sorbonne cathedra to the philosophy department of Bar-Ilan University. It is from her I learned the first chapters in the ethic of inner retreat, both at the existential personal level and at the intellectual one, in her profound lectures on the history of philosophy. The seeds of her rich thought are at the foundation of this book's central theme and of many of my other works. Her thought and her personality have continuously inspired me as well as her many other students in Israel and in the world. This book is devoted to her with deep thanks and appreciation for all that she bequeathed to my wife Rivka and to me—her students.

Chapter 2
The Ethic of Compassion and the Ethic of Justice

The sole ruler in the normative kingdom is the individual, the subject as moral agent. The best realm for examining the standing of the individual is the practical-ethical field of action. It is through action that the individual can concretize his appearance as one who constitutes the suitable moral norm relying on his epistemic autonomy. Action, however, is also the field where the self can retreat when faced with the appearance of the other. In this chapter, I show that the difference between these two appearances of the self comes forth in the difference between two types of ethic: the ethic of justice and the ethic of compassion. Whereas the ethic of justice realizes the sovereign control of the moral subject, who constitutes the field relying on her normative considerations, the ethic of compassion epitomizes the subject's readiness to retreat and renounce his active and sovereign standing in favor of what appears before his eyes—the suffering other.

The roots of the tension between the two types of ethics date back to Aristotle who, in one of the classic and influential discussions on justice, drew a distinction between justice and equity,[1] and concluded that "justice and equity are not absolutely identical, yet cannot be classified as different."[2] This conclusion led him to wonder about the exact relationship between the two, since it is hard to assume that equity is entirely different from justice—were it so, the result would be that "either the just or the equitable is not good," while "if both are good the difference does not exist."[3] This puzzlement leads Aristotle to the following conclusion:

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[1] A previous version of sections of this chapter appears in Avi Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, trans. Batya Stein (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002), 159–172.

[2] Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), 166.

[3] Ibid.

This chapter appeared in a Hebrew book *titled Facing Others and Otherness: The Ethics of Inner Retreat* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2012). The Hebrew title is *Mul aherim ve-aherut: Etika shel ha-nesigah ha-penimit*.

> Equity, though a higher thing than one form of justice, is itself just and is not generically
> different from justice. Thus, so far as both are good, they coincide, though equity is to be
> preferred. What puzzles people is the fact that equity, though just, is not the justice of the law
> courts but a method of restoring the balance of justice when it has been tilted by the law.[4]

Aristotle finds that generalization, the basic feature of legal justice, is problematic. Rather than a random feature or a mistake, generalization is "in the nature of the case": legal justice is meant to apply equally to all those bound by it. But precisely generalization is what could lead to injustice in individual cases, since "there are cases which cannot be settled by a general statement."[5] According to Aristotle, equity, which is a specific kind of justice, enables the correction of this flaw because it enables us to renounce the law's general character:

> And equity essentially is just this rectification of the law, where the law has to be amplified
> because of the general terms in which it has to be couched. This in fact is the reason why
> everything is not regulated by law; it is because there are cases which no law can be framed
> to cover and which can only be met by a special regulation. It is useless to apply a definite
> yardstick to something indefinite …
>   We now see what equity is, and that it is just and superior to one kind of justice. And this
> lets us also see clearly the nature of the equitable man. He is one who by deliberate choice
> has taught himself the habit of doing equitable things, who is not a stickler for his rights to
> the disadvantage of others but refrains from pressing his claims even when he has the law
> on his side. It is a disposition of this kind which finds its expression in equity—equity
> which we have just shown to be a species of justice and not a disposition of a different genus
> altogether.[6]

The importance of these matters can hardly be overstated. These Aristotelian determinations have, ever since, continuously challenged practical, moral, and legal thought. They point to the need for more than one kind of justice so that justice itself may be perfected and attained. Despite their importance, however, the transition from legal to equitable justice remains vague. Ultimately, it rests upon the discretion of the judge, of the legislating society, or of the individual demanding her legal rights and, according to Aristotle's formulation, this transition is entirely voluntary. But what is this discretion founded upon? Does it rest on an arbitrary decision or whim, or is it perhaps an epistemological mechanism serving to identify individual injustices? Aristotle's critics claimed that taking an individual injustice into account could lead to a greater one—breaking the law to solve a local personal problem could cause greater damage to the generality of the law and to its contribution. Aristotle himself merely hints to it here, but evident in his words is a vague consciousness of the need for another ethic that, rather than beginning from the general and the abstract, takes the individual as its starting point, and rather than at the generality of the law and the discourse of rights it enables, looks at the concrete and the local. If legal justice erases the specific face of the other, equity actually begins from the other's face. In Levinas' terms, equity is responsive to the basic demand that follows from the look of the other.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 167.

