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## The Roads of the Others: E. Levinas and T. Adorno

Kito keliai: E. Levinas ir T. Adorno

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**Abstract:** In this article, Levinas' philosophy is interpreted as an ethical and Talmudic consideration of existential paths. After Auschwitz, the concept of otherness and the diversity of other faces presupposes a free and diverse "being on the road," an ethics of journey, and denies theodicy and an essentialist interpretation of being. The thesis is proven by comparing Levinas', Baranova's and Adorno's approaches to ethics and Exegesis. Levinas' philosophy is elaborated by referring to the exegesis of the Exodus and the concept of an incomprehensibility of Auschwitz. The author discusses the philosophies of Levinas and Adorno who both consider the Holocaust as an occurrence not open to interpretation. Levinas advocates the end of theodicy as a justification for divine history and argues the primacy of ethics, while Adorno develops anti-theodicy and presents the relevance of critique of instrumental reason.

**Keywords:** Negative Theodicy, Exodus, Holocaust, Gulag, Levinas, Adorno.

**Summary:** Straipsnyje Levino filosofija interpretuojama kaip etinis ir talmudinis egzistencinių kelių svarstymas. Autorius teigia, kad kitoniškumo ir kitų veidų įvairovės samprata po Aušvico neigia teodiciją ir esencialistinę būties interpretaciją, tačiau supponuoja įvairiapusę „buvimo kelyje“ etiką. Straipsnis lygina Levino, Baranovos ir Adorno požiūrius į etiką ir egzegzę. Levino filosofija plėtojama remiantis egzodo egzgetika ir Aušvico nesuvokiamumo samprata. Autorius aptaria Levino ir Adorno filosofijas, kurie abu laiko Holokaustą įvykiu, kurio negalima suvokti. Levinas pasisako už teodicijos kaip dieviškosios istorijos pateisinimo pabaigą ir įrodinėja etikos pirmumą, o Adorno plėtoja antiteodiciją ir pateikia instrumentinio proto kritikos aktualumą.

**Keywords:** negatyvi teodicėja, egzodas, Holokaustas, gulagas, Levinas, Adorno.

### Holocaust and the Ethics of Wisdom

The love of wisdom (philosophy) and dwelling in wisdom (Chochmah) have a lot in common and they are different at the same time. The contradictions and unity of them creates dialectical relationships in the same way as the ethics (philosophy) differs from the Halachic commandments. Hegel formulated this dialectical relationship by opposing and uniting of the Mind and the Cunning reason (List der Vernunft). Levinas maintains that both these experiences of the mind play a prominent role in history and considers that none of them should be exalted or prioritized. However, in the course of human history, these forms of thought were always as unequal by emphasizing the supremacy of philosophy. The ancient word *method* (μθοδος) indicates 'being on the way'. In the Jewish Torah and Christian Bible, the method was regarded as an *Exodus* from the darkness of the earth and a blindness to the

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light of revelation. In this sense, ethics and commandments become part of the Exodus. Liberation from darkness, according to Levinas, implies relinquishing daily worries in response to a transcendent invitation, when someone calls our names and invites to the future: “Judaism that overflows memory, that attempts to conceive of it beyond the Exodus, and senses an unforeseeable future” (Levinas 1994 b: 87).

Levinas develops principles of ethics of mind (Bina) and wisdom (Chochmah), following the ideas of Elijah Gaon from Vilna and the spirit of Litvak disputes. Additionally, these principles were elaborated under the possible influence of the method of the Slobodka Yeshiva (Kovno), which combines sermons and inspiration:

Strangely enough, Jewish wisdom maintains that style of its master, Moses, who was ‘slow of speech and slow of tongue.’ It is not a personal defect which perpetuates itself. It is the objective style of a thought which fails to embrace the forms of rhetoric. It is the way inspiration inspires in contact with harsh and complex and contradictory realities. A sermon without eloquence, (Levinas 1994 a: 181)

Levinas’ idea of “inspiration that inspires” goes beyond the Greek tradition of rhetoric and logic, and at the same time assists in perceiving the complexities and contradictions of reality. His concept of wisdom coincides with the method of Talmudic discussions in the Slobodka Yeshiva, which was ‘slow of speech and slow of tongue’ and regarded as equally valuable to scholastic arguments. The paradox of the Slobodka Yeshiva method was that during the following lesson, the teacher could ask the learner to present the opposite statement with the same inspiration and respect for tradition. Levinas’ philosophy is skeptical about religious mystics and magic and seeks to provide a rational interpretation of the commandments. At first glance, it may appear that the philosopher comments on the Mishnah and Gemara in a similar way to Søren Kierkegaard and Lev Shestov. However, it is more complex; Levinas is attentive to Kierkegaard and Shestov, but discusses these religious texts in accordance with Litvak Talmudic thought. The main differences in interpretation between these philosophical schools arise from the diversity of Jerusalem and Athens traditions. Shestov follows a mystical pathway of his imagined Jerusalem and refers to Tertullian’s statement of Jerusalem’s supremacy over Athens: “Tertullian who opposes, as is known, Jerusalem to Athens (quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?)” (Shestov 1966: 267). In addition, he interprets Tertullian’s expression in the style of Fyodor Dostoyevsky: “Crucifixus est Dei filius: non pudet quia pudendum est; et mortuus est Dei filius: prorsus credibile quia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit: certum est quia” (Shestov 1966: 166).

