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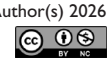
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Ethics in resistance? From *Totality* to *Infinity*

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Abstract

Multiple bodies of literature in management and organization studies examine actions identified as resistance. Comparably diverse and extensive literatures attend to ethics. Yet, when instances of resistance are theorized, explicit reference to ethics is exceptional. To address and reduce this disconnect, the paper contributes to an evolving body of Levinasian scholarship that is distinguished by a radical 'responsibility for the Other'. The relevance of Levinas' thinking is demonstrated by reference to diverse examples of resistance that range from Daniel Ellsberg's publication of the *Pentagon Papers* to the classic, fictional case of Antigone's defiance of Creon in Sophocles' play. These examples are employed to theorize how the dynamics of ethics in resistance comprise three key moments – contingency, commitment and universality – and three associated impediments – dogmatism, motivational deficit and egoism.

Keywords

affect, conflict, ethics, learning, resistance, Levinas

Introduction

Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency (NSA) operative who released its top-secret files, recalls how, during the months preceding this act of resistance, he felt that 'Everything in your head . . . is screaming: "Don't do this!". "And yet" . . .', Snowden continues:

> there is some *voice* that builds over time that has to persuade a person that they do not just have the *right* to [blow the whistle] but a *responsibility* to do so: to make the move that will certainly burn their life to the ground. (*The Guardian*, 2018, emphases added)

How are students of resistance to account for the 'voice' that tells Snowden, when working as a contractor, that he has the 'responsibility', as well as the 'right', to blow the whistle on the NSA?

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Is the 'voice' intelligible *solely* in terms of the demands of normative orders[1] that foster ideas and associated obligations of fairness, justice, and so on (Aldossari and Calvard, 2022)? Or should the 'voice' be interpreted within an alternative normative framework that, for example, identifies it as delusional or megalomaniacal? Alternatively, following Levinas, might the 'voice' be attributable to something *primordial* – an alterity that Levinas (1969) terms *Infinity* – whose call is irreducible to the norms and rules of what he terms *Totality*?

Levinasian *Infinity* speaks of a radical, unsettling openness towards the Other, in contrast to *Totality* that reduces the Other to what is ego-affirmingly familiar, or the *same* (Cunliffe, 2018: 18). In an educational or organizational context, *Totality* is aligned with (re)producing established bodies of knowledge – such as those underpinned by a modernist, everyday political philosophy of possessive individualism that conceives of human beings as proprietors of their own persons and capacities (Macpherson, 1962). Levinasian *Infinity*, in contrast, invites venturing beyond ourselves, including the ego-maintaining desire to possess the Other – an inclination that has the comforting familiarity of sameness.

By addressing the question of how 'responsibility for the Other' (Levinas, 1998: 10) is relevant for the study of acts identified as resistance, this article contributes to an evolving body of Levinasian scholarship in management and organization studies (MOS).[2] So doing, it seeks to *complement and move* studies of resistance beyond accounts grounded solely in concerns with power, identity, interest or normative obligation. In such studies of resistance, ethics is, at best, an unthematized resource, even when it is associated with a particular positioning or identity, such as 'feminist ethics' (Thomas and Davies, 1995). The following section outlines how resistance is theorized here by reference to the example of the ultimate withdrawal of labour through workplace suicide. Next, MOS studies that explicitly connect resistance and ethics are reviewed to demonstrate a lacuna for which Levinasian scholarship provides *a* potential remedy. A number of diverse examples of resistance – such as Daniel Ellsberg's publication of the *Pentagon Papers* and Antigone's defiance of Creon's decree in Sophocles' play – are then deployed to show the relevance of ethics for the analysis of actions identified as resistance; and, specifically, Levinas' understanding of 'ethics as first philosophy'. In the penultimate section of the paper, its theoretical and empirical elements are brought together to theorize resistance as animated by an ethical demand that exceeds the justificatory terms of prevailing normative orders. The conclusion reprises the central argument of the paper and draws out some implications. Overall, the motivation of the article is to engage in 'epistemic resistance' (Liu, 2022) by exerting some influence over the dominant, ethics-light narratives of resistance in MOS.

How is resistance theorized in MOS?

In social relationships, including those of capitalist employment relations, where one party (the 'master') may appear to exert absolute control over the other (the 'slave'), there is invariably some measure of dependence of 'the powerful' upon the 'powerless' (Ashcraft, 2017; Sambrook, 2024) – a 'political' dependence that can provoke acts identified as resistance, such as Snowden's whistleblowing and other examples considered below. Mumby et al. (2017) have reviewed multiple bodies of literature in MOS that study resistance in workplaces, manifest as output restriction, withdrawal of labour, sabotage, whistleblowing and so on. Typically, such instances of resistance are interpreted as a collective or individual response to perceived injustice and unfairness associated, for example, with organizational change such as retrenchment or changes to algorithms (Tirapani and Willmott, 2022).

