

○ VOLUME 14 NUMBER 2, 2015

Against Levinas

James Meffan

Victoria University of Wellington

Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy seeks to instate alterity as the transcendental basis for an ethics that places on the self an 'infinite' responsibility for the Other and ensures ethics' priority as 'first philosophy'. The insistence on alterity as a counter to the ontological search for comprehension—'grasping' and 'adequating' difference in the process—results in an ethical agency that is primarily directed towards the self as a constant 'calling into question of the same'. The effect is to radically challenge most imaginable forms of agential engagement and in the process to undercut most conceivable articulations of duty.

Duties are the concrete expression of ethics. Ethics, however, is not simply the collection of duties but a discourse that seeks to rationalise the basis for the ascription of duties. To live in a manner that is ethically engaged therefore requires two kinds of agency: performance of duties and engagement in ethical discourse itself. This is not to say that those who cannot operate as agential beings in one or both of these ways are 'outside of ethics' for agency necessarily supposes patiency (the object of responsibility, the recipient of an act of duty) just as a subject supposes an object. While most of us are both ethical agents and patients, some (such as the person in a coma) are limited to ethical patiency. While patiency is an essential aspect of any kind of ethical understanding, it is of necessity subordinate to ethical agency, being determined by the agents engaged in ethical debate.

Could it be that the idea of a responsibility that is 'infinite' has the paradoxical effect of diminishing agency, turning both self and others into ethical patients and undoing the basis for those important discussions that can redefine the boundaries of what counts as the proper domain of ethics?

My interest is in the relationship between literature and ethics, more specifically fiction and ethics. There are longstanding arguments that cast doubt on the use of fiction for ethical ends; if fiction entails making things up—less delicately, lying—are there not strong reasons from the outset to question its suitability as part of ethical discourse? Equally familiar are the arguments that seek to restore fiction as a legitimate source of ethical enquiry or promotion: fiction is better able to capture the attention of its audience, to develop sympathy and empathy in its readers, to dramatise—while allowing critical distance from—the central contours of ethically challenging situations, to imagine unfamiliar lifeways and experiences, and to model possible consequences. Most of these defences seek to downplay the significance of fictionality; fiction may not promise factual truth, but, managed well it can nevertheless deliver to its readers a special kind of truth, despite its remove from falsifiability. Seen in this light as a kind of surrogate for real experience, literature's ostensible ethical potential is profoundly humanist in assumption and intent. It is this humanism that underlies accounts such as Wayne C. Booth's highly influential *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988).

Among the challenges that poststructuralism has raised for universalised humanist criticism is a critique of the idea of readers as a homogenised group from which a narrow range of responses might (or should) be anticipated. For Booth, competent readers do not bring their identities into play when responding to a text. The idealisation of the distanced aesthetic response encourages Booth to criticise readers who identify with characters in the text as 'immature' (Booth 1983, p. 248). Behind this logic rests the assumptions that the contents of literature are more or less durable and immanent and that identities exist independently of discursive engagement. Poststructuralism challenges both of these assumptions, suggesting that identity is contextually and discursively constructed, and that readers produce rather than receive meaning. These differing accounts of selfhood and its relation to the experience of literary production and consumption are not as bi-polar as this account might suggest, however. Booth draws attention to 'the currently fashionable claim that no one is free of epistemological and metaphysical adhesions', before noting that although 'the claim is most commonly attributed to Derrida ... and Foucault, ... it is really found everywhere in the history of rhetorical theory', citing Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Cicero's *De Oratorio* as early examples (Booth 1988, p. 62). To a degree he is right of course, though he is perhaps mistaking a mildly pragmatic position—one that acknowledges such 'adhesions' but sees it as desirable that those who take their aesthetic engagement seriously check this baggage at the door—for a more radically thoroughgoing position that understands these not as external attachments to selves but as constitutive of the individual and thus not detachable in the way that Booth desires.

This question of identity and identification is of central relevance to any discussion of the relationship between literature and ethics as it underlies the (often unspoken) assumptions of agency which

determine the ethical capacities of texts and the status of transactions between text, reader and world. What (if any) ethical issues attend the representation or imitation of other selves? What is the nature of transaction between the reader's self and the interaction with 'selves' represented or imitated in fiction? Is any ethical demand made of the reader in this process? Booth's humanism assumes a high degree of commonality between humans, and sees the kind of convergence effected by institutionalising reader competencies as desirable rather than coercive and hegemonic. The ethical value of reading is in part realised through the creation of a reading community that seeks agreement through a process he terms 'coduction' (Booth 1988). This process does, to be sure, leave evaluation open to modification on the basis of further experience, but seeks to stabilise the discussion in the moment by moving from private to 'public' (or institutional) comparison. Exposure to the different, the irreconcilable, has the capacity to change evaluative norms, but its admission into the discourse depends, in the first instance, on its measurement against established norms.

