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READING WITH DREW M. DALTON:
A CONSTRUCTIVE REVIEW SYMPOSIUM ON *LONGING FOR THE OTHER: LEVINAS AND
METAPHYSICAL DESIRE*

Most book reviews are critical assessments of the claims made by the author of the book under consideration. Usually, then, a review symposium is structured as a series of reviews that are followed by a response by the author, who in most cases attempts to defend herself against the objections that have been raised. This review symposium is different. Originating as a book session on Drew M. Dalton's *Longing for the Other: Levinas and Metaphysical Desire* (Duchesne U.P., 2009), which was organized by Michael Paradiso-Michau for the 2011 meeting of the North American Levinas Society (NALS), the engagements with Dalton's book were explicitly meant to be constructive attempts to think in light of *Longing for the Other* and not simply critical assessments of it. Accordingly, Drew Dalton's own essay was presented first as a way of setting up what he took to be the main stakes of his book and the places where his thought has subsequently progressed since its publication. Then, Michael Paradiso-Michau, Kris Sealey, and I, all offered essays that attempted to *think-with* Dalton by *thinking-after* him, as it were. What occurred at the NALS meeting in College Station, Texas, was a robust dialogue that opened fecund spaces for further thought.

What follows are significantly revised and expanded versions of the papers presented as part of that book session. The authors have all attempted to maintain the constructive, and perhaps even experimental, tone in which the original session was envisioned. The result is an invigorating dialogue among young scholars who all, albeit in different ways, question classical ways of understanding Levinas (and Continental philosophy more broadly). Not content with mere criticism, however, all of the authors offer possible alternative interpretations and suggest reasons for taking these alternatives seriously. That said, although this symposium is ostensibly offered in relation to Drew Dalton's book, it should not be viewed as of relevance only to that book. Issues that are given serious consideration include desire, fundamentalism, consumerism, shame, religious belief, personalist theism, and the requirements of phenomenality. Importantly, and intentionally, none of these essays assume a familiarity with

Dalton's book, though given the fecundity of Dalton's work for contemporary philosophy, I hope that his work will receive continued, and well-deserved, attention in the scholarly literature.

The symposium unfolds as follows. First, Drew M. Dalton offers an account of the main claims in *Longing for the Other*, but he does this in a way that is original and expansive rather than merely summative of what he has said elsewhere. Going beyond what he does in the book, he explores the implications of a reconceived notion of metaphysical desire for the ethical, political, and religious existence of social individuals. In an analysis that is both analytically rigorous and existentially sensitive, Dalton suggests that metaphysical desire is misunderstood when it is read as a need for an absent object. Instead, he proposes that metaphysical desire protects us from problematic conceptions of the divine while opening us up to the call of the concrete others with whom we share the world.

After Dalton's opening essay, Kris Sealey thinks in light of Dalton by bringing Levinas and Sartre into a productive conversation about intersubjectivity, shame, and self-presence. According to Sealey, Levinas's radicality has not been fully appreciated by many. She suggests, therefore, that Dalton's consideration of Levinasian metaphysical desire alongside Plato's notion of *eros* helps to illuminate the way in which Levinas turns the tradition on its head by attending to the unending vulnerability of the self as ruptured by the Other.

Finally, in my own essay, I offer a thought-experiment in Levinasian philosophy of religion that is opened by Dalton's own account of the divine in Levinas. Against those readings of Levinas that stress God's incomprehensibility, I contend that are good reasons to at least consider the possibility that Levinas *might* require something like theistic personalism if his use of theological language is to do the philosophical work for which it seems to be intended in Levinas's philosophy.

It should be stressed that all of the following essays are intentionally meant to be *suggestive, but not conclusive*. Rather than working things out to completion, they all call for more work. In this way, we take this *constructive* review symposium to be dialogically invitational and hope that it demonstrates the stimulating excellence of Dalton's *Longing for the Other*.

Finally, we want to thank the editors of the *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* for their encouragement to revise these essays for publication, the 2011 NALS conference committee for allowing us to put the original book session together, Michael Paradiso-Michau for envisioning and organizing that session, and especially the members of the audience at that session for their very helpful suggestions and participation in the conversation that occurred there — our papers are all significantly improved because of the audience's engagement with them.

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