In orthodox labour process theory, for example, employee resistance is framed as the inverse of the managerial preoccupation with labour control, where managers strive to minimize employees'

resistance but may also coopt recalcitrance as a source of innovation or as an opportunity for improving communication (Ford et al., 2008). Dualistic framings of resistance underplay the complexities of the resistance–control relationship as (managerial) control may involve resistance (e.g. covert defiance of corporate policies) and employee resistance may involve control (e.g. the imposition of working to rule). Acts identified as resistance in workplaces and elsewhere may be theorized in very different ways – for example, as manifestations of a damaging social pathology or as a political struggle for justice and/or self-determination. Indeed, the very ascription of resistance to behaviour is a (small 'p') political act: output restriction, industrial sabotage and absenteeism, may, alternatively, be interpreted as cases of exerting (or taking back) *control*.

In the *mainstream* episteme[3] of MOS, manifestations of employee resistance to managerial control are widely framed as symptoms of 'individual "deficiency" or pathology (Hollway, 1991)' (Fleming and Spicer, 2003: 173); and/or they are attributed to 'ignorance, incompetence, or mismanagement' (Ford et al., 2008: 362). In this 'unitarist' framing, such expressions of resistance are considered amenable to remedy by enlightened managerial intervention (e.g. Piderit, 2000). In contrast, a 'pluralist' framing accommodates the presence of conflicting interests and presumes that that a mutually acceptable agreement can be negotiated through the institutional mechanism of collective bargaining. In a 'radical' framing,[4] manifestations of resistance, such as output restriction or sabotage, are theorized as the effects of degrading and/or exploitative structures of control (Edwards et al., 1995), whose elimination requires organized struggle and far-reaching structural change. Finally, in a poststructuralist framing, resistance has been theorized as an outcome of placing 'the constitution of self or identity' (Harding et al., 2017: 1210) in jeopardy or in play (Bowes-Catton et al., 2020; Ezzamel et al., 2001).

Broadly shared by these diverse framings of resistance is the presumption that it is exclusively attributable to pathologies, tensions or contradictions endemic to the prevailing normative and/or politico-economic order. Very rarely is the relevance of ethics for theorizing resistance *directly* considered, let alone incorporated. When, rarely, ethics are explicitly invoked, they are equated with claims and obligations conceived as elements of the normative order.

Enter ethics in resistance

In MOS, Harding et al. (2017) are exceptional in *pointing* to the relevance of ethics for studying resistance, but they then place ethics 'beyond the scope of this current article' (p. 1226). A similar lacuna is evident in *The Sage Handbook of Resistance* where the editors, who are MOS specialists, note, in their Introduction, the absence of a chapter on ethics in resistance. This omission is justified by 'see[ing] it [ethics] rather as a matter for analysis *within all discourse about resistance*' (Courpasson and Vallas, 2016: 14, emphasis added). Readers may find this explanation credible before discovering that 17 of the 22 Handbook chapters do not mention ethics; and only 1, a Foucauldian-inspired chapter (Knights, 2016), makes any sustained connection between resistance and ethics. The *Handbook of Resistance* illustrates how, in MOS scholarship, as in everyday life, the affective 'primordiality' of ethics is typically disregarded, backgrounded and obscured (Rhodes and Carlsen, 2018).

If the relevance of ethics for the study of resistance is to become 'a matter for analysis *within all discourse about resistance*' (Courpasson and Vallas, 2016: 14, emphasis added), then ethics must first be thematized. A possible point of departure is Levinas' conception of 'ethics as first philosophy'. Illustrated by the quote from Edward Snowden that introduces this paper, Levinas' (1998) conception of ethics as 'responsibility for the Other' (p. 10) is a *pre-normative* 'affective mode of being' (Kenny and Fotaki, 2015: 192) such that '*the relationship with the non-ego, precedes any relationship with the ego itself*' (Levinas, 1998: 119, emphasis added). Since the 'responsibility' is

'primordial' (Levinas, 1984: 63), it is endemic to everyday practices including, and of greatest relevance here, actions identified as resistance. For readers familiar with Sophocles' Antigone, which is discussed in a later section, the primacy of this 'responsibility' is, arguably, communicated in Creon's final speech when its force is no longer obscured.

Resistance at work: Levinasian ethics

Acts identified as resistance, such as output restriction and whistleblowing, are situated in the present analysis within a radical episteme (see Note 3) that associates those acts with the presence, exposure and removal of oppressive practices (Mumby et al., 2017). In other words, the disclosure of ethics in resistance as a manifestations of Levinasian 'responsibility for the Other' is conceived to complement, not replace, the recognition of domination in resistance.

In a study that examined multiple suicides at France Telecom Orange and Foxconn, where relations of domination were manifest as intense work pressures, Clegg et al. (2016) conjecture that 'The person kills themselves both to express *their love and commitment to an ethic and ideals that transcend them* in their imagined community and *to show how deeply integrated into those alternative ethics and ideals they are*' (p. 405, emphasis added; see also Jones, 2012).[5] In the academic workplace, a faculty member of Cardiff Business School plunged to his death through the glass ceiling of the library, leaving a note indicating that his workload had become intolerable, making it impossible to fulfil his vocational relationship to his students.[6] Workplace suicide can offer a means of escaping oppressive employment relations from which workers, like the Cardiff lecturer, feel unbearably estranged from, in Levinasian terms, their 'responsibility for the Other', such that it is impossible for them to honour, let alone fulfil, their 'ethics and ideals'.