The 'culturalising' and consequent relativising of literary studies that followed (or at points simply ran in parallel with) the challenges of poststructuralism are now well rehearsed and in many cases have their own institutional momentum to sustain them. Postcolonialism in particular challenged the idea that 'public' discussion was anything like as extensive or accessible as critics like Booth seemed to assume. Postcolonial activism itself highlighted the possible violence attendant on assuming the right to speak or write for or as others. As a counter-hegemonic movement, it grew out of a critical recognition of the injustice and asymmetrical violence of imperialism. Even where colonial and missionary projects sought to 'do good' for those whose lands and minds were being invaded, a failure of reciprocity in these encounters meant that the imperialists' others (usually indigenous people and exploited workers) had their subjectivities overwritten by the imperialists' teleological narratives of advancement and enlightenment. Initial approaches to decolonisation—revolutionary nationalisms; racial, ethnic, even continental solidarities—fought fire with fire, seeking in the strength of identity politics sufficient critical mass to resist the hegemonising aims of empires. However, as intellectuals took up the decolonising project, unease grew over the extent to which vocal elites were presuming to speak for others with whom they assumed or claimed identity. In generalising the aims, anxieties and grievances of diverse groups, they were employing, the argument went, the same kind of hegemonising logic as imperialism, subordinating difference to a collective normativity. We can see evidence of this shift in the critical distance between Chinua Achebe—castigating Joseph Conrad for failing to supply in *Heart of Darkness* 'an alternative frame of reference' that could ensure readers would see European barbarity *in contrast to* Congolese humanity (Achebe 1977, p. 790)—and Edward Said's defence of Conrad for *scrupulously* declining to assume that his narrator Marlow (or he, Conrad) could adequately represent such a perspective (Said 1994, pp. 19-31). The preference shifted from politics of identity (seeking adversarial

strength through coherent, affirmative communal identifications) to politics of difference (seeking respect for and preservation of plurality, difference and subversion of homogeneity).

Postmodernism similarly mounted a challenge to 'grand narratives' (Lyotard 1984) and metanarratives of value, sharing with postcolonialism an assumption that ontology needed to be pluralised, and acknowledging that rationality itself carried its own self-validating assumptions encoded in its logical premises, a thesis bolstered by the New Historicist insight that an 'archeology of knowledge' (Foucault 2002) can reveal the ways in which historical contingency works to produce the enabling conditions of what, at any given moment, counts as knowledge, itself now revealed as a synonym for power. From poststructuralism, postmodernist criticism developed a profound suspicion of, and antagonism towards, the violence of the closural moment, the textual point of final predication that allows for what Barthes calls the 'single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God)' (Barthes 1977, p. 132). Instead semiotic systems are shown to function according to the Derridean logic of *différance*: a self-modifying, self-perpetuating system that defers ultimate meaning endlessly.

To all of these positions which cast doubt on finality and finitude, absolute meaning and value, Levinasian ethics resonates. For those of us whose ethical approaches have developed out of a suspicion towards essentialism and claims on objectivity, Emmanuel Levinas offers the attraction of a position that resists the generalisations that follow from these assumptions. Levinas's philosophy seeks to instate (respect for) alterity as the universal basis for an ethics that places on the self an 'infinite' responsibility for the Other and ensures ethics' priority as 'first philosophy' (Levinas 1989, pp. 75-87). For Levinas, alterity—that aspect of otherness that exceeds mere difference by remaining outside of comprehension or expression (except as *excession*)—is the ethical counter to the assimilative violence of 'grasping' ontology that presumes adequate knowledge of the other. The attraction of this approach for all those 'posts' that have been concerned to resist the imperialising violence of hegemonising systems of thought seems obvious. Yet Levinas also brings something that cuts against the open-endedness and plurality of these theoretical positions: a basis for producing an ethical *imperative* that endures beyond the merely situational, the subjective or intersubjective. In short, Levinas seems to have it both ways, to resist claims on objectivity and the adequacy of ontology while nevertheless finding a basis for ethics that transcends questions of intersubjective agreement; the assertion that respect for alterity underwrites all individual subjectivity ensures that each individual subject is made responsible for all others regardless of any agential choice to shoulder that responsibility. For literary theorists, then, Levinasian ethics seems to offer a solution to the problems of both the coercive assumptions of humanist literary ethics and the potentially quietist implications of a strongly relativist approach. Although Levinas may seem to set ethics against (or before) politics, his insistence on the universality of the

demand on any self's responsibility for the Other allows for an articulation of ethics that is applicable to all without making assumptions about the character of each.