The transcendent absurd justifies actions on Earth. Shestov defends the Christian faith and mysticism but not the rationality of the commandment (Halakha). Much like Dostoyevsky, he discovered the existential drama of religious beliefs but missed the rational discussions and interpretations of religious ethics. While Levinas attempts to build conceptual bridges between dramatic inspiration, rational interpretations

of the commandments of the Talmud and philosophical meditations, in the meantime, Shestov examines the idea of Jerusalem through the eyes of the New Testament, and considers Abraham a predecessor of the apostle Paul. Levinas interprets Christian existentialism with caution and elucidates Jerusalem in a different way. He criticizes not only Western philosophy, but also Christian theodicy (justification of God's actions and the presence of evil) and contradicts Lev Shestov and Nikolai Berdyaev, who firmly believe in Divine Providence. The reason for this philosophical turn was not only the immanent logic of Jewish philosophy, but also the tragic events of the Second World War, the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Levinas rejects the irrational explanation of tragic events and their demonization, and declares the full absence of possibility to understand, because the understanding can justify the tragedy.

Both Yeshiva schools and Levinas presuppose that Talmudic studies and an understanding of the world should be in line with debates about the claims of rabbis from the past and about contemporary practical questions. Long discussions have to show respect for the tradition and for predecessors. Levinas contributed to Talmudic studies by proffering the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the existentialism of Lev Shestov. Both Litvaks and Levinas reject Hasidism (Mithnagidism). Lithuanian researcher of religious studies Aušrelė Pažėraitė identifies three main features in Litvak thought:

1) Mithnagidism, 2) Image of a Jew of Eishishok, representing a kind of an alien to secular culture, prone to isolation, fanatic orthodox world, and 3) Yeshiva, as the basic institution of Lithuanian Jewish Orthodoxy [...] "Perhaps the only thing that associates Levinas to Litvak culture, when defined in three abovementioned stereotypes, is Mithnagidism". (Pažėraitė 2006: 81)

There is no indubitable evidence that Levinas was directly related to the Slobodka Yeshiva in Kaunas, but he grew up and socialized in the city and in an environment where the yeshiva influence was significant. It should be noted that one of the founders of the Musar movement, Israel Salanter (Yisrael ben Ze'ev Wolf Lipkin), exerted significant influence on the style and thinking of Rabbi Nathan Zvi Finkel, the spiritual father of the Slobodka Yeshiva. According to Pažėraitė and Malka Solomon, Levinas could well have been inspired by Israel Salanter (Solomon 1994). In fact, in his works, he often mentioned not only Elliach, the father of the Litvaks, but also Salanter, the father of the yeshiva. For example, Levinas discussed the parable of three hundred wives preparing dinner for King Solomon every evening: The extent of the obligation toward men who are fully men has no limits. One more time let us recall the word of the Lithuanian rabbi Israel Salanter: the material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual needs (Levinas 1984 a: 99).

This parable portrays not only the food making, it conveys respect and understanding of the needs of your neighbors. The wisdom is related not to the abstract Logos of Plato, but reflects the moral attitudes of Litvaks. It is noteworthy that Talmudic and Kabbalistic traditions represent different views of the worlds of God and humans, on reason (Binah) and wisdom (Chochmah). In contrast to the

mystical visions of Kabbalah, Litvak Talmudic readings convey everyday wisdom through the polemic and the commandment (Halakha). Such interpretations differ from the explanation of the “cunning mind” (*List der Vernunft*) of Hegel or “Odysseus’s” mind provided in the “Dialectics of Enlightenment” of Horkheimer and Adorno. Modern philosophers compare the “Phenomenology of the spirit” of Hegel with Homer’s *Odyssey* (Horkheimer, Adorno), or with Goethe’s *Faust* (Ernst Bloch), but not with the Chochmah of Jacob or King Solomon. Jacob, the son of Isaac, craftily obtained the blessing of his father in place of his twin brother Esau. The Bible says that Jacob lived trusting God’s grace and Esau was full of baseless anger, divine absence, and hatred of God’s elect. These, and many other of Jacob’s actions and journeys, resemble the adventures of Odysseus, but they are different. History shows us that divine grace depends not only on tradition and being the firstborn, but also on adhering to the Covenant as proposed by God. Sons of Abraham must be careful and wise in their decisions according to the *zeitgeist* and the Covenant and commandments? Jacob’s act and choice resulted in his long twenty years of post-crime exile. Myths and religious exegesis suggest different conclusions in the case of Odysseus and Jacob. Both Jacob’s journeys and the *Odyssey* are full of trials, but Jacob emphasized blessings, observing the Jewish Law and only there after, love, cunning, and wit. On the contrary, the spirit of Odysseus was designed to win at all costs, even against the intrigues of the gods in the absence of any specific ethics. Odysseus’ desire for victory was based on a military tactic to achieve success by any, even amoral, but cunning means. Jacob also fights with daemons and angels. On his way home from exile at midnight, he met an angel in the form of a man and struggled with him until dawn. When this angel realized that he had not defeated Jacob, he asked him to let go because the day had come. Jacob asked for a blessing. An angel or God blessed him and said that his name was no longer Jacob but Israel. Jacob’s cunning and struggle were justified by his many sacrifices and gifts to keep all the commandments:

This is also Jacob’s struggle with the Angel: to overcome in the existence of Israel the angelism of pure interiority. Note with what effort victory is given here! Yet is it in fact given? No one prevails! And it is Jacob’s religion which remains a little lame when the Angel’s grip is released. This struggle is never over. (Levinas 1994 b :78)

Levinas gives an exegetical interpretation of the religion of Abraham and Jacob and argues that one does not have to go into pure inner space, into pure transcendental meditations, because life and faith are on earth. A blessed person is in everyday life, and that is also where our wisdom is focused.

Odysseus and the other hero *Faust* according to Horkheimer, Adorno, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Bloch and many other researchers, presented the intentions and hidden fate of the Western world. Odysseus proved the benefit of a cunning mind over demonic forces, and *Faust* tried to subdue Mephistopheles in order to regain youth and experience a “wonderful moment” (*Verweile doch! du bist so schön!*). In contrast, the experiences

of Moses, Abraham, and Jacob tell us through wisdom to listen to the voices of the transcendent and to obey the covenant. Jacob's wisdom does not lead to the defense of the subject of property (Odysseus), but to the purification and opening of Israel – the law (Halakha) between us. The Jewish law (Halakha), based equally on Jewish wisdom (Chochmah) and reason (Binah), is not the same as the ethics of Plato or Aristotle, and the method of understanding of rabbinical advice differs from the logical and scientific research of Western thought. Levinas opposes a general invitation to the Exodus by the advice: "go home until the storm passes" (Levinas 1984 a: 190). He says that if you are in danger of an epidemic or war, you should stay at home, even if you are a refugee and have no home. Unlike the Plato ethics, the Talmudic claims do not work directly, but rather only after many discussions about peculiarities and exceptions.

### Traveling: Odysseus and Moses

Erich Auerbach, Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as Levinas and many other thinkers proffered criticisms of Western culture as a metaphor for a journey. Auerbach analyzed the importance of the Odyssean journey as a symbol of the immutability of identity when facing the challenges of fate (Auerbach 1946). Levinas criticizes the spiritual movement into the identical and defends an opposite idea: "Whereas the Work thought radically is a movement of the Same toward the Other that never returns to the Same" (Levinas 2003: 26).

However, he finds, that Western philosophy, from Hegel to Heidegger, continuously ignores the Other: "Philosophy's itinerary still follows the path of Ulysses whose adventure in the world was but a return to his native island – complacency in the Same, misunderstanding of the Other" (Levinas 2003: 26).

Finally, Odysseus returns to his home on the island of Ithaca which is the place of his power and possessions and kills all of Penelope's potential bridegrooms who are his competitors. C. Fred Alford thinks: For Levinas, Western philosophy is an egology, "the reduction of the other to the same" (Alford 2014: 86).

The adventures of the Greek hero differ from Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac and from the exile of Jacob to prove the blessings of the fathers and God, or the exodus of Moses and the Jews from Egypt. The cunning spirit of Odysseus justifies violence and suffering in for the sake of achievement and victory, and this is an example of the theodicy of the Western mind which favors ontology above ethics. The Exodus from Egypt is not just a Torah event, but the source of the contemporary tradition of the Haggadah of Passover. The Haggadah expresses the spirit of Israel. The reference to Israel is essential to the "philosophy of name": the holiness of the personal name suggests, "beyond all objectivization and all thematization", precisely the constitution of an obligated human society. Therefore: "knowledge of the unknowable: transcendence becomes ethics" (Levinas 1994 b: 123).



Israel is the people of the book, those participating in the discussion based on the Torah and Talmud. The ancient Jews were shepherds and nomads, and as they traveled extensively, they cultivated not a sacred belief in the places, but a holy attitude towards the commandments and the transcendent voice. However, Levinas presents not a sacred story, but rather a problematic and constant discussion of Mishnah and Gemara.