Such suicides are typically understood in terms of the strength of identification with a normative order that exacted the ultimate sacrifice. Alternatively, and *additionally*, suicidal resistance of the employees to oppressive relations may be interpreted as manifesting an answerability to the Other – an ethic that precedes and conditions the worldly 'ethics and ideals' of those workers, as articulated by Snowden's sense of responsibility to blow the whistle on oppressive wrongdoing, in the form of extensive, undisclosed surveillance on citizens, even when also anticipating that it would 'blow [his] life to the ground'. A Levinasian perspective on ethics does not exclude or downplay how normative orders cultivate 'ethics and ideals' into which employees – Snowden the employees at France Telecom and Foxconn and the lecturer – had been socialized. But, in addition, they point to a source of resistance in a responsibility that 'precedes any relationship with the ego itself' (Levinas, 1998: 119, emphasis added).

In this Levinasian framing, the suicides at France Telecom and Foxconn are not interpreted exclusively as a kind of perverse self-preservation of what those employees held dear. Congruent with a small, evolving body of Levinasian scholarship in MOS (see Note 2), attentiveness to a pre-normative responsibility provides an alternative, and complementary, way of studying resistance to approaches currently dominating the field. This alternative is now elaborated by considering the distinction drawn by Levinas between *Totality* and *Infinity*.

Totality* and *Infinity

As Levinas explains, 'responsibility for the Other' is not only associated with exceptional or dramatic actions, such as employee suicide.[7] It is also expressed in 'the smallest of gestures, such as saying "after you" as we sit at the dinner table or walk through the door'. For Levinas (1984), such acts '*bear witness to the ethical*' (p. 68, emphasis added). They are not 'merely' good manners or expressions of the prevailing normative order but are, Levinas claims, rooted in an answerability

Table 1. Totality and Infinity.

Dimension	*Totality*	*Infinity*
Basic meaning	The tendency to absorb difference into familiar categories, systems or forms of knowledge.	The irreducible excess of the Other cannot be fully grasped, contained or possessed.
Relation to the Other	Reduces the Other to the Same: what can be recognized, classified, managed or controlled.	The Other is unknowable, uncontainable and irreducible.
Mode of understanding	Fits the Other into an existing order of meaning.	Interrupts existing categories and exposes their limits.
View of knowledge	Assumes that reality can be comprehended, ordered and mastered.	Denies that the Other can ever be fully known or exhausted by knowledge.
Ethical significance	Subordinates ethics to comprehension, control, convention or the prevailing normative order.	Opens the self to responsibility beyond its own interests, categories and certainties.
Effect on the self	Confirms the self's sovereignty and sense-making power.	Disturbs the self's certainty and calls it into responsibility.
Political implication	Enables domination by making difference familiar, inferior or governable.	Challenges closure by exposing the claims of those excluded, silenced or reduced by the system.

to the Other. As Morgan (2016: 31; see also p. 285) explains, a crucial distinction exists between what the '*o*ther' means politically, as a symptom of *Totality*, and what the '*O*ther' means ethically, as a sign of *Infinity*:

> We should not confuse *the everyday, historical, or political use of the 'other'*, where it might be taken to refer to those outside one's group and most of all one's enemies, and *the ethical meaning*, where it refers to all those other than the self and hence all to whom and for whom one is responsible.' (Emphases added)

For Levinas, ethics *precedes* enrolment into any specific normative order through which selves are formed and become engaged in actions, including those identified as resistance. The Other, as *Infinity*, 'is always mysterious and unknowable' (Rhodes, 2014; Rhodes and Carlsen, 2018: 1303); and this 'otherness' repeatedly disrupt*s* the totalizing logic of sameness. *Totality* is associated with the objectification and concretizing of 'otherness', as exemplified by everyday and scholarly accounts of phenomena, including resistance, which typically disregard what exceeds closure. The Other appears most viscerally through the face of the concrete other; but the Other surpasses all efforts to represent it, and so gestures to *Infinity* (see Table 1).

As Butler (2012: 9) has reflected, ethics for Levinas is 'no longer understood exclusively [egologically] as a disposition or action grounded in a ready-made subject'. Implicitly, this is a critique of students of Levinas who have sought to concretize his thought, including his concept of *Infinity*. Notably, when adopting Levinas' categories of *Totality* and *Infinity*, Enrique Dussel (1995, 2013) desacralizes the latter. Dussel's philosophy of liberation is consistent with Levinas' concept of *Totality* when arguing that social orders, such as European modernity, become closed and self-justifying, they then regard other orders as inferior. However, when turning to the Levinasian idea of *Infinity*, Dussel translates it into exteriority: the position of those rendered inferior by the dominant order. Resistance to the logic of sameness is attributed not to the unknowable, irreducible Other but, rather, to the position of those – the exploited worker or the colonized person, for

example – who call the order into question and affirm the value of what is denied by the *Totality*. Ironically, Dussel returns the radical Otherness of Levinas' thinking to the familiar sameness of concrete historical struggle, where alterity is identified exclusively with the social positioning of oppressed subjects.