[6] Ibid., 167–168.

According to Aristotle, equity is another layer of justice. In the formulation that I wish to suggest here, equity implies another opening in the attitude toward the other. Fostering this disposition enables us to transcend the perspective of the law when looking at the other and develop a different attitude toward her as one deserving respect, attention, and consideration. A disposition of equity could also lead to the contraction and retreat of the self in order to make room for the other. It does not compel a dialogue with the other, but its focus on the individual could shape a different relationship, beyond the bounds of justice. In many ways, such an attitude complements justice but not in the sense that Aristotle had pointed out—changing the disposition allows changing the field where human relationships are shaped.

Ethics regulates the attitude to the other and shows the way to the good life. In this chapter, I redraw the boundaries of the ethical discourse,[7] which includes both justice and equity. I claim that this is not a field where one discourse is merely the correction of the other, as Aristotle suggests, but a discourse the two ethics conduct simultaneously as part of a complex dialectic relationship. The ethic of compassion and the ethic of justice differ in the dispositions they shape and in the object of the ethical action, and each one creates a different kind of political discourse as well. The complex relationships between these two modes of discourse will be at the center of the discussion.

The philosophical discussion tends to blur the borders between the two ethics (and the two political discourses derived from them) with vague claims. The moral field of discourse will be explicated by approaching these two ethics as modes of discourse, each one organizing a world of meaning, attitudes, and orientation in the world. Both are myths since both create and shape real life constructs around an organizing concept: "compassion" or "justice." This methodological framework, focusing on the explication of the two modes of discourse, obviously includes their implications for humans as moral agents. The confrontation between the two ethics (and the two politics) that I present in the discussion is itself part of the explication strategy. Their understanding will enable a new approach concerning the proper relationship between them in the realm of moral practice, a matter taking up a great deal of the discussion.

The Ethic of Compassion

What is compassion? Is it a worthy moral quality? What type of interpersonal discourse does compassion shape? A basic description of the quality of compassion was given by Hermann Cohen, who developed his thought through the critique of a view he ascribed to Benedict de Spinoza.[8] Spinoza describes compassion as "sorrow

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[7] For an extensive analysis of the "discourse" concept, which projects on my use of it, see Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[8] In this chapter, I deal with the way that Hermann Cohen understood Spinoza. A rigorous reading of Spinoza shows that Cohen ascribed to him views that are not his, but since I do not deal here

which springs from another's loss."[9] Compassion, then, is a type of sadness, different from other types of sadness because its cause is the negative plight of the other, and thus an affection of the compassionate person. According to Cohen's interpretation, compassion is an inner event that does not necessarily influence the real attitude toward the suffering other, because in compassion we do not exceed the bounds of our circumscribed being. If the compassionate person does mobilize into action in favor of a troubled other, this will only be a random event rather than a result of compassion's basic structure.

Cohen claims that Spinoza—and the ensuing Kantian tradition, which I discuss below—had failed to understand compassion. He shows that, according to Spinoza, the antithesis of compassion is envy. In compassion, the individual senses the deprivation and grievance of the other, whereas in envy, the individual senses the other's excessive abundance: envy is "therefore nothing but hatred in so far as it is considered to dispose a man so that he rejoices over the evil and is saddened by the good which befalls another."[10] The implication is that "compassion … stems from the same source as envy,"[11] since both are selfish attributes. Cohen, however, makes another claim: "Just this, however, shows the abyss in his [Spinoza's] thinking; he does not see the chasm that exists between compassion and envy. This comparison is only possible when one does not think about social suffering."[12] Cohen points to the etymology of the word "compassion": "suffering with" (*mitleiden*).[13] Thus, the compassionate person becomes a partner in the suffering of the object of compassion. This matter that, as I show below, Kant understood well but did not interpret properly, leads Cohen to claim that this partnership in suffering enables us to discover the other as a human being, contrary to the view of Spinoza—as Cohen understood it—and of Kant in his wake, stating that compassion is only an affection.

Compassion denotes participation in "social suffering." It deals with the other for what she is in her concrete existence—a being wrapped in suffering and sorrow. Contrary to Spinoza and his followers, who view compassion as a feeling concerned with the actual feeling subject, his emotions and experiences, Cohen shows that, phenomenologically, compassion is an attribute that turns to the other.

It merits note that, already in the eighteenth century, beside the classic view of compassion as an affection, another view was widespread that presented compassion, in Norman Fiering's words, as "irresistible."[14] This view assumed that people feel

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with the history of ideas, I will refrain from discussing the sources that influenced his interpretation.

[9] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethic*, trans. W. Hale White and Amelia Hutchinson Stirling (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), Schol., Prop. xxii, 125.

[10] Spinoza, *Ethic*, Schol., Prop. xxiv, 127.

[11] Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972), 140.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 139. In my quotations from the English version of Cohen's book, I changed from pity to compassion the translation of the original German *mitleiden*.

[14] Norman S. Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1966), 195.

compassion for the suffering of others and are driven to action: the fact that the other is suffering compels the one whose heart opens up to this suffering to act. The compassionate person cannot disregard this suffering, which is the other's call to action.

Arthur Schopenhauer ascribes a crucial role to compassion in the development of morality. Schopenhauer rejects the Kantian position, which assumes that abstract rules or principles might guide moral behavior. He holds that, just as knowledge of aesthetic rules and principles does not turn us into artists, neither will knowledge of moral laws and rules turn us into moral creatures.[15] According to Schopenhauer, compassion, namely, a yearning for the other's well-being,[16] is a criterion for estimating the value of a moral action: "only insofar as an action has sprung from compassion does it have moral value, and every action resulting from any other motive had none."[17] Morality is rooted in the individual's actual being, held Schopenhauer, and compassion fully reflects it.

Phenomenological analyses of compassion have been widespread since Hermann Cohen, confirming the intuitions that various theoreticians had tried to formulate—compassion awakens vis-à-vis the distress of the other, the object of compassion is one specific other, compassion is a response to the other's pain, sorrow, anguish, or vulnerability. In the words of the Jewish biblical commentator Samuel David Luzzato (Italy, 1800–1865): "The compassionate man identifies himself with the suffering person and does not rest until he helps him, and alleviates his pain."[18] Compassion, then, is one of the emotions where the object is the other's distress.[19]

But what is the relationship between the compassionate person and the object of this compassion? In what way, if any, does this emotion differ from pity? Stefan Zweig, in *Beware of Pity*, draws a distinction between two kinds of compassion:

> One, the weak and sentimental kind, which is really no more than the heart's impatience to be rid as quickly as possible of the painful emotion aroused by the sight of another's unhappiness, that pity which is not compassion, but only an instinctive desire to fortify one's own soul against the sufferings of another; and the other, the only kind that counts, the unsentimental but creative kind, which knows what it is about and is determined to hold out, in patience and forbearance to the very limit of its strength and even beyond.[20]

Latent in Zweig's distinction is the difference between pity and compassion, and also a suggested outline for the analysis of compassion. Compassion, as Adrian

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[15] On his view, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. Payne (Indianapolis, ID: Bobbs Merril, 1965), 187–198.

[16] Ibid., 145.

[17] Ibid., 144.

[18] Samuel David Luzzato, "The Foundations of the Torah," in *Studies in Torah Judaism: Luzzato's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism*, ed. Noah H. Rosenbloom (New York: Yeshiva University, 1965), 157. Hermann Cohen may have been influenced by Luzzato's analysis. Note that, like Schopenhauer, Luzzato too viewed compassion as a constitutive component of moral action, and his definition of compassion is close to that of Cohen in *Religion of Reason*, 162.

[19] See also Lawrence Blum, "Compassion," in *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz and Robert B. Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987), 230; Nancy E. Snow, "Compassion," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 28 (1991) 195–196.

[20] Stefan Zweig, *Beware of Pity*, trans. Phyllis and Trevor Blewitt (London: Cassell, 1953), 209.

Piper indicates, involves three elements: (1) Empathic understanding of the other's condition. Although still passive, this understanding is only the beginning of the opening up to the other. (2) A sense of suffering resembling that sensed by the object of compassion resting on sympathy and drawing together the object of compassion and the compassionate person in a way that transcends processes of cognitive understanding. (3) A change in the disposition of the compassionate person from neutrality to action. From this analysis, Piper derives three components of compassion: a cognitive, an affective, and a conative component.[21] All three denote stages in the process of increasing identification between the compassionate person and the object of compassion, which eliminate the distance between them: from a deep understanding of the other's suffering, through identification with this suffering and a sense of partnership in it,[22] up to the translation of this identification into real action.

What enables this identification is the imagination.[23] Compassion requires the compassionate person to vividly envisage the sufferer's plight, and we can feel compassion for the other enduring a pain we have never experienced. Compassion, then, is not based on a shared experience but on imagination, through which the compassionate person senses that the suffering other is a human creature, a partner to human existence and its hardships.[24]

The view that compassion is not based on the compassionate person's experiences was clearly formulated by Cohen. In his view, Schopenhauer's mistake was precisely his perception of compassion as an expansion of the self: "Compassion should only reveal to me that the other is rather myself. Therefore if I have compassion for him, I have it rather for myself."[25] This misunderstanding of compassion is a result of Schopenhauer's view of it as a kind of affect, whose end is the self. Cohen notes in this regard: "Every metaphysical and ethical misunderstanding of compassion originates in the erroneous view that compassion is only reflexive and is only incited in and by myself."[26]

When feeling compassion, we transcend our boundaries and experience the suffering of the other. Compassion is an opening up to the other and her distress, and its emergence marks a deep transformation in our self-identity: from a creature narcissistically constituted by the self and through the self to one constituted by a profound experience of partnership. The compassionate subject identifies with the other's pain, recognizing it as an expression of human vulnerability that could affect every human being at any time.[27] Compassion is thus a change in the basic disposition of human beings toward themselves. It exposes our membership in the broader

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[21] Adrian M. S. Piper, "Impartiality, Compassion, and Moral Imagination," *Ethics* 101 (1991), 743.

[22] Snow, "Compassion," 197–199.

[23] Blum, "Compassion," 231–232. On the imagination as a mediating mechanism in the relationship with the other, see below.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 140.

[26] Ibid., 142.

[27] Snow, "Compassion," 197–199.

human community and the fact that the self is not only a subject for whom the other is an object. The self is being with the other—both are subjects and, more precisely, living beings.[28] In this sense, compassion is not merely an act of the imagination; it is not based on the random ability to imagine the situation of others and identify with them but on the transparent recognition that shared human existence is vulnerable and unsafe. An impressive indication of this recognition is found in *Literature or Life*, a dramatic account of Jorge Semprún's experiences in Buchenwald. Faced with the death of his companions, he writes:

> The look in my companions' eyes, no matter how fraternal (because it was, on the whole), reflected the image of death. Death was the substance of our brotherhood, the key to our destiny, the sign of our membership in the community of the living. Together we lived that experience of death, that compassion. This defined our being: to be with one another as death advanced upon us … All we who were going to die had chosen the fraternity of this death through a love of freedom.[29]

Semprún is indeed describing an extreme and atypical human existence, but it is precisely on the edge of destruction that the character of human existence becomes clear and transparent. Facing the terror of death, the companions turn to one another with a look of compassion.

All the elements of compassion are evident in the redefinition of the partners to the relationship—the compassionate subject and the object of compassion—as human creatures. Cohen holds that compassion plays a crucial role in the constitution of the attitude toward the other:

> Compassion is so little reflexive from the other man back to the self that, rather, the other man, who supposedly merely drives me back to myself, and who until now counts only as the next man and does not yet exist as the fellowman, is to be created through compassion as the fellowman.[30]

Compassion leads to changes in the perception of the other. Before compassion, the other had been an undefined, random entity.[31] Through compassion, the other becomes a "thou," a concrete human creature with a unique face. This transformation takes place through the feeling of compassion that directs one to the other's real pain, an actual pain implanted in a concrete world. Simultaneously, the other's transformation into a fellow—and in Cohen's view, because of it[32]—the compassionate person is reconstituted: compassion toward the other's pain and her concrete existence redirect me to my concrete being:

> If now, however, through suffering and compassion, the Thou in man is discovered, then the I may reappear liberated from the shadow of selfishness. Furthermore, even one's own suffering need not now be accepted with plain indifference. To have compassion with one's own suffering does not have to be simply inert and fruitless sentimentality. Corporeality

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[28] Alan R. Drengson, "Compassion and Transcendence of Duty and Inclination," *Philosophy Today* 25 (1981), 39.

[29] Jorge Semprún, *Literature or Life*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Viking, 1997), 24.

[30] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 142.

[31] Ibid., 16–19.

[32] Ibid., 19–20.

belongs, as matters stand, to the soul of the individual and the soul is neglected when the affliction of the body is neglected. Humanity requires consideration for one's own suffering.[33]

Compassion makes human beings aware of their circumscribed corporeal existence, brings them down from the rarefied heights of abstract universal duties, and returns them to the temporal historical circumstances of their lives. Compassion is no longer one feeling among many. It constitutes a renewed humanity in which concrete human creatures turn to one another out of understanding and identification, willing to commit themselves to action in the concrete world. Compassion restrains the passion for a solely metaphysical understanding of suffering and pain and redirects each one of us to assume actual responsibility for our own and the other's existence. It reveals humans to one another anew, as partners to concrete human existence.

A fuller understanding of the interpersonal relationships shaped by compassion requires a renewed analysis of the relationship between pity and compassion. As I show below, Kant and his followers did not differentiate at all between them. Kant even assumed that compassion/pity leads to unworthy relationships because it exposes the hierarchical ties between the compassionate or pitying person and the one in need of such feelings. This hierarchy is indeed found in pity and is actually an essential feature of it. *Don't Expect Miracles* offers an illuminating literary expression in the monolog of a woman who is an object of pity:

> But when they see you're finished, their hearts become heavy, their hearts become black. So what do they do to lighten their hearts again? They pour their pity on your head. A bucket of water from the end of the mopping, black water, that is their pity. Now that they've poured their pity on you, their heart is clean again. Sparkling clean! Shining from their thinking how good they are. And you? What's with you? You stand there, soaked to your bones, and dirty too, from their black water.[34]

Zweig, however, was right. Compassion is not the same as pity, and Blum points to several differences between them.[35] First, compassion leads to the acknowledgment of a basic human equality because it is predicated on our equal vulnerability to the possibility of suffering, whereas pity perpetuates the inferiority of the object of pity while uplifting the one generously granting favors. Without the empathy and sympathy present in compassion, pity is founded on the mutual distance between the parties. Another literary expression of this distinction appears in Yosef Haim Brenner's novel *Misaviv la-Nekudah*, where he traces the inner musings of Abramson, the protagonist:

> Since he had come to live in these poor quarters, Abramson began relating to everyone closely and tenderly, himself unaware of how much this closeness was compassion and identification with the sorrow of the heavy burden borne by these people, and how much of it was scorn and condescension for all their concerns and values.[36]

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[33] Ibid., 19.

[34] Sara Shiloh, *Don't Expect Miracles* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), 17 [Heb].

[35] Blum, "Compassion," 233.

[36] Yosef Haim Brenner, *Writings*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1978–1985), 435–436 [Heb].

Brenner clearly separates compassion and the shared sorrow that brings the compassionate person and the object of his compassion close together from the feeling of pity that conveys distance between them.

Second, pity rests on an explicit or implicit assumption whereby people in need of it have brought their misfortune upon themselves through their ill-considered actions, or by failing to prevent their misery in time, or because they deserved what befell them. Pity is often accompanied by a negative judgment or by an accusation. Both sides assume that the misfortune afflicting the object of pity is not wholly unfair; indeed, pity goes beyond the requirement of justice.[37]

Compassion, by contrast, instead of a judgmental act that locates the object of compassion in the depths of her affliction, is an act of participation and identification with the sufferer in his pain, in a recognition that precludes accusations: "The book of guilt must be destroyed … the question of guilt … cannot be considered in this connection, because thereby the discovery of the fellow man would be missed."[38] Accusing the suffering other is an attempt to justify his pain, which allows us to disengage and remain indifferent. Compassion is radically different—it involves a partnership of understanding and identification, and entails no blame.

Third, pity is a passing, episodic feeling attuned to affections, whereas compassion, because it is based on participation and identification with its object, is characterized by the continuity of the feeling and the ensuing corrective action.[39] The episodic nature of pity comes forth in the fact that feelings of pity and brutality toward the same person can be concurrent, "they can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment, despite all logic."[40] Compassion, by contrast, dismisses the possibility of cruelty, since it is based on a view of the other as one in whose suffering we share and with whom we feel solidarity.

In addition to the differences between compassion and pity noted by Blum, two other differences follow from the essence of compassion. The first is that compassion is directed toward a specific person experiencing a particular pain. It is constituted in a particular situation. Compassion emerges in response to the demand posed by the sufferer's plight and according to her unique circumstances. It assumes the other is an individual and, therefore, neither rests on nor strives for generalization. Pity, however, rests on affections evoked by the pain of the other while blurring the sufferer's concrete specific pain, and thus his individual character. Pity can therefore easily shift from one sufferer to another without the one who feels it sensing it poses any specific demand because it is prompted by the experience of the one

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[37] On this matter, see George W. Rainbolt, "Mercy: An Independent, Imperfect Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1990), 169.

[38] Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 137.

[39] For further discussion of the distinctions between pity and compassion and their implications for interpersonal relations, see Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), ch. 11.

[40] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), 39.