Correspondingly, Horkheimer and Adorno interpret the European spirit of the Enlightenment as a mind that returns to itself. The European identity arises from the triumph of cunning reason and the will to power, which translated into the colonization of other cultures. Aesthetically and ethically, Adorno and Levinas criticize the idea of synthetic negation as developed by Fichte and Hegel. Instead of synthesizing contradictions, Levinas and Adorno claim the possibility of a wise oscillation between the opposites of many people. Levinas asks:

This tension between opposites and not their reconciliation, a tension prior to becoming and to love, a tension at the heart of becoming and of love, this immediate consciousness of feeling – does it necessarily evoke the life of childhood, the lost paradise to which instinctive life clings? (Levinas 1997: 115)

Maintaining the tension between opposites rather than reconciling or overcoming them is one of the conditions for the manifestation of the Other. Here, Levinas opposes the psychoanalysis which reduces tension to childhood trauma, and defends the idea, that the drama is our reality that induces our moral judgements. The importance of the dramatic tension suggests that the tradition of Odysseus or the cunning Enlightenment can be preserved only as an element of history to defend and support the continuous becoming of the other identities. As Silvia Benso noticed: “[...] philosophy must be both Ulysses and Abraham, where the and, as is the case in filiality, as is the case in Totality and Infinity, expresses separation as much as it expresses conjunction” (2000: 13).

The exodus of Moses or the journey of Abraham to Mount Moriah is determined by the mysterious invitations of the Lord and the covenant. However, all intentions are possible: to stay home because of the storm, or to participate in the Exodus, or to defy the invitation as Jacob struggled with the angel and his temptations.

The Nazis rejected the Jewish wisdom of staying at home or traveling as a kind of “machination”, and promoted the direct Rule (Ordnung) and sacrifices for the glory of the Third Reich without any exceptions, without considering the wisdom of daily life in small communities. In “The Black Notebooks” Martin Heidegger has written dozens of pages about the “machinations” of Jews, about their unrootedness in existence. The Nazis tried to build the Third Reich, which can be interpreted as the perverse interpretation of the Faustian and Nietzschean idea of an old-young nation, by clearing the country of Jews, Gypsies, communists and homosexuals. The Nazis were sure that they themselves were not performing “machinations”, but the National Mind (Vernunft). The directives from the national socialists (Nationalsozialisten Auftrag, Ordnung) became the start of catastrophe and the end of all roads.

The ambivalent wisdom of Exodus and returning home “until the storm passes,” encourages us to reflect on wise ethics on the road, not only about the cases of Moses, Abraham, and Jacob, not only about Ulysses or the Nazis’ “nach Ost”, but also about the stages of deportation (to the Gulag) or even living as a tramp – the “being on the road”. All of the roads are radically different. Many Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Poles and Lithuanians suffered from being deported to deadly Siberian labor camps. Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov found that the only way to survive in the Gulag was to follow local camp wisdom. The crafty and astute wisdom was perceived by Stalinists and Nazis alike to be some kind of machination, the manipulation and the lies that facilitated survival in the Gulag and Ghetto (before Auschwitz).

Critics of the Soviet regime sometimes use the Yiddish word “chochma”<sup>1</sup> (as for example, in the books and songs of Alexander Galich) – meaning wisdom, which may include a trick, a joke. Contemporary literature draws on both significances: mystic Chochmah and similar Yiddish chochma, for example in the book “Yiddish Wisdom: Yiddishe Chochma” (Swarnier 1996). The concept of Yiddish chochma emanated from experiences during the long history of local life and the persecutions of Jews in Eastern Europe.

As an opposite to Gulagian deportations, we may consider the concept of Charlie Chaplin’s character “The Tramp” and the related idea of Jacques Kerouac in the novel “On the Road”. Both present the free journey of a poetic tramp in search of absent happiness. Chaplin’s tramp, his “jokes” and tricks criticized industrial capitalism and, later, Hitler (in the movie “The Great Dictator”). Similar characters were introduced in the novels of Sholom Aleichem (Solomon N. Rabinovich). His “vagabonds” are local Jewish artisans who travel from place to place with small business, tricks and jokes.

Juratė Baranova prefers Kerouac’s aesthetic experience of traveling. Books about Kerouac and travels by local hipsters and beatniks became a source of inspiration for counterculture in the Soviet era. The concept of an endless adventure motivated Baranova to interpret Homer’s Odyssey and Joyce’s Ulysses differently from the interpretations of Horkheimer and Adorno. Kerouac’s book led Baranova to understand Lithuanian writer Ivanauskaitė, who was a tramp “on the road” and to accept her concept of love. Baranova says that Odysseus: “[...] had also lost the time when he escaped the dynamical sequence of time that enchained him. The journey of this subject also becomes super-temporal. What chases the subject go to on the eternal voyage?” (2009: 22).

Baranova concurs with Jacques Derrida’s interpretation of Joyce’s Ulysses as endless travel and identifies the phenomenology of a stream of consciousness that has escaped the dynamic passage of time. In this context, Baranova finds modern nomadic ways of life in Ivanauskaitė’s novels and employs Deleuze’s concepts of plurality and deterritorialization to interpret the immanent spirit of traveling and meeting others. Ivanauskaitė and heroes of her novels travel in a search of himself/herself, lives in the peregrination or flâneur. As a result,



Ivanauskaitė and Baranova adopt the slang's expression "madness is cool" for the being on the road, instead of thinking in terms of traditional, local wisdom:

However, most of Ivanauskaitė's early prose characters can be described as mad in the purely Kerouacian sense of the word. "I was shocked. Everything was mad," said some Kerouac hero. To say "mad" in the dictionary of characters in Kerouac's novel "On the Road" means that everything was really cool. In Jurga's works, madness also often means that it is unusual, special, it takes your breath away. (Baranova, 2014a: 54)

Baranova develops the concept of the mad in Artaud's discourse, when the "cool madness" takes your body, even if it is cruel action. The idea of a madness on the borders of culture and social-political events, opens us to the other important perspective for Baranova, an understanding of Holocaust: theater. Madness was part of theater dating from the Oedipus of Sophocles and includes the madness of Shakespeare's "King Lear". Madness and nomadism shaped the way of life of many actors: always on the road and on the verge of schizophrenia. Before the Second World War, actors from Jewish (Yiddish) theaters were nomadic players in the territory between Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (Pukelytė 2017). Pre-war Lithuanian society, like many European countries, sought to integrate and assimilate the Jewish population. However, nomadic lifestyles, theater actors, writers and merchant trips withstood these attempts. Although the nomadic way of life is essential to the aesthetic being, it differs from the idea of the Exodus. There are, however, points of commonality between theatre and travelling. Jewish theaters and music bands played an important role in the Jewish ghettos in Kaunas, Vilnius and Warsaw. The same could be said about the Gulagian theatre in labor camps and prisons, for example in the Solovki camp after 1923 and in the Vorkuta camp after 1943 (Mažeikis 2018). All these theaters responded to the external political absurdity, madness and endless cruelty. Resistance to obedience and assimilation also explains ghetto theaters. Only Auschwitz could disturb everything.

## The End of Theodicy and Anthropodicy

In "Negative Dialectics" Adorno developed a critique of Western thought, that chose the road to Auschwitz. He associated misunderstanding and ignoring of strangers (Jews, Roma, homosexuals ... of all the "The F Scale's" "monsters" (Saldukaitytė 2016: 95)) with the general trends in the growth of capitalism, with expansion of control and power, with alienation, loneliness, instrumentalization and anxiety. Levinas, like Adorno, understands that selfishness and ignoring the Other are reflected in the history of Western thought: "The Hegelian system represents the fulfilment of the West's thought and history, understood as the turning back of a destiny into freedom, Reason penetrating all reality or appearing in it" (Levinas 1990: 235).

Besides, criticizing Western individualism and the blindness of liberal society and its enlightenment does not mean supporting the process in the

Soviet Union or in Maoist China. The problem with Stalinist and Maoist communism and Hitler's Third Reich is that they considered the essence of being a struggle for leadership, for the *Triumph des Willens*. On the other hand, their vision of Being can be reduced to Levinas' "il y a", or to the totality of depersonalization, to the emptiness of Being.

Levinas criticizes Hegel, who argues in lectures on the "Philosophy of History" and "Philosophy of Religion" that Christianity dialectically negated the contradiction between Greek polytheism and Abraham's monotheism and, later, Catholicism was sublated (*Aufhebung*<sup>2</sup>) by Protestantism, and this corresponds to the German philosophy of the Absolute spirit. From the Hegelian point of view, Judaism is anachronistic in the present (in the Actuality - *Wirklichkeit*). Levinas negates this notion of an anachronistic Judaism and comments:

Judaism is a non-coincidence with its time, within coincidence: in the radical sense of the term it is an anachronism, the simultaneous presence of a youth that is attentive to reality and impatient to change it, and an old age that has seen it all and is returning to the origin of things. (Levinas 1990: 212)

He was positive about the anachronism of the Talmud and Midrash:

[...] the mischievousness of the Midrash which, as a master of anachronism (that is to say, of eternity), confuses times and places and is wary of abstractions that are always prematurely rigid and clear. (Levinas 1990: 103)

Remaining anachronistic in relation to the moment does not mean too late, but to be in an active confrontation with the past and in this sense at all times be with God. It corresponds to the spirit of the Talmud and its teaching method as well as the spirit of the Yeshiva schools, which united both the old Haggada traditions and the new trends of the Haskalah.

The western Christian consciousness has the character of theodicy – justification of God and at the same time – justification of violence and the results of modernization. The most remarkable work on the justification of history and all wars is the book by Leibniz "Theodicy", which was expressly realized in Hegel's philosophy. Levinas sharply criticized the value of suffering and argued that the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century negate the discourse of theodicy, which justifies violence and suffering in the interests of an imagined better world. Suffering is an evil which can realize the final point of meaninglessness and damage to become an absurdity. This is why suffering is essentially useless, it is not endured for the sake of someone else, but is able to capture the center of human being:

Among these events the Holocaust of the Jewish people under the reign of Hitler seems to us the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, where evil appears in its diabolical horror. This is perhaps not a subjective feeling. The disproportion between suffering and every theodicy was shown at Auschwitz with a glaring, obvious clarity. (Levinas 1998: 162)

Jennifer L. Geddes comments on Levinas essay "Useless suffering" and claims, the tragedies of the 20th century destroyed "any balance between the explicit and implicit theodicy of Western thought" (Geddes 2018: 4).

Theodicy is based on speculative metaphysics, which tries to explain the transcendent aims of life and the providence of God. Modern humanism has an intention to transform the concept of theodicy into anthropodicy – justification of action for the glory of a nation or political party, for example through military “peace enforcement”. Anthropodicy is based on the idea of modernization and believes that human nature has been understood. Theodicy seeks to justify the Holocaust and the Gulag as God’s plan, while anthropodicy justifies the same violence by ideological reasons.

According to Levinas, theodicy is not possible after the Holocaust: any justification of evil for the sake of good is evil. Horkheimer and Adorno have shown that Western civilization, which is oriented towards the development of the Enlightenment, modernization (Horkheimer and Adorno 2022) and the totality of identity, has a consequence – totalitarian systems and concentration camps or mass prisons. Jay Bernstein and Carl B. Sachs interpreted Adorno’s criticisms of Auschwitz as a “negative theodicy”, that is, the disenchantment of human nature in the process of its alienation and instrumentalization. Bernstein analyzes Adorno’s negative dialectics and criticizes anti-theodicy which only accuses evil. Adorno stated that this is not enough because anti-theodicy lacks the critique of instrumental, alienated and desocialized consciousness of criminals and the depersonalization of victims. Anti-theodicy does not reveal the full depth of the catastrophe:

But a negative theodicy, unlike an anti-theodicy argument, presupposes the proximity thesis. It is because Auschwitz evinces disenchantment of the human subject itself and the destruction of aura through a practice that is, for all intents and purposes, continuous with processes of disenchantment and rationalization that have been the dominant of the modern desocialization of society, the supervening of instrumental rationality on what were the material inference structures that formed the empirical bonds among subjects, that it offers an apotheosis of identity thinking, the negative theodicy of the modern (which is not modern but old). (Bernstein 2001: 385)

Sachs interprets Adorno’s concept of Auschwitz as a negative fact or negative transcendence that cannot be represented in art works. In this context and as a reaction to Bernstein, he formulates his claim:

‘Negative theodicy’, like traditional (‘positive’) theodicy, sees actuality as standing in need of justification; hence as something that should not be passively accepted. The ‘negativity’ is the consciousness that actuality is bereft of justification. There is thus an experience of discovering actual social conditions to be in need of an ethical justification that is unavailable. At the same time, this resolute negativity does not license any inferences as to the content of what is on the other side of what is given as actuality. (Sachs 2010: 13)

Sachs separates Levinas’ negation of theodicy from Adorno’s negative theodicy: the first rejects the western form of self-justification and the second declares the impossibility of understanding the fact of Auschwitz and therefore its justification.

We interpret the end of the road in Auschwitz and in the Gulag in both ways: in the sense of Levinas’ anti-theodicy and as negative transcendence

– an incomprehensible fact of annihilation. The Holocaust means the expansion of senselessness, the destruction of all public relations. Both systems of repression, the Nazi concentration camps and Stalin's Gulag, not only destroyed names, turning them into statistics and figures, but also demolished the possibility of a collective constitution of respect. Wholescale terror is large-scale violence that destroys homes, names and lives. Mass terror with arrests and deportations desocializes people much earlier than mass killings. People lost their moral principles at the time of the accusation or even earlier in the ideology. Baranova tells a very common story of Stalinist regimes rendering enemies anonymous.

We learned that we would be taken out in the last car on May 22, 1948, from a neighbor Balciunas. He came to us across the fields and said, "They made me sign an order for your deportation, but I didn't sign it." He didn't sign, but there were some who did. This was a Komsomol member Valeria Aleksandraviciute from Siauliai. We didn't even see her in the eyes. But is it necessary to be familiar with each other on such an important issue? It just gets in the way. Friends resist trying to save. And the stranger – what does he care about? Pure statistics on the expropriation of the kulaks. Still signed by Grizas and Nemeikstis, although it is strange that he himself returned to Siberia from tsarist exile. It seems what's the difference? If it was not him, others would have signed. (Baranova 2018)

People signed allegations and could even publicly indict declared enemies without knowledge of the person or the situation just because the accusers trusted the party and its leader, and in fear of the terror, for the loss of autonomous social responsibility. Depersonalized people lost the right to a name, memory and face. Depersonalization and deterritorialization of the people means building an authoritarian and even totalitarian power and a state of ruled masses.

Totalitarian states deported people to the GULAG in stages (по этапам). The concept of stages (этапы) of deportation denotes circles of depersonalization. Take Solzhenitsyn's "In the First Circle", which not only references Dante's idea, but also that the hero was saved from going through all the stages of the Gulag. The road to the Nazi concentration camps has no significant stages, because good logistics and instrumentalization destroyed the notion of distance and, consequently, the time taken to realize what was happening.