'Responsibility for the Other' is unassimilable to self-consciousness and identity formation forged within normative orders (*Totality*). The *secondary* status of self-consciousness is betrayed by breakdowns or breaches (Garfinkel, 1967) that, whatever their source, point, in a Levinasian framing, to the Other 'that can pierce the *illusion* of my *self-created* universe' (Van der Ven, 2011: 123, emphasis added). Recognition of the Other 'empties me of myself and empties me without end' (Levinas, 1998: 94 quoted by Van der Ven, 2011: 146), such that the totalizing idea of self-creation, and the associated notions of self-possession and self-preservation, are radically placed in question.

The significance of the primacy attributed to 'responsibility for the other' (Levinas, 1998: 10) resides in its opening up of 'existing political identities, practices, institutions and discourses to an Other which is beyond their terms' (Newman, 2010: 7 quoted by Rhodes, 2014: 731). When once asked directly to give an example of such 'responsibility', Levinas responded with an anecdote about a mundane situation:

> I remember meeting once with a group of Latin American students, well versed in the terminology of Marxist liberation and *terribly concerned by the suffering and unhappiness of their people* in Argentina. They asked me rather impatiently if I had ever actually witnessed the utopian rapport with the other which my ethics philosophy speaks of. I replied: 'Yes, indeed, here in this room'. (Levinas, 1984: 68, emphasis added)

This example provides a further illustration of how for Levinas, 'responsibility for the Other' is not an abstract or esoteric idea but, rather, is expressed in everyday concerns.

From this Levinasian perspective, contemporary manifestations of resistance (e.g. 'Time's Up', 'MeToo' and 'BLM') can be counted as expressions, *albeit partial or imperfect*, of how 'The ethical "I"' places itself in jeopardy when it 'kneels before the other, sacrificing its own liberty to *the more primordial call of the other*' (Levinas, 1984: 63, emphasis added). In everyday living, the 'kneeling' that expresses 'the primordial call' is typically compromised by competing demands from multiple concrete others (what Levinas terms 'third parties') who are invested in, and responsive to, the moral claims of normative orders. Nonetheless, for Levinas, the primordiality of 'responsibility for the Other', associated with the limitless quality of *Infinity*, discloses the limits of the sameness of *Totality.*

Criticism of Levinasian ethics

For critics of Levinasian 'first philosophy', including luminaries such as Richard Rorty (1996) and Gillian Rose (1992), the greatest sticking point is the notion of unlimited responsibility for the Other. It is held to lack any mediation between ethics (*Infinity*) and politics (*Totality*) and to lack practicality. Such criticisms assume that the Other must have some objectified meaning and practical application. Such criticisms reflect a failure to contemplate an ethics of answerability to the Other that is unlimited; or, relatedly, to take sufficiently seriously the implication that the sovereign subject is an illusion requiring *radical* deconstruction.

These criticisms of Levinasian ethics partly overlap with those of more sympathetic commentators such as Simon Critchley, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek.[8] To further unpack Levinasian ethics, it will be compared and contrasted with the ethics of Lacan. Lacan's attentiveness to desire and

Levinas' heedfulness of responsibility each rejects the sovereignty of subjects that is presumed and elaborated by conceptions of ethics based upon the intellectual tradition of liberal humanism, as articulated by Locke and Mill. Žižek's Lacanian–Hegelian reading of Levinas is especially relevant because Contu's (2008, 2014, 2023) analyses of Antigone's resistance, engaged in a later section of this article, draw principally upon Lacan and Žižek.

To comprehend Lacanian ethics, it is necessary to appreciate the centrality in his thinking of three interdependent 'registers' of experience: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The register of the Imaginary emerges as subjects misrecognize themselves as whole or coherent. The Symbolic register, articulated in normative orders, elaborates and solidifies Imaginary self-understandings. Crucially, it can never completely represent what it aspires to convey. Finally, the Real register testifies to the limits of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. It points to what cannot be symbolized, and so accounts for the impossibility inherent in symbolization, including the symbolization of the Real. In sum, Lacanian ontology conceives of subjects as split and decentred by language (the register of the Symbolic) that divides the ostensibly autonomous 'I' (a product of the register of the Imaginary) from what exceeds it (the register of the Real).

As a desiring, decentred being, the Lacanian subject struggles continuously with a self-preserving impulse (or drive) to attain an imaginary sovereignty that, typically, is cultivated and reinforced by normative orders, and is perpetuated by denying and escaping the confounding Real. Defying symbolization, the Real lurks beyond the Symbolic. The Real is apparent in breakdowns of symbolization – for example, the enjoyment of guilty pleasures, including many acts of resistance (e.g. 'decaf resistance'; Contu, 2008) – which exceed the bounds of the normative order, and yet also affirm an ostensibly paramount reality, thereby displacing the Real that repeatedly unsettles the seeming solidity of symbolization.

