

Just knowledge: justification in a rationality of peace

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In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas refigures justification, pointing to its roots in the older notion of justice. For Levinas, justice is an extension of our primordial responsibility, born in the appearance of the third interlocutor and the impossible task of comparing the incomparable. Justification is thus not simply a matter of demonstrating consistency within a logical system; it is a matter of making just our knowledge enactments – making them fair, morally upright, and sincere attempts to meet our responsibility. Thus justification does not simply provide reasons, but calls these into question; guards against the violence of hypostatization and the oppression of proceduralism; insists on the moral claims of the relational. The objectivist praxis of contemporary psychological science, however, militates against this moral critique, dramatizing, instead, a neutrality that only privileges power (and is increasingly co-opted by dehumanizing, corporatizing, and oppressive forces). Many have sought for a more humanized and morally literate scientific practice and their work has coalesced in uneven and uncertain alliances (e.g., qualitative methods, critical theory). Across these alliances, however, there is no shared justificatory praxis that can transcend the moral obtuseness of objectivism. In this paper, I argue for a justificatory praxis rooted in responsibility, rather than in objectivity. My claim is that Levinas points us away from the hierarchical epistemological bureaucracy of objectivism and toward a network of local epistemological regionalities articulated across horizons of shared responsibility; a praxis where responsibility inheres in relationships (rather than systems) and justification is the reflective, attentive, moral endeavor required in a rationality of peace.

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