Moreover, Levinas's ethics do not share poststructuralism's antipathy to humanism, quite the reverse. As Francois Raffoul asserts in *The Origins of Responsibility*, Levinas's is an:

undeconstructed, indeed assumed and proclaimed humanism. Levinas is not interested in deconstructing humanism, and in fact he is very critical of the contemporary critiques of humanism and of the subject. He takes issue, for instance, with structuralist thought, with its appeals to impersonal principles. (Raffoul 2010, p. 167)

What Levinas does reject, however, is the 'egology' of the sovereign responsible self. This is a humanism of the self 'held hostage' to the alterity of the Other, a self whose attempts to take responsibility are unethical in the light of an ethical demand that subordinates selfhood to the recognition of the unrecognisable other.

For literary critics of a certain stripe, reference to (and use of) Levinasian ethics, reduced to an insistence on the self's infinite responsibility for the other, has become *de rigueur*, typically initiating an analysis of character relations within fictional narratives, or of the relationship of the author and (implicitly or explicitly) the reader to (some of) the characters. Gerald L. Bruns notes the inconsistency and occasional hostility in Levinas's writings to art and poetry, recording Maurice Blanchot's observation that 'Levinas mistrusts poems and poetic activity' (qtd. in Critchley & Bernasconi 2002, p. 207). Nevertheless, this apparent indifference does not seem to have dampened the enthusiasm of the kind of criticism that evidently finds something deeply resonant in the exacting demands of an ethics that seeks to prioritise relationship, not through identity and recognition, but through asymmetry and non-recognition. For my part, I find something questionable and troubling about this adoption, partly because the application of Levinas to the critical project seems arguably a misuse, relying as it does on a discourse of individual identity, agency and responsibility understood as accountability, but also because it points to something unresolved at the heart of the critical project, a moment of indecision between the naivety of humanist criticism (treating characters as persons) and the desire for evaluative certainties. At the same time, this critical 'indecision' might also be seen to reflect a problem in Levinasian ethics itself, not least in its insistence on the infinitude of the face-to-face relation as a means of undermining the agential aspects of intentional phenomenology. As Simon Critchley summarises: 'On this model, in my view, the philosopher, unlike the natural scientist, does not claim to be providing us with new knowledge or fresh discoveries, but rather with what Wittgenstein calls *reminders* of what we already know but continually pass over in our day-to-day life. Philosophy reminds us of what is passed over in the naivety of what passes for common sense' (Critchley & Bernasconi 2002, p. 7). 'What we already know' is that

the project of attempting to capture that which eludes the grasp of knowing rehearses a desire for totality that is disabled by the very conditions under which it operates.

If this conception assures the place of ethics as first philosophy, it also challenges an understanding of ethics as a field of discourse within which the respective merits of certain approaches to understanding can be assessed, and the generation of guiding principles can be considered. My concern is what this means for the articulation of duties (a question to which Levinas offers a singular answer: responsibility for the other), which regulate or guide conduct and for the activity of ethical thought itself. For ethics is a discourse mobilised between individual humans (even if those individuals represent institutionalised values) in order to encourage or modify actions, either directly, or by modifying the opinions or beliefs that are influential in producing actions, as well as arguing for the bases for promoting particular kinds of actions. The urgency of ethics comes from its imbrication in agency and action; if either is missing the necessity of the discourse is removed.