When subjects are no longer subordinated to the prevailing normative order (e.g. career, self-preservation), they/we experience and express desire without authorization or rationalization. Ethics, for Lacan, is associated with a refusal to betray desire, expressed in the injunction 'do not give up on your desire'. Ethical resistance, for Lacan, involves a refusal to conflate or limit enjoyment (*jouissance*[9]) to ordinary pleasures (*plaisir*) that are demanded and endorsed by, and maintain, the dominant normative order. For Levinas, too, ethics are irreducible to conformity with the (contingent) moral conventions of the normative order. But Levinas' conception of ethics more *radically* deconstructs and debunks the subject when ascribing primacy to an infinite 'responsibility for the Other' that precedes the formation of the 'I' or ego. That primacy (*Infinity*) is a source of empowerment that enables subjects to resist pressures to affirm the moral demands of the prevailing normative order (*Totality*). Levinasian ethics debunks sovereignty by radically doubting the ontological separateness of the subject in relation to the Other (see Box 1). It is what enables resistance that, in Lacanian terms, is animated by an ethics of the Real.

Contra Žižek and Rose, Levinasian ethics does not necessarily exclude or diminish the significance of political antagonisms and violence or the means of their containment (see Note 8). Nor does it necessarily marginalize the significance of the unconscious and its unhinging contents. Taking 'responsibility for the Other' does not imply that other beings are weak rather than, say, resilient. Nor does Levinasian ethics diminish the prospect of radical political action. It is mistaken to regard Levinasian ethics as politically naïve; or to suggest that absences in his work, rather than the projections of his readers, are culpable for instances of its misapprehension and misappropriation.

Consider Butler's (2012) misdirected critique and, specifically, what she regards as the inconsistency between Levinas' 'ethics as first philosophy' and his defence of Zionism that, she claims, renders Palestinians 'faceless' (see p. 39 et seq.). This critique contends that Levinas' investment

Box 1. Is Levinasian ethics 'Buddhist Judaism'?

Slavoj Žižek (2023) characterizes Levinasian ethics as a form of 'Buddhist Judaism'. The phrase is rhetorically striking because it associates Levinas' 'ethics as first philosophy' with a supposedly mystical, quietist or politically indeterminate spirituality. On this reading, Levinasian ethics and Buddhism are both suspected of lacking a sufficient basis for resisting cruelty, domination and barbarism.

Such criticism of Levinasian ethics is provocative but reductive. It depends upon a highly selective view of Buddhism as if it were primarily contemplative detachment from worldly suffering. Yet Buddhist traditions are not ethically empty. The basic precepts of doing no harm, cultivating good and acting for the benefit of beings already challenge the suggestion that Buddhism lacks a moral orientation. In Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, this orientation is intensified through bodhicitta: the aspiration to awaken for the liberation of all beings. Such an aspiration does not invite passive withdrawal from suffering but a disciplined commitment to respond to it. The argument is made, for example, in *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes on a Buddhist Revolution* by David Loy (2008), an authorized Zen teacher in the Sanbo Zen/Sanbo Kyodan lineage.

Žižek's suspicion is directed, following Chiesa and Johnston (2023), at the Buddhist treatment of desire. Yet Buddhism does not simply regard all desire as illusory or to be extinguished. The problem is not desire as such, but craving: the attachment that treats what is impermanent as if it could provide lasting security, identity or possession. Aversion is the complementary movement by which the ego rejects whatever threatens its imagined stability. Meditation, ethical discipline and insight do not abolish energy, care or commitment; they loosen ego-centred appropriations of them.

This distinction matters politically. If Buddhist practice weakened all forms of concern, it would indeed welcome quietism. But if it weakens craving, aversion and ego-fixation, it contributes to enabling forms of action less governed by domination, resentment and self-protection. The self-immolation of the Vietnamese monk Thích Quảng Đức, undertaken in protest against the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government, is a dramatic reminder that Buddhist practice does not require withdrawal from political struggle. Whatever one makes of such an act, it cannot easily be described as passive contemplation.

The comparison with Lacan is also instructive. Lacan's phrase 'subjective destitution' names a release from fantasies of completeness, mastery and self-identity. Buddhism shares something with this critique of egoic fantasy, but it does not leave the subject merely suspended in irreparable division. Its practices seek to loosen the felt solidity of ego and the dualism of subject and object such that life is experienced as interdependent, impermanent and empty of fixed essence. This does not require belief in a metaphysical 'beyond'. Rather, it points to a transformed way of inhabiting ordinary life.

Although Levinasian ethics is not Buddhist doctrine, the comparison can be useful if it draws attention to a shared challenge to egoic sovereignty. Levinas' 'responsibility for the Other' and Buddhist compassion each unsettle the self's claim to be the centre of meaning and value. Neither entails indifference to politics. Both can deepen the ethical question of how resistance to cruelty might avoid reproducing forms of domination.

in a Jewish self-identity (*Totality*) leads him to defend (the normative order of) Zionism. It is this alleged incongruity that Butler (2012) – herself a person of Jewish heritage – seeks to 'call out'. However, she conflates Levinas' support of the *principles* of Judaism, as articulated in the pursuit

of Zionism in/as the state of Israel, with Zionism as it is *practically, imperfectly realized* – in the form, for example, of messianic fanaticism.

