LIVING WELL TOWARDS OTHERS:

The Development of an Everyday Ethics Through Emmanuel Levinas and Alfred Schutz

Yvonne Haigh BA (Hons) Murdoch University

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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with what it means to live well towards others. It develops a form of everyday ethics that emphasises how existing in the world and being ethical are entwined. To develop this approach to ethics this study employs Alfred Schutz’s phenomenological descriptions of everyday world and Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of the ethical. The purpose of the thesis is to develop an understanding of ethics that operates at the everyday level of human-to-human contact. This form of ethics is significant in that it indicates that being ethical is an important aspect of human life. My intention is to show that ethics is always more than simply the institution of codes of conduct that govern the way people act. The significance of the thesis is that it contributes both to ways in which ethics can be understood and to the manner in which ethics can be operationalised at an institutional level.

My thesis has four specific aims. First, to examine the conditions and characteristics that constitute the everyday world as understood in Alfred Schutz’s work. Second, to explore Emmanuel Levinas’s understanding of the ethical. My third aim is to synthesise these theorists’ ideas through my heuristic device, Echoes of the Other. This device will allow me to extract the conditions for and features of an everyday ethics. My fourth aim is to point to an in situ illustration of this approach to ethics. This will be drawn from my observations at the Western Australian Police Academy.

My argument is that synthesising Levinas’s and Schutz’s ideas will enable the development of an everyday ethics. This will highlight the ways in which ethics functions at the micro levels of human life. This study contributes to approaches to ethics, and specifically, ethics derived from Levinas’s ethical relation. This approach can be of use to people interested in ethics, phenomenology, the works of Levinas and Schutz and those concerned with developing ways to live well towards others.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Yvonne Haigh
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