pour sauver l'honneur de la raison, comment traduire. Par exemple le mot "raisonnable". Et comment saluer, au-delà de sa latinité, dans plus d'une langue, la différence fragile entre le rationnel et le raisonnable. La raison raisonne, certes, elle a raison, et elle se donne raison de le faire, pour se garder, pour raison garder. C'est là qu'elle est et donc veut être *elle-même*, c'est son ipséité souveraine. Mais pour rappeler son ipséité à la raison, il faut aussi la raisonner. Une raison doit se laisser raisonner » (217).

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Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), viii+184 pages.

Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), xvi+206 pages.

"Femininity . . . appeared to me as a difference contrasting strongly with other differences, not merely as a quality, different from all others, but as the very quality of difference," writes Emmanuel Levinas in one of his early essays, *Time and the Other* (p. 36). An exploration of the notion of "the feminine," the changing role it plays within Levinas's philosophy, and a cluster of concepts which relate to this notion, such as sexual (and gender) difference, the definition of woman, eros, fecundity, filiality, paternity, and maternity, are what Claire

Katz's *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca* and Stella Sandford's *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* have in common. Beyond the shared thematic interest, these two challenging books are as different as one could imagine—in terms of style, approach, background from which they deliberately move and that they are willing to consider, strategies they employ, agenda they pursue, and, ultimately, conclusions they reach. It is this radical, at times even opposed, interpretative difference, however, that is both impressive and suggestive, and that makes it interesting, almost mandatory, to read and consider the two books side by side. It is also this difference that makes it impossible to choose, as it were, between the two works in terms of greater accuracy, or plausibility of interpretation. Despite the many divergences, rather than proposing mutually exclusive readings, the two works situate themselves as complementary in the horizon of Levinas scholarship. In this sense, they demand that the reader proceed according to a truly and genuinely Levinasian spirit: not an either-or logic, but a complication demanding that each reconsider its own position in response to the other is the (might we say, ethical?) relation in which these two works stand with respect to each other and their subject matter(s).

Sandford's book, which appeared prior to Katz's (and with which Katz frequently converses, though not in terms of Sandford's more general theses), soberly considers Levinas's work against the background of the Western philosophical tradition, especially in terms of his increasing criticism of Husserl's and Heidegger's philosophies. Above all, it critically argues "for an understanding of [Levinas's] project in terms of a metaphysics of transcendence" (Sandford 3). Levinas's work, then, according to Sandford, should not be properly characterized as ethical, as has generally been emphasized among Anglophone readers, but as metaphysical. This primacy of metaphysics over ethics, one seems justified in concluding,

is what makes Levinas a philosopher, a Greek, and not primarily a religious thinker, a Jew (to address here Katz's concerns, which, however, do not seem openly to be Sandford's). Although grounded in Levinas's own words, such a separation, or primacy, of metaphysics over ethics remains somewhat unwarranted in view of the sense of Levinas's overall project, and in that respect, despite Sandford's arguments, appears somewhat artificial, and almost a merely speculative issue. Is it in fact possible in Levinas, one might ask, to separate ethics from metaphysics? Can the self experience transcendence, be it the trace of transcendence, anywhere else than in the face of the Other? Is not ethics for Levinas the necessary, even the only way in which a true sense of "the beyond" can reveal itself in the world? In other words, perhaps Greekness and Jewishness, philosophy and religion, cannot be separated in Levinas, despite Sandford's theoretical agenda, which stands opposed to Katz's.

In a philosophical era of anti-Platonist sentiments, the emphasis on metaphysical transcendence, whose meaning is found in ethics as the *phenomenological* attestation of "the beyond," constitutes Levinas's "retrieval of a certain Platonism" (Sandford 3, 13, 124), although such a Platonism is filtered through a modern phenomenological method, Sandford convincingly argues. An analysis of Plato's *Symposium*, interlaced with extrapolations from the *Phaedrus*, shows how Levinas's Platonism emerges especially in his twofold understanding—which phenomenology undoes, however—of affectivity (which characterizes the feminine, fecundity, maternity, and also ethics) as split between an immanent form (need, eros) and a transcendent one (desire, love without eros, and ultimately ethics). For Sandford, however, such a Platonism is neither useful nor helpful either for a feminist appropriation of Levinas's debatable construal of the notion of the feminine (and of related concepts, especially maternity, which, in

Levinas's understanding of it, "is neither a philosophical innovation nor a cause for feminist celebration," Sandford claims [5]), or for a phenomenological study of the notion of love. Such a study would in fact reveal the close proximity between eros and ethics. These two concepts, however, Levinas insists on maintaining as separate. Sandford's conclusion is that, in the end, Levinas's metaphysics of transcendence has nothing to offer either to phenomenology because, in view of "the impossibility of separating affectivity out into its sensible and intellectual components" (Sandford 127), phenomenology "works *against* the metaphysics of infinite transcendence" (Sandford 128), or to "a feminist theoretical project which aims to help transform society through the location of the origin of meanings—including that of 'the feminine'—in the finite structures of the world" (Sandford 140).

Sandford's "immanent critique" of Levinas (Sandford 128) forces the reader to ask very important questions. Besides those properly (and from a scholarly point of view) pertaining to a Levinasian understanding of ethics, sexual and gender issues, and so on, these include: What is the relation between phenomenology and any discourse that aims to speak of a dimension of transcendence? Is it possible to imagine a concrete feminist politics on the basis of categories that speak of "the feminine" as an abstract notion not grounded in empirical women, or in women's experiences? And finally: What role may a notion of transcendence (even if not necessarily Levinas's) play in the configuration of a feminist agenda? Sandford's more general criticism of Levinas rests on a rather debatable, although predominant, interpretation of Plato's philosophy as itself split between the mind and the body, transcendence and immanence, love of wisdom and eros. A more nuanced, problematizing, even if perhaps more problematic (and less traditional) reading of Plato's position might lead to a more sympathetic reinterpretation even of

Levinas, and of the concepts of maternity, eros, and love in their relation to ethics. Such an interpretation might in turn pursue the ideas, for example, that maternity is not devoid of eros; that eros is not devoid of ethics; and that immanence (even the immanence that nourishes a feminist politics) is inspired by transcendence.

In a sense, this more nuanced, generous, and positive reading is offered by Katz, although her field of reference is not Greek philosophy, but the Jewish religious tradition. Like Sandford, Katz also follows, in the development of Levinas's texts, the ambiguities of Levinas's use of the term and notion of the feminine, the changing role he assigns to the feminine, his vacillating between metaphor, category, and concreteness, and between "feminine" and "woman." Unlike Sandford, however, Katz is more sympathetic to Levinas's use of the notion of the feminine. She sees maternity, as described by Levinas, not only as "the ethical relation par excellence" (Katz 3, 155), but also as permeated by an eroticism that shields it (and Levinas's philosophy altogether) from Sandford's criticism. Katz concedes that maternity and the feminine function as metaphor. Yet, for Katz, maternity is not only about responsibility, that is, it is not only about ethics, about spirituality, about a love without the body, as a perhaps too Christian, too traditionally Platonic (in the sense described above, which leads to Sandford's criticism) reading would have it. Maternity is erotic and joyous, Katz asserts; it "unites enjoyment and responsibility" (Katz 155), and Levinas's reference to it is the expression of a deeply "life-affirming" (Katz 255), earthbound, indeed, one might say even immanent philosophy. The ground for these rather passionate, suggestive, and undoubtedly refreshing assertions is found by Katz by means of a very interesting, exciting, and challenging exploration into the discussion of Levinas's Judaism, and especially of the figures of Jewish women that appear in the

Jewish biblical tradition. In the range of their life attitudes, these female figures—among them, Ruth, Sarah, and Rebecca—represent the empirical women nourishing Levinas's metaphor of "the feminine," which thus is not a merely empty, disembodied concept. An understanding of the role they play, of what they represent within the Jewish Bible, is thus fundamental to understanding how the feminine functions in Levinas's overall project, but also to devising—in a way, against Sandford—"what use his description of the feminine may be to us today" (Katz 4). It is also fundamental, she adds, to understanding how "the two bodies of thought [that is, Levinas's confessional and philosophical writings, or the Jewish and Greek traditions, but the latter only as portrayed in Levinas's philosophical works] can work together to aid our understanding of Levinas's project" (Katz 4).

Whereas for Sandford Levinas's project is aimed at a retrieval of Platonism, for Katz, his "philosophical project . . . is to reclaim the ethical as Jewish while also translating the Hebrew into Greek" (Katz 21). If however, as she claims, "to recover the ethical . . . is . . . to recover Judaism" (Katz 151), one wonders whether, in a Levinasian perspective as Katz understands it, one can be ethical without being Jewish, with all the problems attached to the difficulty of a definition of what constitutes Judaism, or Jewishness. Moreover, one wonders, as Sandford ultimately does, whether, despite the joyfulness of maternity that emerges, for example, through a reading of the figure of the Jewish Sarah, for today's feminine there is a truly safe place of appropriative inspiration that is not a matter of "silent footsteps" within the frame of such an admittedly "misogynist, patriarchal perspective" such as that of Judaism (Katz 65) (which in this sense is so similar to the Greek tradition, I would add). It is true, as Katz reminds us, that one cannot read Levinas separately from his Jewish rootedness. Yet, it is also true that it is a Levinas inspired

attitude that, despite Katz's scholarly reference to various rabbinic, Talmudic, and Midrashic texts, enables the reading of Jewish women figures that she offers. In other words, can we understand "the feminine" in the Jewish Bible in the way that Katz does without Levinas? Does such a Levinas-inspired reading owe anything to the Greek philosophical tradition? Does Levinas's own interpretation of the feminine owe anything to such a Greek tradition? Perhaps the hermeneutic circle of interpretation is more complex here than Katz allows for. One is struck by the absence of any reference to Hegel in her discussion of Kierkegaard's critique of ethics, and of his (and Levinas's) interpretation of Abraham. Analogously, one is also struck by the absence of consideration of the possibility that Levinas's attitude toward the feminine may owe some of its sources (and not only the negative ones) also to the Greek tradition—maybe not philosophical but perhaps literary (for example, the Greek tragedians, Shakespeare, the great Russian novelists, to suggest a few). One could counter, though, that, as stated in the subtitle, Katz's book is deliberately focused on Judaism. Yet, here too a more nuanced reading might be helpful, not so much to understand the role of the feminine (Katz's analysis is very inspirational), but to understand Levinas as a complex thinker for whom the relation between Jewishness and Greekness is never played out in a unilateral manner. As suggested earlier, such a nuanced, integrative reading is the one that, despite (or perhaps because of) its own situatedness, Sandford's work offers in a way that is not exclusionary, but rather complementary.

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