## **From Athens and Jerusalem to the Third Reich and Third Moscow**

Levinas was impressed by two Russian existentialist philosophers: Nikolai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov, who developed the ideas of Fyodor Dostoevsky and criticized the origin of communism. Berdyaev viewed Russian communism as a blind substitution for the old idea of Moscow, the Third Roma (Berdyaev 1937) in the theophanic sense. The Soviets were trying to build a new type of classless society, and Stalin invited the Communist Party and the Soviet people to intensify the class struggle against the enemies of the revolution. As a continuation of the civil war,

they opened and developed the Gulag archipelago. The Third Rome was actually turned into the Gulag archipelago.

Shestov, alternatively, thought about the contradictions between Jerusalem and Athens, between faith and culture. Similar comparisons were popular during this period. Oswald Spengler, for example, contrasts the ancient Apollonian and West Faustian cultures. Accordingly, the Nazis declared the Third Reich to be the realization of German Athens and the idea was represented by Leni Riefenstahl in her documentary *Olympia* about the Olympic Games in Berlin. She pictured Germans as Aryan race tribes returning to the Athenian spirit. The purpose of Shestov was different: to justify the Christian way to Jerusalem. He found similarities between Judeo-Christian thought and Dostoevsky's existentialism. Edith Wyschogrod considers Levinas' 1937 review on Shestov's article "Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy" and thought that the Russian thinker could have influenced the direction of future Levinas considerations (Wyschogrod 2000: 26): "Shestov interprets the philosophy of Kierkegaard as a combat undergone by a soul abandoned to despair in a world ruled by reason and the ethical" (Levinas 1937: 140).

Levinas critiqued Shestov's interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophy (McMachlan 2016). According to him, Shestov sees the imaginary Jerusalem as a believing but desperate soul abandoned in the world. However, Shestov was not interested in the Jewish Covenant and Halacha and regards philosophical ethics as the creation of Athens. Halacha – the moral law of Judaism, the heart of Israel – was missed in Shestov's book. Like many other Russian thinkers at the beginning of the 20th century, he commented on God's will in history, on theodicy and theophany and the Russian Revolution. Levinas thinks differently: the end of theodicy in front of the gates into Auschwitz. He wonders how God is possible after these tragedies? And his answer is that God is in the eyes of our faces and speaks by our names because we are different, because there is otherness between us, because we are travelling along different roads. The most important for pilgrims is the purpose: "a thousand roads lead men forever to Rome" (Alain de Lille), which is different from doubt "What good is a road if it doesn't lead to a church?" (T. Abuladze). Hero of Tengiz Abuladze asked this question in order to reject the stages of deportation to the Gulag and the new meaningless city streets built according to the plans of the Soviet nomenclature. Some roads lead to the parish church, the others into Holzwege (M. Heidegger) or the mazes for wanderers, third, the worst, leads to the Gulag and ends in death camps. The roads are as different as our faces and names. The concept of the otherness means a variety of roads.

A multiplicity of both communal and individual roads exists like forestpaths, where they appear or disappear. In the lives of ordinary people, death does not mark the end of the road as long as there are heirs or successors. The Shoah, however, is a rupture in many ways, it is an anti-exodus, that is, anti-freedom and anti-love. Shoah and Gulag are not abstract terms, but materialized under special industrial conditions. For



some, the end of all roads was the gas chamber, for others icy deserts, but in both cases resulted from industrial thinking, by obligatory “railways”, and glorification of common “progress”. There, no exodus is possible, all freedoms disappear there: from believers to vagabonds, from pilgrims to merchants. The concept of the end of the road means disappearance of Otherness and requires a special rational-negative interpretation, unlike the concept of negation in the philosophies of Hegel, Marx or Nietzsche, where negation signified the new unity: a new stage of development, modernization and progress. The Shoah and the Gulag are calls to think the opposite: the industrial unity of the people, the one aim and the one road signifies the reduction of the people to the level of biological survival and complete depersonalization, to the disappearance of any individual notion of life.

Nelson claims that works by Adorno and Levinas help diagnose the aporias of liberty as an ideological and mythical seduction and manipulation by people in the process of alienation, the destruction of social bonds (desocialization), adiaphorization and depersonalization. Nelson interprets Adorno and claims: “It is questionable whether freedom and liberty are the unconditional goods they are construed to be when they are deployed in an ideological and mythical manner that is pathological and destructive to flourishing of individual and common life” (Nelson 2012: 65).

Representatives of the Frankfurt School such as Erich Fromm and Adorno demonstrated that not only National Socialist and Communist slogans, but also capitalist individualism and consumerism can be destructive. Defenders of consumerism regard criticism of alienated individualism as a communal compulsion. Supporters of global consumer society do not recognize the value and importance of small local cultures: from the Litvaks’ “Miasteczko” (Yiddish “shtetl”) to subcultural ways of life (Baranova). However, the small local communities and subcultures create multiplicity of the paths and this is the beginning of the recognition of Otherness. Negation of the traditions or creativity of the groups, even if they are nomads, supposes not only the denial of community ethical rules, “commandments”, but constructs a society without a civic solidarity, because people are no longer responsible for being on the road, they do not have their roads. The depressed masses of individual consumers are ready to vote for ultra rights or ultra left parties in order to hide their own concern about the lack of their unique lifestyle. On the contrary, social ethics, love and friendship, the tradition of respect for dignity and critical debate protect against alienated individualism, National Socialists and Soviet collectivism. Public life is based on a constant discussion of moral issues. Levinas stands for the primacy of ethical discussion: “True thought is not a silent dialogue of the soul with itself but the discussion between thinkers” (1994 b: 49). Levinas explains that ethics and its element – love – are beyond politics and power regimes. It means that the feeling of love and the recognition of the Halakhic law are not contradicting each other: Commandments and love do not contradict one another, contrary



to Kant; the desire to be conserved, without being torn inside, adheres to the Commandment which generates integrity” (1990: 115).

The ethics of Levinas means dialogue with others in the context of traditions, and love is the ethical feeling and exists in the context of understanding and disputes between loved ones. The conclusion follows from the statement that since love corresponds to the wise local way of life and to God at the same time, this means that love accepts the Covenant and the Halakha. The ethics frees love from accident and blind fate of history and makes it its own in man: Without multiplicity and discontinuity – without fecundity – the I would remain a subject in which every adventure would revert into the adventure of a fate. A being capable of another fate than its own is a fecund being (Levinas 1969: 282).

Baranova considers the novels of Kerouac, Ivanauskaite, and J.P. Sartre and Derrida’s philosophy as a rebellion against coercive morality, that negates divicities and otherness, and she tries to represent the case of ethics of being on the road. It does not mean a negation of Levinas’ ideas. On the contrary, Derrida and Baranova accept many of Levinas’ principles, support his concept of otherness and difference. I think their considerations intersect when we view the journey as an autonomous and responsible presence, independent of laws of history, independent from the Theodicy.

## Conclusion

Staying with the truth means engaging wisely and lovingly with others, which follows the archetypes of the Odyssey and Moses, Athens and Jerusalem, but includes other archetypes and different existential pathways. Litvaks, Yeshiva Slobodka and Levinas debate the truths of the world, and the polemic respects the various statements of community memory and the comments on current challenges. Polemics should listen to one another and to the voice of God. The commandment requires us to be wise and respond to the situation: either to participate in the Exodus or “to stay home during a storm”. Levinas provokes ethical, halachic conversations that are to continue until the last day. Talmudic commentaries support traditions and schools of halachic debate about everyday life in a local situation (“Miasteczko”, Yiddish “Shtetl”). Every local community and sometimes individuals make their own path that construct a complex labyrinth. Some individuals choose a nomadic form of life, like Jewish actors, travelling between states. However, Western civilization has developed a cunning Enlightened mind that differs from Talmudic and Cabbalistic Chochmah, concentrates around itself, acts beyond good and evil and seeks the glory of victories. The results of the Western Odyssey, the Hegelian List der Vernunft and the liberal practices of desocialization of the masses were the Holocaust and the Gulag archipelago. Industrial systems of the Holocaust and the Gulag represented mass depersonalization, decommunization and the construction of a substituted, false publicity. Totalitarianism destroyed multiplicities of communal communication, the wisdom of Miasteczko

and replaced it with administrative role-playing games and ideological rituals. The systems of depersonalization, destruction of local places and ways of life are the steps towards the end of the path.

Conversely, Levinas' and Adorno's philosophy seeks to halt the destruction of the creative power of love, to negate the negation of traditional commandments, and to open new faces (Levinas) and artworks (Adorno). According to Levinas, the crime of Shoah demonstrates the end of theodicy, the tragic impasse of Exodus. Adorno presented negative dialectics about Auschwitz, which can be interpreted as negative theodicy. Adorno considers the Holocaust to be an anti-fact because it was constructed on the destruction of understanding and is on the other side of recognition. However, there is an opportunity to understand and negate the processes and thoughts that led to Auschwitz. Negative theodicy means the negation deviating from Hegel, Marx or Nietzsche nihilism, which opens up new perspectives of becoming.

Levinas discusses the wisdom of Abraham, Jacob and Moses and the exodus of Israel from slavery or the mist of life in the light of love and thought. The love and ethics of the communities play an important role on this path. Baranova follows the ideas of Kerouac and Derrida and supports the vagabonds of life that break the rules of the community out of love and interprets the visions of Ivanauskaite as a rebellion of love. New ethics of love help to bring new paths into the labyrinth of life. So, the concepts of the Other and otherness were supplemented by the corresponding idea of a multiplicity of roads and being on the road.

Levinas, Adorno and Baranova have partly different ideas of a journey. Levinas's path leads to heaven Israel according to the rules of Haskalah and ethics, Adorno's journey guides to social modernization, and Baranova contemplates an existential walk through the eternal labyrinth of being. But at the one crossroad they meet, and this is the point of negation of all the paths that take place in Auschwitz and the Gulag and this is why all of them negate theodicy.

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## Notes

- 1 In the article, we distinguish the Kabbalistic word ‘Chochmah’ and the Yiddish word ‘Chochma.
- 2 Hegel’s concept of *Aufhebung* has the double meaning of “do away with” and “preserve” and often is translated as the sublation.