

Facing Someone, Facing Something

Emmanuel Levinas has elaborated a striking phenomenological account of the experience of being faced by someone. He saw in this experience the original and fundamental experience of finding oneself obligated. Ethics begins in being faced by someone who appeals to me and puts demands on me.

I will argue that limitations and distortions in his description of this experience results in the distortions in the ethics that he derived from it.

I will argue that the experience of being directed, ordered, obligated precedes, and extends far beyond, the encounter with someone who faces me.

Then I will argue that the experience of someone facing me involves much more than the experience of being addressed and ordered.