Levinas acknowledges how 'in our daily lives, our comprehensive, infinite, and indeterminate obligations to others are always realized in a determinate way that depends upon our choices and the precise features of the situation' (Morgan, 2016: 338). Levinas' (1990) defence of Zionism refers to its intent to fulfil the *principles* of Judaism (*Infinity*): he contends that the establishment of the 'State of Israel . . . finally offers the opportunity to carry out the social law of Judaism' (p. 218 cited in Morgan, 2016: 40). Whether the state of Israel should have been created is a moot question. But enactment of the 'social law' (*halakhah*) of Judaism is assessed by how the stranger – the Levinasian Other – is treated. Levinas' defence of Zionism relates to the latter's espousal of the infinite obligations of Judaism. It does not imply support for an actual Zionism that, in Butler's words, may, and often has, rendered Palestinians 'faceless' to the point of their obliteration (*Totality*).

MOS studies connecting ethics with resistance

In this section, attention is paid initially to studies in MOS that *directly and explicitly* connect resistance to ethics but without referring to Levinas. Of course, it could be plausible to argue that any study of resistance involves questions of ethics; and, therefore, that numerous empirical studies examine acts of resistance in relation to ethics. On examination, however, making an *explicit* connection between resistance and ethics is exceptional. For example, it might be expected that this connection would occur in Scott's classic *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Yet, Scott makes only one fleeting reference to ethics, in Chapter 6, where he considers how subordinate groups voice grievances against elites' indictment of the ethics of the normative order of the *pueblo*.

Uys

Uys (2000) is the first MOS specialist to propose the term 'ethical resistance' when she challenges and seeks to replace the popular, managerialist conception of the whistleblower as 'an informer, a spy or a traitor'. But she does not elaborate, even briefly, upon her proposal. Nonetheless, Uys strongly encourages studies that attend to the ethics of resistance.

Alakavuklar and Alamgir

Alakavuklar and Alamgir's (2018) 'Ethics of resistance in organisations' connects ethics and resistance directly, arguing that motivation to resist is associated exclusively with the social '*position*' occupied by (recalcitrant) 'organizational actors' (p. 33, emphasis added). Their thesis is that actors are compelled by the '*ethical obligation*' *attaching to their position* to 'act against inequality, exploitation, and oppression in our own forms of praxis' (Schaffer, 2004: 255; Alakavuklar and Alamgir, 2018: 36, emphasis added). Absent is any consideration of ethics that precedes or exceeds the demands of social positions invested in normative orders.

Courpasson and Marti

Courpasson and Marti (2019) associate ethics with actors' enactment of 'moral principles' that they attribute to 'a particular project of life' (p. 858–859), rather than to their social position *per se*. Actors committed to a 'project' engage in acts of resistance as they strive to reduce, and potentially overcome, the inertia associated with passive conformity to rules and norms (see Schaffer, 2004:

67). The commitment to 'moral principles', Courpasson and Marti (2019) propose, is what 'constructed [the resistors'] response to oppression as a collective project, deriving from an *ethical demand* for political action (Critchley, 2008)' (p. 854, emphasis added). The reference to 'an *ethical demand*', and the associated citation of Critchley's (2008) *Infinitely Demanding*, might suggest an indebtedness to Levinasian ethics as Critchley is a prominent Levinasian scholar. However, 'the ethicality of resistance' is attributed to a normative order (of faith) that, 'permit[ted] the powerless [or at least a minority of them] to make lifestyle choices' (Courpasson and Marti, 2019: 854) in the face of extreme privations.

Conroy, Kempster and Remke

This study of middle managers in a health care setting characterizes their defence of established '[institutional] practices from being corrupted' as a form of 'ethical resistance' (citing Conroy, 2010: 220; Conroy et al., 2024: 727–728). Applying Macintyre's (1981) neo-Aristotelian ethics, the managers' recalcitrance is attributed to 'culturally based' virtues (Conroy et al., 2024: 729) resulting from 'complex socialized activity' comprising learned 'expectations, assumptions, skills, standards . . . etc.' (Conroy et al., 2024: 730). The formation of the virtues is understood to occur within the normative order enacted by medical clinical professionals. In a passing observation, it is suggested that the managers' narratives 'offer a *real sense* of these managers knowing *deep down* . . . what is right for their practices' (Conroy et al., 2024: 736, emphases added). The managers' deeply held self-knowledge could be interpreted as an expression of 'responsibility for the Other'. Instead, however, the authors attribute the managers' 'ethical resistance' exclusively to the internalization of virtue ethics as part of medical professionals' socialization.

In summary, in MOS studies that make a direct connection between acts identified as resistance and ethics, the conception of ethics is traced to the normative order or a collective project that nurtures that order. With the possible exception of Conroy et al. (2024), there is no intimation of how ethics may be rooted in a pre-normative sense of 'responsibility for the Other'.

McMurray, Pullen and Rhodes

This is the sole application of Levinasian ethics in MOS to an empirical case of resistance (McMurray et al., 2011).[10] It reports how a partner in a UK medical practice sought to 'call out' his employer, the local Primary Care Trust (PCT),[11] over its handling of a proposed buy-out of the practice. In a letter of complaint, the partner wrote that members of the Trust had neglected their 'professional duty' (McMurray et al., 2011: 555). The partner's complaint is interpreted as an act of resistance animated, not wholly but significantly, by 'responsibility for the Other' that is compromised by the partner's identification of the PCT as a powerful, anonymous actor *to* which he feels no ethical obligation (McMurray et al., 2011: 553), even though he also feels a strong obligation *from* them.The example is held to demonstrate how expressions of primordial responsibility are 'flawed' (McMurray et al., 2011: 555) by their situatedness within social relations where his partner regards and treats others as abstract, faceless categories – a totalizing 'Them'.

McMurray et al. (2011) conceive of actors, such as the partner, as simultaneously ethical and political subjects. They/we are ethical subjects because we bear an infinite answerability to the Other. We are also, inescapably, political subjects as we live in interdependent relation to others who we may, for example, (dis)regard as a (totalized) 'Them'. As McMurray et al. (2011: 557) put it, 'in organizations the ethical subject is always as well the political subject; the one who takes action in response to the call of the ethical demand'. In the PCT case, the relation between the Trust and the partner is manifest in the latter's resistance expressed in the letter of complaint. One

possible implication, advanced by McMurray et al. (2011), is that the subject is inevitably divided between the 'impossible' ethical demand, and the possibilities afforded by politics when responding to that demand. Politics is the medium that frustrates or enables the expression of the ethical demand. The difficulty of reconciling ethics and politics, and the 'divided self' (McMurray et al., 2011: 557), does not result only from the restrictions of the political medium but also from the compromised ethics of the subject – the 'angelized sense of ethical subjectivity' and an associated 'sense of righteousness' (McMurray et al., 2011: 556) ascribed to the partner – to which, of course, political media of subjectivation (e.g. managerialism) contribute. The difficulty exists irrespective of the conduciveness of the 'specific socio-political context' (Critchley, 1999: 100 cited by McMurray et al., 2011: 557) to fulfilment of the demand. The ethico-political challenge, then, is to engage in acts of resistance to oppression by establishing and enacting institutional media of subjectivation without compromising one's (ethical) 'responsibility for the Other'. That, arguably, is the 'affirmative possibility for researching and theorizing ethics within a critical framework' (McMurray et al., 2011: 557).

Given the dearth of studies in MOS that draw upon Levinas' writing to connect ethics and resistance, three examples – two brief and one extended – are now given to demonstrate the relevance of his ethics for theorizing resistance.

Levinasian ethics applied to cases of resistance

Whistleblowing

During the Vietnam War, Daniel Ellsberg was contracted by the Pentagon as an expert on Vietnam (Ellsberg, 2003; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013). Over time, on his own account, Ellsberg became increasingly alive to suffering on both sides of the war. Eventually, he felt compelled to leak highly classified files, the *Pentagon Papers* (hereafter the *Papers*) as a way of contributing to growing resistance to the war (Ellsberg, 2003, 2010). When framed within a Levinasian perspective, Ellsberg's actions expressed, albeit imperfectly and partially, a 'choiceless choice' (Alford, 2002: 40 cited in Contu, 2014: 399) to speak out against the suffering that, in his assessment as a Vietnam expert, was indefensible, not least because it was a war that could not be won. From this perspective, his whistleblowing expressed an ineffable 'generosity grounded in embodied affect' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2014: 784) that was animated, in substantial part, by the ethical demand of the Other, and not simply by the obligations of the normative order or opportunistic self-aggrandizement.

In the case of Edward Snowden's release of the NSA files, a reference to which opens this article, he accounted for his whistleblowing by making repeated reference to 'goodness' (cf. Levinas, 1969: 305), and to his concern for 'oppressed people'.[12] Joining the Army, and then working for the NSA, Snowden recalls, was, when interpreted from a Levinasian perspective, animated by a sense of 'responsibility for the Other'. Likewise, releasing the files was, as Snowden claims, a way of protecting 'the freedom of all publics', although, like other acts identified as resistance, this account is open to competing interpretations (Harfield, 2021), including the accusation that Snowden deliberately broke legal and moral obligations to the state. It is not necessary to reject such interpretations to doubt their exhaustiveness, and so open up space for understanding actions – such as those of Snowden but also Ellsberg and the medical practitioner – as, at least in part, expressions of 'goodness' animated by an Other-oriented responsibility. Indeed, it is rather implausible that a moral obligation or an impulse to demonstrate his power or prowess (e.g. to expose the extensiveness of state surveillance in violation of the right to privacy) was sufficient to instil the courage necessary to risk everything (and eventually be exiled to Russia as a consequence of the US government revoking his passport, thereby preventing him from travelling to other destinations.

Sheltering Jewish refugees

In one of the most celebrated and intensively researched cases of resistance, the inhabitants of *Le Chambon*, a village in the south of France, defied an edict issued by the Vichy authorities during World War 2. The order forbade the villagers to help Jews, including children, who had escaped from nearby internment camps (see also Rittner and Myers, 1986; Rochat and Modigliani, 1995). For the residents of *Le Chambon*, the pressing question, with regard to providing sanctuary for the refugees, was: '*Do you think we are all brothers or not?* Do you think it is *unjust* to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!' (Rittner and Myers, 1986: 102 cited in Facing History and Ourselves 2017: 528, emphases added). Despite the risks involved, many residents of *Le Chambon* treated the Jews as their 'brothers' – an act of 'goodness' that, from a Levinasian perspective, is attributable to their ethical sense of 'responsibility for the Other'.

When advancing this interpretation, it is relevant to note that the residents of *Le Chambon* were Protestants in a Catholic country whose ancestors had endured a long history of persecution. It is probable, therefore, that the resulting normative order of the villagers disposed them to help the Jews. From a Levinasian perspective, however, the villagers' actions are incompletely accounted for by reference to normative obligations. More profoundly, Levinasian ethics suggests that their actions were animated, to some degree, by a viscerally felt, comparatively selfless, answerability to the Other. It is notable that the villagers' help 'happened progressively and was *seldom premeditated*' (Rochat and Modigliani, 1995: 197, emphasis added). The absence of premeditation is consistent with interpreting the provision of sanctuary for the Jews as an expression of Other-oriented responsibility, manifest as generosity that 'eschews the calculation characteristic of an economy of exchange' (Diprose, 2002: 5; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014: 792).

Antigone

The third, more extended example of the relevance of Levinasian ethics for theorizing resistance is fictional. Sophocles' play Antigone has recently received close attention in MOS scholarship (Contu, 2008, 2014, 2023).[13] Contributing to a distinctive genre of research (see Dallyn and Marinetto, 2022), the example of Antigone is of particular interest because, it will be suggested, her commitment to 'the good' and 'responsibility for the Other' is comparatively unalloyed by egoism and self-righteousness, although her actions are not immune from such negative assessments. Contu's (2008) Lacanian reading interprets Antigone's resistance as 'emblematic of a real act' such that one does not act 'because of promised compensation (money or reputation) but because one must . . . the act is the moment of radical freedom from, and suspension of, the pleasure principle and its utilitarian logic' (see Žižek, 2001: 169; Contu, 2008: 375). Or, to translate this Lacanian interpretation of Antigone's act of defiance into Levinasian terminology, her 'real act' expresses, not wholly but significantly, answerability to the Other.

In order to appreciate the historical and political context of Sophocles' play, it is necessary to provide a brief synopsis. Polyneices, the brother of Antigone, leaves Thebes,[14] the setting of the play, after quarrelling with his only male sibling, Eteocles. In an act of treason, Polyneices returns to Thebes with an army and is defeated in a battle during which the brothers kill each other. Creon, Antigone's uncle, then replaces Eteocles as King, and becomes Antigone's guardian. As the sister and the only surviving close relative of Polyneices, Antigone is, by convention, primarily responsible for her brother's burial. The drama turns around Antigone's impassioned determination to bury her brother, in defiance of Creon's edict that forbids Polyneices, as a traitor, a proper burial,[15] and that also condemns anyone defying his order to be buried alive.

From what Levinas terms the 'egological' perspective of *Totality*, Antigone's resistance to Creon may be attributed to her threatened self-identity that she stubbornly defends. From the

perspective of *Infinity*, alternatively, Antigone's resistance is animated by a profound, visceral and uncompromising sense of 'responsibility for the Other' that is articulated in the strength of her conviction that *every citizen* of Thebes,[16] regardless of what they have done, merits a proper burial. This conviction is affirmed by, but not reducible to, the normative order of Thebes. It is not just that Polyneices is especially precious and irreplaceable as a brother because their parents are both in Hades (deceased). Crucially, a profound and sublime significance is attributed to burial as it 'attests to a bond between the living and the dead, which *reveals the limits of politics* – more precisely, the limit of domination' (Ricoeur, 1992: 245, emphasis added). On this reading, receipt of a proper burial, rather than allowing 'dogs and vultures' (ll. 556) to devour the corpse, affirms the mysterious primacy of a shared *Infinity* that precedes and subsumes the relativity of space–time bound social reality.

As the ethical demand of the 'Other' is infinite, it cannot adequately be conveyed by the (finite) categories of 'conventional systems of morality' (Cornell, 1998: 141) that comprise *Totality*. The radical difference between *Totality* and *Infinity* is thrown into sharp relief when Antigone asks Ismene, her sister, to help her to arrange their brother's burial. In response, Ismene can be heard to defer to the logic of *Totality*, saying: 'I must yield to those in authority' (ll 49–50) as 'I have no strength to break laws that were made for the public good' (ll 64–65).[17] Antigone, in contrast, is moved by a force that, surpassing any normative obligation to comply with earthly laws ostensibly devised for 'the public good' (*Totality*), gestures towards the ineffability of Levinasian *Infinity.*

The complexities and ambiguities of Sophocles' play invite multiple interpretations of Antigone's defiance of Creon. