Self and Other in Critical International Theory: Assimilation, Incommensurability and the Paradox of Critique

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Introduction

Since the time of the pre-Socratic philosophers, one of the most recurrent and pervading questions in Western philosophy has been the 'problem' of the one and the many and/or identity and difference. As Richard Bernstein notes, 'Western philosophy began with this "problem": philosophers have always been concerned with understanding what underlies and pervades the multiplicity, diversity, and sheer contingency that we encounter in our everyday lives'.[1] It is, then, by no means a coincidence that the main dissatisfactions with the project of European modernity, at least since Nietzsche, converged around the criticism that the dominant tendency in Western philosophy and metaphysics has been to privilege and valorise unity, harmony, totality and, thereby, to denigrate, suppress, or marginalise multiplicity, contingency, particularity, singularity. Similarly, until the advent of Critical Theory and post-structuralist approaches in International Relations (IR)[2], the prioritisation of sameness over difference had been scarcely recognised as such by the debates in the field, even though it implicitly permeated the basic epistemological and ontological assumptions of the various mainstream theories that competed for exegetic primacy in the discipline. Nonetheless, although the issue of exposing the practices of exclusion and eradication of difference, against what was seen as the naturalisation of historically contingent power structures, was gradually recognised as a legitimate and long-missing critique in the field of IR,[3] it is not yet clear what this recognition entails in terms of the possibility of transcending the division between identity and difference. In other words, do critical approaches in IR succeed in articulating a true reconciliation between self and other without objectifying the other's alterity? Or does any effort to avoid committing injustice to difference inescapably foreclose any possibility of communication between self and other?

To begin with, the analysis will build on the distinction between the relative and the absolute interpretation of otherness most prominently found in the work of two philosophers both belonging to the phenomenology tradition, Georg Hegel and

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[1] Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 58.

[2] In the context of International Relations , the terms 'Critical Theory' and 'post-structuralism' are used to refer to theorists relating their work to the Frankfurt School (particularly Habermas), on the one hand, and to primarily French post-structuralist theorists (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Levinas), on the other. Within this essay the work of Linklater, who mainly relies on Habermas, and Shapcott, who relies on Habermas and Gadamer, is used to exemplify 'Critical Theory' and, in specific, their own critical version of dialogic cosmopolitanism; the work of Ashley and Walker, and Campbell is used to exemplify 'post-structuralism'. The term 'critical approaches' is used to allude to both types of critical theorising in IR.

[3] See for instance Yosef Lapid, 'The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positive Era', *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989): 235–54.

Emmanuel Levinas. The main argument this essay will be putting forward is that, in responding to the 'enigma' of otherness through either a relative or an absolute understanding of alterity, the most promising critical approaches in IR theory tend to oscillate between two equally uncritical options: they either compromise the other's true alterity so she or he becomes a mirror image of the self or, in fear of some totalising reduction bordering on violence, make the difference between sameness and strangeness so inaccessible that communication becomes impossible. Put differently, the argument is that albeit driven by different aspirations – namely either to bridge the gap between identity and difference or to question the prioritisation of identity by calling for a strategic preoccupation with alterity – critical theorising in IR appears to compromise its critical edge through relapsing into either assimilationism or radical incommensurability. Yet, it should be noted that drawing any authoritative generalisations over the capacity of critical IR theory *in toto* to articulate otherness persuasively is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, by presenting the limitations and contradictions of some nuanced critical approaches in IR theory in their treatment of alterity, this essay offers not an exhaustive account but a suggestive indication of the paradoxes involved in the politics of critique when applied on the self/other problematic.

Hegel and Relative Otherness

In the *Conquest of America,* Todorov sets out to explore how the 'enigma' of otherness was interpreted by the Spanish in the Americas[4]. His inquiry examines the relationship between self and other that developed when two different cultures encountered each other for the first time. Todorov himself uses specific terms to describe the variety of relationships that emerge when the self 'discovers' the other for the first time, such as enslavement, colonialism, communication, conquest, love and knowledge. These terms attempt to reveal and explain the relationship between knowledge and evaluation of the other from the Spanish perspective. The central question here is what sort of actions are generated by the knowledge (or ignorance) of the other's alterity. Unlike Wendt[5], who stresses the importance of the first gestures that signal the quality of the contact between Ego and Alter, Todorov points to the preconceptions that construct both the gestures and the contact. This is more than obvious in Columbus' egocentric confrontation with the other. Columbus discovers the Indians, but not their alterity, since even before the initial contact he has already set for himself the terms of his engagement with the other. Todorov calls this pattern a 'double movement':

> Either he conceives the Indians (though without using these words) as human beings altogether, having the same rights as himself; but then he sees them not only as equals but also as identical, and this behavior leads to assimilationism, the projection of his own values on the others. Or else he starts from the difference, but the latter is immediately translated into terms of superiority and inferiority (in his case, obviously, it is the Indians who are inferior) … These two elementary figures of the experience of alterity are both

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[4] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

[5] See Alexander E. Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 46 (1992): 391–425.

> grounded in egocentrism, in the identification of our own values with values in general, of our I with the universe – in the conviction that the world is one.[6]

In short, Todorov's study highlights the inescapable fact that however strong our need to make sense of the world in our own terms, 'discovery' reveals difference, that the world is not one. Yet otherness is not immediately or readily recognised. The initial revelation of difference by the self is 'translated' as the 'inferiority' of the other. Further contact may lead to the discovery or construction of commonality. However, this commonality (and purported equality) is established at the price of the disregard of difference, leading to a projection of values on the other, a demand for assimilation.[7] Similarly, Connolly argues that conquest and conversion function together as premises and signs of superiority: 'each supports the other in the effort to erase the threat that difference presents to the surety of self-identity'.[8] What both Todorov and Connolly describe here is a pre-Hegelian state of affairs: in the process of realising its project of identification, the individual constructs its identity in relation to a series of differences which are recognised by a knowing subject as objects of knowledge and are, subsequently, converted into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.

However, as Hegel explains again and again in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[9] through the enumeration of the repeated failures of the subject's endeavours – he calls them 'shapes of consciousness' – to impose his vision on the social universe, the 'big Other' of the social substance always returns to upset the self's teleological project. Hegel is never tired of reminding us that the very fact of identity's constitution through differentiation contributes to its inherent instability. In fact, Hegel's renowned sections on the master–slave dialectic actually provide one of the most trenchant theoretical accounts of the subject's failed process of identification. In the paragraphs which preface the *Lordship and Bondage* section (paras 166–177) Hegel tells us that 'self consciousness is desire' and as such is 'certain of itself only by superseding the other', 'certain of the nothingness of this other' and that self-consciousness achieves only an imperfect realisation of this desire when it 'destroys the independent object' in a merely 'objective' or natural manner (paras 174–175). Therefore, if the subject is to be able to integrate for herself her opposed views of herself as 'self-consciousness' (as independent, as determining for herself what counts for her) and as 'life' (as being dependent on the given structure of organic desire), she must be able to find some desire that is not simply given but is a desire that comes out of her nature as a self-conscious independent agent *per se*.

These requirements are met by the subject's having a desire for recognition (*Annerkenung*) as an independent agent by another self-conscious agent. This is what Hegel means when he writes that self consciousness as desire 'achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness' (para 175), and that the goal which lies ahead is 'the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which … enjoy perfect freedom and independence: "I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I"' (paras 175, 177). The person who seeks to have her conception of herself affirmed as an independent agent by satisfying her desire for recognition must confront another self-conscious person who takes herself to be dependent on the first person, and who, through this act of taking herself to be dependent, thereby affirms that first person's self-understanding. However, as is characteristic in Hegel, a claim for recognition is at the same time an epistemic claim. The encounter between the two self-conscious agents is the 'attempt on the part of each to impose his own subjective point of view on the other and to claim for his own subjective point of view the status of being the "true", the objective, impersonal point of view'.[10] The struggle is therefore not just over the satisfaction of desire but over what is to count as the objective point of view and thus what is to count as the truth. What Hegel has succeeded in illuminating here is the inadequacy of approaches that preserve a self-contradictory distinction between the self and its other or the one-sidedness of those approaches which fail to account for a convincing reconciliation between the subjective and the objective point of view. What performs the reconciliation for Hegel is the notion of 'Spirit'. Without Spirit, self-consciousness remains abstract and decontextualised. It is through Spirit that Hegel has effected the transition from a phenomenology of 'subjective mind', as it were, to one of 'objective spirit', thought of as culturally distinct patterns of social interaction (a 'second nature').

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[6] Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, *op. cit.*, in note 4, pp. 42-43.

[7] See Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 10 and Inayatullah and Blaney, 'Knowing Encounters: Beyond Parochialism in International Relations Theory', in *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, ed. Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (Boulder London: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 75.

[8] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 43.

[9] Georg F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). All references from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be provided by indicating the paragraph number in A. V. Miller's 1977 translation.

However, legitimate objections have been raised at this point concerning the terms of this reconciliation, as it may be said that it takes place in the terrain of self-consciousness, thus tacitly affirming the priority of the reasoning individual. Self-consciousness perceives the possible gap between self-certainty, i.e. the subjective take on what is happening, and what is called the 'truth' – often manifest when it is apparent that others attribute to me commitments and implications of commitments other than those I attribute to myself – as a contradiction that must be overcome. The experience of such a gap, itself a kind of social pathology, is what Hegel appeals to as the engine for conceptual and social change, a striving for reconciliation and mutuality in such a context. In other words, it is the self-consciousness's inability to account for its claims on its own terms that drives the striving for unity in the form of a reconciliation between the subjective and the objective point of view. In the master–slave dialectic each has found out that she cannot identify what is her own without reference to the other's point of view – without, that is, reference to the sociality common to both.[11] What counts as her own projects for the master cannot be unambiguously identified without incorporating some references to the slave's projects and vice versa. However, what unites the two perspectives is the need to establish the priority of a non-contradictory sense of identity for the subject-knower (either the master or the slave). Hegel has been prominent in showing us the incompleteness of this process: he implies that to the extent pure identity is a mere illusion, the terms of the assimilation performed by self-consciousness remain inherently unstable: the famous Hegelian *negation of the negation* is nothing other than the very logical matrix of the necessary failure of the subject's teleological activity.[12] Nonetheless, even if we accept that the Absolute Spirit has no positive content of its own (a non-teleological interpretation of Hegel), and is just the succession of all dialectical transitions, of its impossibility of establishing a final overlapping between the subjective and the objective viewpoint, the *logical* necessity of the link between the two affirms the hegemonic priority of Reason.[13]

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[10] Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 59.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

That said, it has been persuasively argued that Hegel does not aspire to the holism of a ‘substance’ metaphysics, or to a mystical unification of all in the One. Instead, Hegel's holism is relational in the sense that his self-differentiating holism must include both identity and difference.[14] However, doubts have been voiced as to whether, in his scheme, Difference and the Other are taken to be ineradicable as the ordering and structuring principles of the whole as opposed to being mere transitory moments, logical categories swept away in the Spirit’s actual movement towards a consistent and non-contradictory narrative of the reasoned individual. For this exact reason, his philosophical project is reproached, most prominently by Levinas, for affirming the philosophical imperialism of the privileged self which seeks to lift all contradictions with the external world through a learning process that is nothing other than the ‘primordial work of identification’.[15] Yet, it should be noted that by interpreting the subject’s activity of mediation as a movement of appropriation as opposed to Hegel’s insistence that it is the repeated failure to achieve this end that is constitutive of ‘reality’, this latter criticism risks misrepresenting Hegel’s corrective to Kant. Hegel’s unprecedented contribution lies exactly in amending the inadequacies of Kantian formalism through lifting the duality created by the abstractness of an apperceptive self as opposed to an empirical self,[16] thus providing a form of idealism that avoids solipsism. Hegel showed that there is no escape from the limitations of external facticity not because there is an abyssal gap between the knowing subject and its object but because ‘we (meaning any self-conscious being) are the limitations of our external facticity: we are what we learn, what we have learned and also what do not and have not learned’.[17] However, Levinas’ criticism is not to be lightly dismissed as it does point to an underlying motif in speculative idealism in terms of its understanding of the relationship between tautology and heterology.

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[12] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 77.

[13] See Ernesto Laclau, ‘Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics’, in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), pp. 60–1. Laclau writes: ‘As in most post-Kantian Idealist systems, Hegel aspires to a presuppositionless philosophy. This means that the irrational – and ultimately contradictory – moment of the thing in itself has to be eliminated. Furthermore, if Reason is going to be its own grounding, the Hegelian list of categories cannot be a catalogue, as in Aristotle or Kant – the categories have to deduce themselves from each other in an orderly fashion. This means that all determinations are going to be *logical* determinations. Even if something is irrational, it has to be retrieved as such by the system of Reason.’