What then are the duties that flow from Levinas's universally applicable ethics that is nevertheless non-totalising? What does 'infinite responsibility' look like, and is it as hard—impossible even—to actualise as it sounds? What do I *do* when I am being infinitely responsible? How do I *act*? These are serious questions since ethics (particularly ethics built on the foundation of responsibility for the other) must be concerned with the actions that inform interpersonal conduct. Ethics is never only an individual affair, and therefore never entirely the province of individual agency. A duty is no use if it exceeds (or precedes) the agential capacity of the individual, or conversely if it makes no demands or offers no guidance on conduct. What kinds of foundational principles do Levinasian ethics call upon to ensure right relations? If I was to take the opposite tack from Levinas, I might come up with the sort of principle (after Charles Taylor) that responds to a politics (or ethics) of recognition; I would accentuate similarity and commonality as the bases for arriving at an ethically satisfactory agreement with others. Against this, Levinasian ethics would point out that something like the Christian injunction to 'do unto others as you would have them do to you' makes exactly the sort of supposition (that understanding my own wishes and needs is the key to understanding yours) that is antithetically opposed to a respect for alterity. Arguably, then, the principle of respect for Otherness leads away from engagement with others in favour of self-interrogation, a move that sounds suspiciously 'egological' after all.

To my mind, this represents a fairly minimal level of ethical agency, and makes the dubious assumption that self-interrogation is both ethically productive and has the capacity to overcome the solipsistic pitfalls of self-affirmation or the endless regress of auto-critique. It remains blind, moreover, to the importance of an individual's situation in a social and political context, for while the ideal of democratic

freedom may insist upon the equal status of each individual, the reality is often less than equitable. In its weakest form, responsibility for the Other becomes respect for difference, creating the classical liberal demand for tolerance. Herbert Marcuse (1965) and Ghassan Hage (1998) after him have demonstrated how tolerance, which appears to be an individual virtue in a liberal society, actually operates as a structural mechanism for the maintenance of inequity and, in Hage's view, supports a white liberal fantasy of control—I bestow my tolerance on you in order to sustain the illusion that inclusion in some ideal of a culturalised state is mine to offer. Under such a system we may all exercise agential will, but structures of power ensure that only some expressions of agency are influential in determining the direction and pace of social change. While the Levinasian idealisation of alterity might seem to support some kind of universal tolerance, in practical terms this seems unsatisfactory, since for the relatively enfranchised tolerance is experienced as power, while for the relatively disenfranchised tolerance may look rather more like resignation and feel like being patronised.

Agency, I am suggesting, is the key to ethical engagement in two particular ways: engagement in ethical discourse itself and performance of duties and obligations. I find it useful to distinguish the related terms ethics and morality, borrowing Clifford Geertz's method of considering not a discourse's 'theories or its findings' but 'what the practitioners do' (Geertz 1973, p. 5). If we think about what ethicists and moralists do we can see a clear distinction: a moralist is someone concerned to ensure the promotion and performance of already understood (though variously constituted and frequently adversarial) codes of responsibility, duty and rules of conduct. An ethicist, on the other hand, engages discursively, considering questions about what these codes should be, what basis there is for their prosecution, what limits on their application. Indeed, on this view, morality—understood as the application of already known codes—is antithetical to ethics as it discourages *responsive* debate, the forum in which ethical agency is expressed, preferring what is sometimes termed ethical patiency (a rights-based deontological theory that demands moral treatment of those persons unable to engage *reciprocally* with moral agents) over agency, making individuals the objects rather than the subjects of ethical discourse.

While this formulation coupled with a relativised view of value may seem clearly to prefer the open-ended discourse of ethics over the restrictive application of morals, for ethical discourse to have any point it surely needs to produce some answers to its questions about the basis and reach of codes of responsibility. Such answers may only be situational and momentary, but at some point must be able to yield a judgment on the morality of actions. And here, too, issues of agency are important since actions performed by individuals can be more or less under their own agential control, or alternatively more or less a result of uncontrollable external or internal compulsion. It is thus generally accepted that it only makes sense to judge the moral adequacy of an individual's actions if those actions are undertaken

with a reasonable level of agency. We see this expectation demonstrated in law courts where lack of volitional engagement can (or can at least be argued to) limit culpability. Not only does lack of agency potentially excuse an actor from the ambit of moral judgment, there is also a view that the exercise of 'free will' is necessary to make an action moral, that moral value does not inhere in the action itself, but in the individual's agential decision to 'freely choose the good'. I am no more being moral if I simply perform good actions because I am compelled to than I am bad if I perform bad actions under compulsion. By this logic, only those with the capacity to make genuine choices with respect to their actions can be considered fully moral agents.

It has long been argued, however that there are classes of 'being' without the ability to exercise either ethical or moral agency who are nevertheless entitled to moral consideration. These are sometimes termed moral patients in moral philosophy, a distinction that follows efforts to de-couple 'moral personhood' from 'ontological personhood' and the consequent effort to understand moral personhood in more complex ways:

Moral personhood ... seems to combine two distinct spheres, namely the sphere of moral agency, and the sphere of moral patiency. Those falling within the former sphere are the subjects of ethical duties. Those falling within the latter sphere are the objects of those duties. But these spheres need not necessarily coincide in practice. All sentient humans and non-humans will qualify as moral patients, on Singer's view. But only humans (so far as we know) qualify as moral agents. Most normal humans will occupy the intersection of the two spheres. But it is perfectly possible that under certain circumstances we may fall outside of the sphere of moral agency and possibly also outside of the sphere of moral patiency. (Lucas 2011, p. 29)

What or who should be included within the category of moral patient is understandably the subject of much debate, especially given the possibility that living humans might fall 'outside of the sphere of moral patiency'. The very young, the old, and severely infirm are often considered as test cases, with the attribution of patiency depending on one's basis for understanding moral personhood, whether utilitarian or deontological.

While moral patiency strikes me as an important ethical concept, allowing as it does that ethics cannot only be a game played among consenting adults, it articulates a limit case and a position, crucially, that cannot be engaged in ethical discourse. Those who fall outside the sphere of moral agency but inside the sphere of moral patiency are incapable of any reciprocal relationship with moral agents. Instead, rather like Hage's recipient of tolerance, the moral patient reflects the power of the bestower who exercises a control that only emphasises the asymmetrical distribution of capacities and duties in the relationship. This is where I find the concept of alterity, and the

consequent antipathy to adequation, problematic. Recognising in my face-to-face encounters with others (*all* others) the final inscrutability of other lives, especially where I recognise that our ethical understandings are at odds, *does* make a problem for my tendency to seek, first, to argue for the ethicality of my life, to defend my position. Levinasian ethics quite properly discourages this tendency, aiming to dethrone the ego in a first step towards disinterested engagement. Yet what it offers instead—respect for alterity as alterity—discourages discourse, which is *necessarily* oriented towards intersubjective comprehension. My sense of responsibility for the Other must lead me away from discursive engagement, since such a ratiocinative process necessarily performs the function of adequation. Yet to do this is, in ethical terms, to reduce the Other to the position of moral patient, declining to engage their ethical agency out of concern that to do so would enact a violence on a core of singular selfhood. This bestowal of patiency can reasonably be criticised as a control mechanism, even if I use my own agency to interrogate my own ethical assumptions. Actually, my sense is that Levinasian ethics to some degree makes moral patients of us all, finding that the key determinant of ethical consideration—the self's indebtedness to the Other for the coming in to being of its subjectivity—precedes and determines the nature of engagement for each individual.

In practice though, agency is never equivalent to complete freedom; our ethical thoughts are directed (if not entirely determined) by very many preceding conditions and events. It is this that makes sense of the fact that my values are more likely to be similar to those whose life experience most closely aligns with my own. The ethical challenge for me is to overcome my sense of the self-evident rightness of what I take to be 'my own' position and recognise that others, for whom the rightness of my position is not self-evident, may hold positions that seem equally self-evident to them and which deserve merit and consideration. This is not something I can do on my own. As the preceding comments suggest, this position is itself at least partially received; in an important sense it is *not* my own, and nor am I the sole author of my selfhood. My selfhood is discursively constructed, and so I must engage discursively to modify it. To do this I cannot simply take another's ethical position at face value but must understand more about the context in which it, too, can seem self-evidently right. This is not an exercise of ethical agency that I can undertake without finding some shared basis on which to enter into discourse with my 'Others'. But my Others are not without their own (similarly qualified) agency either in this process.

In some respects, this is what makes fiction an ideal discursive field in which to engage ethically. The very fact that fiction cannot lay claim to literal truth removes the question of reference (of direct relationship between word and the state of affairs 'represented') as a meaningful line of enquiry, denying truth-claims as the path by which interpretive variety or indeterminacy might be foreclosed or even momentarily arrested. Truth is replaced by concepts like credibility or plausibility or the satisfaction of other expectations, which are themselves produced

by means of the extra-personal rhetorical devices that constitute the discourse. Yet if this seems to suggest that 'the text' *does* something, containing the devices that will determine its right reading, to make this claim would be to misrepresent the operation of rhetoric. Rhetoric, like any 'artistry', is not immanent in the text but is experienced by the viewer, auditor or reader (whether as persuasion, aesthetic bliss, or whatever) as a force produced in the mind when exposed to a particular configuration of elements. Texts do not have agency. The agent in the reading transaction is the reader (related to, but not necessarily directly connected to the agency exercised by the writer in the writing transaction). How I choose to read is not strictly directed or delimited. I may choose to read 'with the grain', seeking to align my own persuadability with what I take to be the persuasion desired by the writer (the implied author, as Booth tellingly calls him). Alternatively, I might read 'against the grain', or 'symptomatically', letting certain features of the text persuade me of an impulse, desire or agenda that the writer's efforts seem determined to cover over.

The experience of fiction is thus performative. As a reader I can apply myself to a fictional text in a number of different ways, motivated by different desires, remaining more or less open to the exploration of unfamiliar possibilities (which is not to say that the text opens up alternatives; however, it does make available resources that allow for my application of a variety of reading strategies). Fiction becomes the space of play in the sense suggested by object relations theory, the words on the page allowing different individuals to explore various ways of experiencing imagined sequences of events, as well as the actual event of the reading itself. The text *does* nothing, merely catalysing different possibilities in different minds, more readily or reliably enabling certain reading strategies perhaps, but also always vulnerable to other possibilities. Insisting that the relevant agency to be considered rests with the reader is not the same as saying that the reader has complete freedom or full control over hermeneutic outcomes. The reader is only identifiable as reader on the basis of familiarity with certain pre-established conventions of reading; the text is only legible to the extent that it operates according to rules sufficiently understood by the reader. To the extent that the reader seeks to confirm or test a particular response to a text in conversation with other readers, these others can be influential on the outcome. A re-reading is likely to produce something different again. The text is like the Levinasian Other in the sense that 'what it means to, or in, itself' is ultimately inaccessible to any given reader, and in approaching the text, seeking to 'discover' its meaning, the reader responds to that opacity by attempting a kind of adequation, producing a meaning that derives from received principles of construction, attributing to the text something that originates from the reader him or herself. The text is unlike the Levinasian Other though, of course, because it contains nothing that could be discovered, means nothing to or in itself. It is inert and non-agential, an inanimate physical artifact that has the capacity to provoke thought and feeling only insofar as readers choose to use it as the basis for activating certain kinds of thought processes. It should go without saying that it

offers no defence against being remade, time and again, according to the desires of its readers.

Fiction provides a domain of engagement in which all participants play by a set of rules, not all of which need apply equally or at all in any given reading. Writers are free to bend these rules, or introduce new techniques; readers can read with selective focus, place uneven weight on different elements of the text, or use strategies that justify going beyond the words on the page. It is possibility and contingency rather than certainty and transmission that animate the reading process in fiction. Even those readers who believe themselves to be in search of a singular right reading, or the 'author's intention', establish this goal in response to awareness that the stasis of the text cannot guarantee the uniform production of meaning. The constraints on readers are determined only by the reading community by which they wish to have the force of their reading recognised. Reading need not engage ethical consciousness, but when it does it creates the conditions in which the aware reader will understand that they have some freedom to exercise their readerly agency in ways of their own devising even as they must also recognise that this exercise of 'agency' is predicated on the deployment of preceding norms. Not agency in the sense of complete freedom perhaps, but neither the fall into patency of which I suspect Levinasian ethics.

James Meffan is a lecturer in the English Programme at Victoria University of Wellington. He has a particular interest in literature and ethics.

References

Achebe, C 1977, 'An image of Africa: racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 782-794.

Barthes, R 1977, *Image, music, text*, Fontana Press, London.

Booth, WC 1988, *The company we keep: an ethics of fiction*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

—1983, *The rhetoric of fiction* (second edition), University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Critchley, S & Bernasconi R (eds) 2002, *The Cambridge companion to Levinas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Foucault, M 2002, *The archaeology of knowledge*, trans. AM Sheridan Smith, Routledge, London.

Geertz, C 1973, *The interpretation of cultures*, Basic Books, New York.

Hage, G 1998, *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto, Annandale, New South Wales.

Levinas, E 1989, *The Levinas reader*, S Hand, (ed.), Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Lucas, P 2011, *Ethics and self knowledge: respect for self-interpreting agents*, Springer, London.

Liotard, J-F 1984, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, trans. G Bennington & B Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Marcuse, H 1965, 'Repressive tolerance', in R Wolff, B Moore Jr & H Marcuse, *A critique of pure tolerance*, Beacon Press, Boston.

Raffoul, F 2010, *The origins of responsibility*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Said, E 1994, *Culture and imperialism*, Vintage, New York.