[14] See Robert R.Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 78 and 270 and Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[15] Levinas Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 36.

[16] See John Mc Dowell, ‘The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of “Lordship and Bondage” in Hegel’s Phenomenology’ in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi (Montreal: Mc Gill-Queens University Press, 2006).

[17] Kimberly Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 76.

To clarify this latter point, we should look more carefully into the distinction between relative and absolute otherness. Ultimately, Hegel's treatment of the self/other relation seems to conform to what Kearney alludes to as the relative understanding of otherness[18]. Plato, in the *Sophist* puts the interrogation of otherness into the mouth of the Eleatic stranger (*xenos*). For the Eleatic stranger the other is other only in *relation to* the same. The other as a distinct class is not comprehensible unless it is considered *relative to* some other (*pros heteron*). The complete separation of the same (*autos*) and other (*heteron*), of being and what is other than being, would be the obliteration (*apophasis*) of all speech.[19] In so far as it differs from the known order of being, the other is always relative. Or more simply put, any relation with the Absolute makes the absolute relative.[20]As we have already seen, Hegel historicises the problem by demonstrating in his master–slave dialectic that the self only expresses itself as a sovereign subject in so far as it struggles with and is eventually recognised by its other. It is on this point that adherents of an absolute interpretation of otherness would castigate Hegel's movement as one that is constituted under the terms of the knowing and appropriating subject and one that inevitably leads to the subsumption of the other's true alterity. Hence, for a thinker like Levinas, the desire to *understand* is the centre of the problem. For Levinas' concern is to try to understand the other without using the violence of comprehension to do so. To understand the other by comprehension, the argument goes, is to reduce other to self. It is to deprive the other precisely of the very alterity by which the other *is* other. Even if, as in the case of Hegel, identity is constituted through differentiation and, thus is denied any reification or naturalness, alterity as such is not recognised in its own terms. The task of the next section is to examine these objections in detail.

Levinas and Absolute Otherness

One of the most astute critics of the Hegelian resolution, and in general of Western metaphysics, to the problem of otherness was the French Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas reads the entire project of the history of Western philosophy, whose destiny has been shaped by the classical Greek problematic, as functioning within what he calls 'the Same and the Other'.[21] For Levinas, the primary thrust of this Western tradition has always been to reduce, absorb, or appropriate what is taken to be the Other to what Levinas, following Plato, calls the Same (*le même; to auton*). According to Levinas, the ontological event that defines and dominates the philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger consists in suppressing or reducing all forms of otherness by transmuting their alterity into the Same.[22] Parmenides stated it in the form: 'thought and being are the same',[23] with a radicality and simplicity which dissolves difference and otherness in the identification of thought and being. This imperialistic gesture, a gesture to conquer, master and colonise the Other, reveals the violence that is implicit in the reduction of the Other to the Same.[24] For Levinas, this violence reaches its apotheosis in Hegel:

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[18] Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 16.

[19] Plato, *Sophist*, trans. William S. Cobb (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), p. 102 (*259e*).

[20] See Kearney *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, *op. cit.*, in note 18, p. 15,

[21] Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, *op. cit.*, in note 1, p. 70

[22] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 6.

[23] Cf. Joan Stambaugh, 'Introduction', in Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 7.

> The 'I' is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primary identity, the primordial work of the identification … Hegelian phenomenology, where self-consciousness is the distinguishing of what is not distinct, expresses the universality of the same identifying itself in the alterity of objects thought and despite the opposition of self to self.[25]

Levinas interprets Hegelian phenomenology as affirming 'the return of absolute thought to itself, the identity of the identical and the non-identical in consciousness of self recognizing itself as infinite thought, "without other"'.[26] In short, alterity is ultimately *aufgehoben,* swallowed up in the Absolute Subject. Consequently, 'alterity' has no singular metaphysical status outside what is ontologically the same; it is only a 'moment' within the Same: '"all exteriority" is reduced to or returns to the immanence of a subjectivity which itself, and in itself, exteriorizes itself'.[27] Levinas boldly seeks to escape this 'philosophical imperialism' of the Same and the Other by opening the space for the absolute exteriority of the metaphysical Other (*l'autrui*) which he sharply distinguishes from the ontological Other (*autre*). The metaphysical Other is an 'other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other.'[28]

For Levinas, we are responsible to alterity as absolute alterity, as difference that cannot be subsumed into the Same, into a totalising conceptual system that comprehends and exhausts self and other. To acknowledge the otherness of the Other (*l'autrui*), to keep it from falling back into the other of the Same requires Levinas to speak of it as the 'absolute other'. The French word '*autrui*' refers to the other human being, whom I cannot evade, comprehend, or kill and before whom I am called to justice, to justify myself.[29] It is this radically asymmetrical relation between the I and the Other (a 'relation' that defies reduction to reciprocal equality and, hence, rejects justice as impartiality) that characterises what Levinas calls the *ethical relation*. The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity, or what Levinas also calls 'exteriority', that cannot be reduced to the Same. In fact, the ethical 'I' is constituted as a subject 'precisely insofar as it kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to the more primordial call for the other'.[30] At the same time, to be regarded ethically, the Other must remain a stranger 'who disturbs the being at home with oneself [*le chez soi*]',[31] who remains infinitely other. The ethical for Levinas is finally, 'a nonviolent relationship to the other as infinitely other'.[32] Unlike the Hegelian narrative of overcoming contradiction and achieving reconciliation, Levinas suggests a journey towards 'a pluralism that does not merge into a unity'.[33] To represent the self's journey towards alterity as a movement which exceeds the circle of the self and goes towards the other without ever turning back, Levinas juxtaposes Abraham's journey to Odysseus', which is the basis for the Hegelian dialectical journey in which alterity simply serves the enhancement of the self: 'To the myth of Odysseus returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham, leaving his fatherland forever for a land yet unknown.'[34]

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[24] Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, *op. cit.*, in note 1, p. 69,

[25] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, in note 15, p. 36.

[26] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), p. 137.

[27] Levinas, *ibid.*

[28] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, in note 15, pp. 38–9.

[29] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, *op. cit.*, in note 22, p. 5,

[30] Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 27.

[31] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, in note 15, p. 39.

Through this argumentation Levinas seeks to elicit the incommensurability of the 'Other' with the 'I'.[35] This incommensurability and asymmetry of the Other (*l'autrui*) is manifested in what he calls the 'face-to-face', the primary ethical relation that can never be reduced to the 'totality' of the Same and the Other. Levinas' emphasis on the lack of reciprocity, unlikeness, asymmetry – and indeed incommensurability – in the ethical relation with the other has consequences for understanding the asymmetry of responsibility where I, in responding to the Other (*l'autrui*), am always responsible for (to) the Other (*l' autrui*), regardless of the Other's response to me. It is important to emphasise here that what Levinas understands as 'responsibility' is not a move of ontology's imperial 'I', nor is it a form of co-responsibility grounded in compassion, benevolence, or empathy;[36] rather, responsibility is incumbent on me exclusively and is explicitly non-reciprocal: "In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subjection to the Other; and I am 'subject' essentially in this sense".[37] With subjectivity defined as subjection, Levinas introduces one of the most radical themes of his thought on alterity, the idea that, as a unique and noninterchangeable 'I', I am substitutable for another.[38] This idea of substitution, of putting oneself in the place of another is not so much a movement of an appropriating self-consciousness, but what he refers to as a 'passivity', wherein the self is absolved of itself.[39]

However, it is exactly on this point that Derrida questions the intelligibility of Levinas' notion of absolute exteriority. Derrida agrees with Levinas that 'the other is the other only if his alterity is absolutely irreducible, that is, infinitely irreducible'.[40] But, contrary to Levinas, who claims that 'to make the other an alter ego … is to neutralize its absolute alterity', Derrida argues that 'if the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse'. Against Levinas' reading of Husserl, Derrida claims that according to Husserl 'the other as alter ego signifies the other as other, irreducible to my ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego … This is why, if you will, he is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually command me'.[41] In short, there is both sameness and radical alterity, symmetry and asymmetry, identity and difference in my relation with the other, and above all in the ethical relation. For Derrida, without this acknowledgement no ethics would be possible. *Pace* Levinas, the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I: 'Without this, no letting-be would be possible, and first of all, the letting be of respect and of the ethical commandment addressing itself to freedom. Violence would reign to such a degree that it would no longer even be able to appear and be named.'[42]

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[32] Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 102.

[33] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 1987), p. 42.

[34] Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 348.

[35] Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, *op.cit.*, in note 1, p. 70.

[36] Patricia Molloy, 'Face-to-Face with the Dead Man: Ethical Responsibility, State-Sanctioned Killing, and Empathetic Impossibility', in David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro, *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 220.

[37] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 98.

[38] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1981), p. 117.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 115–17.

[40] Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', *op. cit.*, in note 32, p. 104.

Ultimately, what Derrida's thought invites us to realise is that we can never escape the real practical possibility that we will fail to do justice to the alterity of the other. On a more profound level, this is a mere implication of our inability to escape metaphysics altogether:

> [T]here is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce no single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[43]

Derrida has effectively shown that Levinas' language presupposes the very same Heideggerian ontological transcendence it seeks to overcome. While speech can counter the violence of language by disrupting language's pretension to conceptual mastery – like Levinas' notion of the way the ethical is performed in conversation, in a 'saying' that disrupts the 'said' – it must inevitably, to remain intelligible, do some violence and, thereby, affirm aspects of what it resists.[44]It is for this reason that Derrida argues that an ethical regard requires one to acknowledge this dilemma. The fact that we may recognise that the moment we enter the realm of language and conceptual understanding we commit violence against the other's singularity does not necessarily condemn us to absolute incommensurability. Rather, by admitting the continuing violence of one's own discourse, one commits the least possible violence. On the contrary, the most violent position would precisely be a puritan and self-righteous commitment to total non-violence.[45] It is in this sense that Derrida's notion of undecidability should be understood to be the necessary precondition for ethics and politics. Against criticisms that take it to be the very negation of politics and the denial of responsibility, Derrida constantly reminds us that to aspire to a world devoid of the undecidable would be to wish for the demise of politics, 'for it would install a new technology, even if it was a technology that began life with the markings of progressivism and radicalism'.[46]It is to this Hegel-inspired Derridian point that we will turn to at the end of this essay to reach hopefully a better understanding of the self/other problematic within the limits of language.

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[43] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 83.

[44] For a defence of Levinas on this point see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, *op. cit.*, in note 22, pp. 156–69.

[45] See Michael J. Shapiro, 'The Ethics of Encounter: Unreading, Unmapping the Imperium', in David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro. *Moral Spaces*, *op. cit.*, in note 36, pp. 67–8.

Dialogic Cosmopolitanism: The Assimilative Logic of Universalism

Introducing the above discussion into the realm of critical international theory obliges us to examine a critical brand of cosmopolitanism that is significantly inspired by the Hegelian strife for reconciliation between universality and particularity, namely the dialogic cosmopolitanism espoused by Linklater and Shapcott.[47] The purpose of this section is to show how their relative understanding of otherness combined with the latent universalism of their critique usher in an implicit assimilationism in their work. Linklater's seminal work *The Transformation of Political Community* is an exploration of the possibility of open dialogue with the other and of support for post-sovereign communities in which new levels of universality and difference are plausible. Deliberately post-Marxist, this approach tends to focus on the emancipatory potential inherent in communication. Linklater draws on Habermas' discourse ethics and theory of historical development to identify the potential of modern states to transcend the logic of the state system reflected by realism. The key issue for this Habermasian rendition of critical international theory is how to accommodate the Enlightenment's initial concern with universalism with the claim for difference into a single theoretical perspective. In a more profound sense, it is a question of how to strike the right balance between two features of the project of modernity: the ethos of critique and the spirit of cosmopolitanism.[48]

This latter ambition translates into a particularly challenging task which, in many ways, is accountable for Critical Theory's major pitfalls. Specifically, some theorists have accused Habermasian Critical Theory of relying on uncritical assumptions about the criteria of judgement.[49] This point can best be understood in terms of what Kimberly Hutchings calls the legislative function of the Kantian critical project. Hutchings argues that the Kantian project is bedevilled by an inescapable paradox of 'limitation and legislation'.[50] Kant and those who have followed him have been faced with a paradox whereby critique problematises all limitations on thought, and all claims to authoritative knowledge, while at the same time claiming a legislative, judicial function for itself. Kantian critique, as a result, she argues 'is characterized both as free debate and as the passing of “judicial sentence’’.[51] The legislative or judicial role of critique is to define and exclude those modes of speech which are illegitimate, in particular, dogmatism and radical scepticism (relativism). In terms of providing a model of conversation the Kantian appeal to reason ‘legitimates and encourages freedom of speech, while arguing that only certain speech is legitimate’.[52]

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[46] David Campbell, 'The Deterritorialization of Responsibility: Levinas, Derrida, and Ethics after the End of Philosophy', in Campbell and Shapiro *Moral Spaces*, *op. cit.*, in note 36, p. 51.

[47] For an overview of this approach see Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), and Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Although I remain critical of their work, I have been instructed in many ways by Linklater's and Shapcott's brilliant studies and have drawn on them directly and indirectly throughout this investigation.

[48] Richard Devetak, 'The Project of Modernity and International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 24, no. 1 (1995): p. 35.

[49] See Kimberly Hutchings, 'The Nature of Critique in Critical International Relations Theory' and Nick J. Rengger, 'Negative Dialectic? The Two Modes of Critical Theory in World Politics', both in *Critical Theory and World Politics*, ed. Richard Wyn Jones (London: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

[50] See Kimberly Hutchings, *Kant, Critique and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 37: 'The critic legislates, governs and judges on behalf of reason, but always also bears witness to the impossibilities of that legislation, government and judgment, except on the basis of hypothetical *as-if* identifications or hopes.'

This essay argues, following Hutchings, that the Habermasian telos of consensus and agreement repeats the paradox of limitation and legislation and imposes unjustified restrictions on conversation which are potentially exclusive of difference. In this sense, discourse ethics, both as conceived by Habermas and appropriated by Linklater, fails to engage with alterity in its own terms. The telos of ‘understanding oriented towards rational agreement’ generates two possible types of exclusion: exclusion in relation to the possible topics of conversation and exclusion in relation to the identity of the agents of conversation.[53] This dimension of discourse ethics can best be explained as a result of its privileging of questions of ‘right’ over questions of the ‘good’. This is a natural outcome of modern ethical theory’s preoccupation with establishing the impartial means by which different conceptions of the good can coexist and sort out their differences in peace. Impartiality and stability are elevated to the status of the only acceptable public values while comprehensive conceptions of the good life are considered mere aesthetic preferences or tastes on which there can be no rational agreement.

Linklater insists that the ethical universalism of Critical Theory does not display any inherent aversion to cultural diversity and difference nor does it simply involve bringing aliens or outsiders within one homogeneous, moral association.[54] Discourse ethics, the argument goes, remains faithful to procedural universalism and the possibility of an ‘undistorted communication’ that would lead to a cross-communal understanding through the force of the better argument. What remains unsaid is that conversation oriented towards universalism can occur only between subjects who have achieved a ‘postconventional’ level of consciousness: that is, morally mature, reasonable beings able to be governed by the unforced force of the better argument. As Shapcott argues, the pursuit of freedom in the form of a morally inclusive universal conversation in discourse ethics is, therefore, simultaneously an advocacy of a particular conception of agency.[55] As such it involves an assimilative moment at the level of agency because it envisages a community of equally self-determining rational agents. In a similar vein, Benhabib claims that this conception of agency privileges ‘a secular, universalist reflexive culture in which debate, articulation and contention about value questions as well as conceptions of justice and the good have become a way of life'.[56] In this sense discourse ethics raise obstacles to communication with the radically different while seeking to achieve universal inclusion.[57]

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[51] Hutchings,. *Kant, Critique and Politics*, *op. cit.*, in note 50, p. 32.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[53] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 106.

[54] See Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community, op. cit.,* in note 47, pp. 87–100. See also Andrew Linklater, ‘The Achievements of Critical Theory’, in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 291.

[55] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 120.

Moreover, Critical Theory's emancipatory project has been criticised as being 'open to a presumption of superiority, and, therefore, inequality, on behalf of the 'emancipated' towards the 'unemancipated'.[58] Commenting on the Habermasian communicative ethics, Brown questions the potentiality of the Habermasian Critical Theory to embrace difference and points to the fact that the Habermasian notion of 'ideal speech situation'[59] uncritically privileges a Western view on rationality as a measure for transcultural and transhistorical judgement: 'To believe in the desirability of transparency [the idea that, in principle, human communication could be free from distortion] comes close to a commitment to the elimination of difference, to a denial that the Other could be accepted as the Other.'[60] Pluralism in this sense is understood as a platform of coexistence under the unifying effect of Western rationality and not as a true affirmation of otherness. In this respect, discourse ethics 'prescribes not only the procedure but also the content of dialogue, that is, of what are acceptable statements and topics, according to an already given definition of the moral realm, one which is constituted prior to the engagement with the other'.[61] It is then no surprise that Walker considers Linklater's project as the latest edition of idealism 'except that this latest representative of the idealists has begun to temper his universalistic tendencies with an appropriately late-modern attention to difference and diversity'.[62]

Instructed by Linklater's shortcomings, Shapcott's thin cosmopolitanism aspires to introduce a *via media* between the unproblematic universalism of liberal cosmopolitanism, the slightly more nuanced universalism of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the radical anti-universalism of post-structuralism. To achieve this objective, Shapcott employs Gadamerian hermeneutics in an attempt to provide a non-foundational account of truth that would allow genuine communication between self and other. Philosophical hermeneutics, according to Shapcott, takes it that the capacity for cross-cultural understandings is real and accompanies the development of language itself.[63] In the philosophical hermeneutic account, 'the other is understood as a linguistically constituted agent from the start and, therefore, inherently capable of understanding and conversation'.[64] The upshot of this approach is the denial of any determinate understanding of the other prior to real engagement. Conversation rests on the notion that 'understanding refers to the subject matter (*Die Sache*) of conversation, to what is said, not the sayer, the text, not the writer'.[65]

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[56] Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 42.

[57] For a recent reformulation of Linklater's argument where he seems to incorporate both Hutching's and Shapcott's critique and cautions against the exclusionary and assimilationist potentials in discourse ethics see Andrew Linklater, 'Dialogic Politics and the Civilising Process', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): 141–54. Yet, he still advocates a thin version of the discourse approach as 'the best means of advancing the *civilising process* in international relations' (my emphasis).

[58] See critique by Shapcott., *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 124.

[59] For an argument though that Habermas has abandoned the misleading concept of 'ideal speech situation' see Jürgen Haacke, 'Theory and Praxis in International Relations: Habermas, Self-Reflection, Rational Argumentation', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1996): 265.

[60] Chris Brown, '"Turtles All the Way Down": Anti-Foundationalism, Critical Theory and International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 23, no 2 (1994): 221.

[61] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 113.

[62] Robert B. J. Walker, 'The Hierarchicalization of Political Communities', *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 155. See also Beate Jahn, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back : Critical Theory as the Latest Edition of Liberal Idealism', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27, no. 3, (1998): 613-641.

[63] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 235.

Although Shapcott's approach aspires to avoid assimilationism by pointing to our historical situatedness 'that always informs our understandings',[66] Shapcott himself does not deny that philosophical hermeneutics and discourse ethics hold in common the argument that 'dialogue requires that agents are prepared to question their own truth claims, respect the claims of others and anticipate that all points of departure will be modified in the course of dialogue'.[67] Shapcott is right to point out that philosophical hermeneutics do not share the same interest in achieving a 'thick' kind of agreement but it is rather oriented towards the much thinner goal of understanding. One, however, wonders whether even this latter goal does not previously require the affirmation of the postconventional agent. Even if philosophical hermeneutics claims to eschew the sin of determining universal principles for the conversation prior to the dialogical engagement, the moment of assimilation occurs in the argument that '[r]easoned conversation is a property of all humans who possess language'.[68]

Voices of Dissidence in IR: Oscillating between Assimilation and Incommensurability

Post-structuralist theories of international relations are programmatically driven by an unconditional attentiveness to difference as well as a suspicion towards practices of unjustified exclusion. Ever since post-structuralist approaches were introduced in the discipline by Ashley's challenge of Waltz's mainstream neorealist project,[69] the critique of what was seen as the reification of historically conditioned power structures, such as anarchy and sovereignty, was associated with an almost strategic preoccupation with expanding the realm of resistance. As George and Campbell proclaimed in a special edition containing landmark articles for post-structuralist approaches in the field:

> The (poststructuralist) project is a search for thinking space within the modern categories of unity, identity, and homogeneity; the search for a broader and more complex understanding of modern society which accounts for that which is left out - the other, the marginalized, the excluded.[70]

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[64] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[67] Andrew Linklater cf. Shapcott, *ibid.*, p. 169.

[68] Shapcott, *ibid.*, p. 166. Shapcott acknowledges this criticism but he argues that while philosophical hermeneutics cannot escape the assimilationist moment altogether, it reduces that moment significantly (*ibid*, p. 165, n. 101).

[69] See Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', in *Neorealism and its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), and Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the *Anarchy Problematique*', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988).

[70] Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 280.

Similarly, in their path-breaking article ‘Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline’, Ashley and Walker explicitly raise the question of how to engage ethically with those who do not share their self-understanding or who ‘in their specific marginal sites’ comprehend the meaning of freedom differently.[71] They ask how it is possible to pursue and expand the realm of freedom and at the same time be attentive to otherness:

> if, in the process of testing limitations, one assumes that one’s local strategic situation is a paradigm for the struggle for freedom wherever it unfolds, then one is all too likely to be impatient with other’s labors in other strategic situations … one is all too likely to be insensitive to the ways in which one’s own conduct - one’s way of questioning limitations - might ramify beyond one’s locality and threaten to deprive others of the cultural resources by which they reply to the problems of freedom in other equally difficult strategic settings.[72]

Their response to this problematic is to be sensitive to the other’s difference in order not to provoke a hardening of institutional boundaries on behalf of the other in response to a perceived threat. There is always the danger that the other will choose the protection of its autonomy over the general increase of freedom for all. The question is how can one engage in real conversation with the other and at the same time escape the ‘violence’ of freedom? For Ashley and Walker this is best achieved through the ‘patient labor of listening and questioning’. The purpose of this painstaking practice is ‘to explore possible connections between the strategic situation of others and one’s own, always sensitive to the problem of expanding the space and resources by which the ongoing struggle for freedom may be undertaken there as well as here’.[73]

In this conversation, one engages with the other, not in order to understand them *per se*, but rather in order to resist the ‘rigidity of the boundaries’[74] that limits theirs and one’s own freedom. In this regard, Shapcott is right to point out that communication with the other is ‘over-determined by the strategic purpose of expanding the realm of freedom’.[75] A conversation orientated towards the telos of freedom, while not necessarily qualifying as a purely strategic one, nevertheless presupposes two things which work as a limitation to freedom: a notion of freedom as the purpose of communication understood as self-critique and a certain type of self-reflective agent willing to decentre herself and to question her own beliefs. By theorising in ‘a register of freedom’ Ashley and Walker’s account of freedom also ‘take[s] on the explicit status of a Kantian regulative idea as standard of judgment’.[76] For Ashley and Walker, freedom, therefore, inevitably functions simultaneously as both an emancipatory and a legislative idea. In this sense and to this degree Ashley and Walker’s account of practice is complicit in a potentially unequal relationship between self and other.[77]

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[71] See Richard K. Ashley and Robert B. J. Walker, ‘Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 367–416.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 393–4.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 394.

[74] Devetak, ‘The Project of Modernity and International Relations Theory’, *op. cit.*, in note 48, p. 49.

[75] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 103.

[76] Hutchings, *Kant, Critique and Politics*, *op. cit.*, in note 50, p. 164.

[77] Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 101.

Again the principles of emancipation and freedom work against real communication with the other. It seems as though the creation of a universal principle of conversation require such a substantive transformation of individuals and communities that it is itself a process of assimilation rather than communication. This brand of post-structuralism may avoid the pitfalls of an over-reliance on the Habermasian objective of emancipation but shares the same implicit presumption of a particular postconventional agency.[78]

In contrast to conducting ethics in a 'register of freedom', Campbell suggests an alternative post-structuralist ethics based on the work of Levinas. Levinas argues that 'ethics redefines subjectivity as … heteronomous responsibility' to otherness 'in contrast to autonomous freedom'.[79] Responsibility understood as such refigures subjectivity because the very origin of the subject is to be found in its subjection to the Other, a subjection that precedes consciousness, identity, and freedom.[80] Hence, because this ethics stems from a particular conception of human subjectivity as radical intersubjectivity, it resists imposing the contents of particular identities onto particular others. In Campbell's account the other is engaged in conversation in order to understand their particular positions and problems and as a means of recognising and fulfilling a responsibility to them. In this sense, Campbell's account, premised on Levinas, is arguably less instrumental than Ashley and Walker's since the purpose of communication is to fulfill a moral responsibility, to allow an ethical life, to answer another's call and not to treat the other as the object of our ends of enlightenment.[81]

Campbell sets himself apart from traditional approaches in IR which 'have sought to specify in the abstract what good and right conduct consists of'.[82] In contrast, he seeks to redefine ethics and politics from something independent to something integral and indispensable to subjectivity. In pursuit of this end, Campbell's reading of Levinas is supplemented with a reading of Derrida. The major dilemma behind this choice is how to realise ethical responsibility towards the plurality of others. For Campbell, Levinas' work provides poor guidance on the subject while the issue of prioritising one's ethical response to alterity reveals the limits of radical interdependence when confronted with the plurality of others. Campbell identifies an insidious danger of 'political totalitarianism' in Levinas' potential limiting of responsibility in view of the third (*le tiers*) Other and seeks to respond to this challenge via Derrida's notion of undecidability.[83] Confronted with a plurality of others to whom one is responsible

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[78] It is fairly indicative of the assimilative moment in the poststructuralist thought that support for diversity is neatly 'clothed in unambiguously universalistic garment'. Linklater characteristically remarks that this late humanistic ethics of freedom 'may be the final repository for the damaged hopes of the Enlightenment and the sole surviving refuge for a modernity which has shed its utopian delusions' (Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* ,*op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 72).

[79] Levinas and Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', *op. cit.*, in note 30, p. 27.

[80] Campbell, 'The Deterritorialization of Responsibility', *op. cit.*, in note 46, p. 33.

[81] See Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 104.

[82] David Campbell, *Politics without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics and the Narratives of the Gulf War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p. 99.

[83] ,Campbell, 'The Deterritorialization of Responsibility', *op. cit.*, in note 46, p. 42. For a different view that sees no inconsistency in Levinas' response to the plurality of others problem and attributes Campbell's critique to a misunderstanding of Levinas' view on politics that rests on a 'redemptive vision of the political', see Jacob Schiff, 'Politics Against Redemption: Rereading Levinas for Critical International Theory', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, 5 March 2005. Online <.PDF>. 2006-10-05 < www.allacademic.com/meta/p69730_index.html>.

Campbell argues that there remains a responsibility to act, to make a decision. Derrida's account of undecidability, of the madness of the decision, acknowledges this dilemma and suggests the need for a 'double contradictory imperative' wherein one acknowledges that in making a decision one is simultaneously asked to calculate the incalculable, to experience the possibility of an impossible justice manifested in doing justice and injustice to others by giving priority to some or one and not others or another.[84] The need to respond to 'two contradictory injunctions' demonstrates that questions of responsibility are not clear-cut and cannot be decided in a programmatic way prior to the engagement with the other.[85]

Nonetheless, Campbell's reservations for an uncritical endorsement of Levinasian ethics may be justified for more reasons than he deems necessary. First, there is a danger that placing the other at a height is not a relationship of equality as such. As we have already discussed, Levinas develops an absolute view of ethical conduct that is located in the ineradicable difference between 'I' and the 'Other'. The ethical relationship is one in which I respond to the other *qua* her or his alterity on the basis of a 'response-ability'.[86] In so far as the other cannot be known, cannot be negotiated with since any such move would irreparably compromise his or her alterity, I can only respond passively. Levinas insists that the call of the other is not an attack on subjectivity but 'has a positive structure: Ethical'.[87] Nonetheless, in this scenario the other's needs come before those of the self and the other is somehow seen to be more important or to have a superior demand. The question that can only be raised here is what place is there in this encounter for the needs of the self and for the other's responsibility to the self.[88] If the Levinasian objection to the Habermasian communicative ethics is the elimination of radical difference, it is the absolute ineffability of otherness that is authoritative in Levinas' ethics of proximity.[89]

Surprisingly, however, Campbell's recourse to Derrida as a corrective to Levinas' absolute understanding of otherness, though inspired by deconstruction's critical ambivalence, ultimately fails to deliver its promise. And I explain myself: if genuine responsibility is generated within the ethical space of the Derridian undecidable, then the call for 'a different configuration of politics, one in which its purpose is the struggle for – or *on behalf of* - alterity, and not a struggle to efface, erase, or eradicate alterity',[90] does not remain faithful to the experience of aporia in every decision and ends up being a reversed form of totalising universalism. Campbell is right to evoke Derrida and argue for a politics which enacts the double injunction. But, in so far as he is reconfiguring politics as a struggle for alterity, he seems to deviate from this ethical commitment.[91] Rather, it is one of Derrida's lessons that violence in the form of arbitrary authority is an inevitable part of the madness of the decision. Undecidability implies that a truly critical attitude towards alterity involves an always precarious commitment to the 'lesser violence'.[92]

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[84] *Ibid* , *op. cit.*, in note 46, pp. 44–50.

[85] To this extent, Campbell's argument shares affinities with Connolly's agonistic democratic ethos in which engagement with otherness involves contesting and renegotiating fixed standards of exclusion and judgement (see William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995)).

[86] George Trey, *Solidarity and Difference: The Politics of Enlightenment in the Aftermath of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 132.

[87] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, in note 15, pp. 196–7.

[88] See critique by Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, in note 47, p. 105.

[89] Trey, *Solidarity and Difference*, *op. cit.*, in note 85, p. 142.

[90] Campbell, 'The Deterritorialization of Responsibility', *op. cit.*, in note 46, p. 50. In a recent forum in *International Relations* on the role of IR scholars as intellectuals in international politics, Campbell restates this 'ethico-political imperative' for a politics on behalf of alterity (see David Campbell, 'Beyond Choice: The Onto-Politics of Critique', *International Relations* 19, no. 1 (2005): 132–3). While his understanding of critique as an everyday intervention in the world is an undisputed part of the critical enterprise, his enactment of the critical ethos rests on a blanket affirmation of alterity which, ironically, betrays critique's commitment to an unremitting labour of self-examination and reflection

In other words, by adding a specific prescription to his critique, Campbell seems to re-enact the paradox of the politics of critique: whenever critique pretends to secure an authoritative ground it undermines its legitimacy. With all sympathy for the 'excluded', the 'victimised' and the 'disempowered', our critical reflexes against the totalising aspects of traditional morality should not be exhausted in a defence of a reversed totality, this time in the form of radical alterity.[93]Exclusion is always an exercise of power, as Carl Schmitt has persuasively shown us, but so is the exclusion of the exclusion. In thinking that they have found a point of opposition to domination by way of choosing 'deterritorialization' over 'territoriality', post-structuralists tend to become co-opted by the same logic they seek to transgress: it is by overlooking that the very point of opposition is the instrument through which domination works that the powers of domination are reinforced. Judith Butler explains this most lucidly: 'Dominance appears most effectively precisely as its "Other". The collapse of the dialectic gives us a new perspective because it shows us that the very schema by which dominance and opposition are distinguished dissimulates the instrumental use that the former makes of the latter.'[94]

Conclusion

This essay was principally concerned with the way some sophisticated critical approaches in IR tend to reproduce the paradoxes of the politics of critique in their engagement with the self/other problematic. It has been suggested that their understanding of otherness is theoretically informed by the two antithetical

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identified by Hegel as 'the labor of the negative' (*Arbeit des Negativen*) (Georg F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *op. cit.*, in note 9, para. 19).

[91] See the exchange between Warner and Campbell (Daniel Warner, 'Levinas, Buber and the Concept of Otherness in International Relations: A Reply to David Campbell', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1996): 111–28 and David Campbell, 'The Politics of Radical Interdependence: A Rejoinder to Daniel Warner', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 25, no 1 (1996): 129–41). Campbell derides Warner's plea for an energising ethics of responsibility on the grounds that this seems to be 'an act of recidivism that takes us back to a perspective of deracinated ethics and denuded politics' (p. 138). But, if politics is constructed as 'the struggle *for*, or *on behalf of* alterity', then Campbell is guilty of the same sin. This 'figuration of politics' is equally informed by a strategic concern that threatens to degenerate radical interdependence into a defence of a reversed totality.

[92] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, *op. cit.*, in note 32 p. 313, note 21.

[93] See also Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, *op. cit.*, in note 1, p. 310 : 'despite all professed scepticism about binary oppositions, there has been a tendency in many "postmodern" discourses to reify a new set of fixed oppositions: otherness is pitted against sameness, contingency against necessity, singularity and particularity against universality, fragmentation against wholeness. In each case it is the former term that is celebrated and valorized while the latter term of these oppositions is damned, marginalized, exiled.'

[94] Judith Butler, 'Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism', in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, *op. cit.*, in note 13, p. 28.

philosophical responses to the enigma of alterity, namely relative vs absolute otherness. Hegel's attempt to show the inadequateness and self-subversiveness of abstracted forms of universality have alerted us to the illusions of pure identity but have also forced us to confront the limits of a relative engagement with otherness. In contrast, Levinas' alternative understanding of alterity calls for a relationship between self and other that regards heteronomous responsibility towards the other as prior to any consciousness or intentionality required for the self's awareness of and capacity for communication but achieves that at the expense of rendering the other almost unintelligible. Derrida's critique of Levinas reminds us that there can be no relation to alterity outside the horizon of language and invites us to accept the inevitability of committing violence to alterity as a condition of the possibility of even speaking intelligibly about it.

Moving to critical international theory, dialogic cosmopolitanism, despite its emphasis on solidarity and reconciliation between universality and difference, suffers from the antinomies of the Kantian critical project: formalism and the inability of reason to secure the grounds for its legislative, judgemental authority. In fact, both dialogic cosmopolitan responses to pluralism and Foucauldian post-structuralist IR theory hold that the purpose of freedom is best achieved through the exercise of critique. As such they find themselves entangled in the paradoxes of the politics of critique as Kant. This has direct ramifications on the possibilities for communication between radically different cultures, since affirming the priority of human reason and the capacity of all human beings to exercise critique is already a judgement prior to the articulation of the arguments during the conversation which, thus, invites possible unjustifiable exclusion.

Among post-structuralist approaches Campbell's ethics of radical interdependence deserves a special attention since it calls for a relationship with alterity in its own terms and, thus, less predetermined by the strategic demands of the interaction. However, Campbell's ethical responsibility to the other allows limited space for the other's responsibility to the self. In parallel, it seems that the Levinasian concern for the inviolability of the other renders alterity almost inaccessible. In the final analysis, post-structuralist critique, when fixated with the purposive valorisation of heteronomy as opposed to autonomy, is always in danger of substituting one totality for another, thus becoming co-opted by the dominant Western discourse of universalism as the legitimate, sometimes politically convenient but, in any case, domesticated voice of dissidence. This precariousness seems to be a direct offshoot of the Derridian contention that there can be no unthematisable and non-ontological ethical relation to the other outside the ontological thematisation performed irreducibly by language. Claims that fail to retain awareness of this caveat by understanding critique as total non-violence towards, or unreflective affirmation of, alterity tend to relapse to precritical paths, i.e. either to ethnocentric universalism and the affirmation of one's identity through the objectification of the other or radical separatism and the impossibility of communication with the other.

This latter aphorism may easily leave us with the impression that critical theorising in IR will always be beset by the failure of grounding the authority of critique. It is not the purpose of this essay to prescribe passivity exactly because it does not understand critique as a practice that can either succeed or fail.[95] For this reason, it does not perceive the impossibility of theoretically overriding the self/other problem without reproducing the terms of its re-emergence as a source of discouragement. Rather, this essay suggested that those critical approaches in IR theory, which, by practicing critique, either fail to acknowledge the ungroundable universalism of their critical project or instantiate a puritan ideal of eliminating injustice against alterity, end up betraying the key element of a critical attitude towards difference: the impossibility of arriving at a definite resolution of the self/other conundrum and, nonetheless, the inevitability of pursuing it. What is more important than seeking a final overcoming of the self/other opposition is to gain the insight that it is the perpetual striving to preserve the tension and ambivalence between self and other that rescues both critique's authority and function.

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[95] For an elaboration of this point see Hutchings, *Kant, Critique and Politics*, *op. cit.*, in note 50, pp. 189–91.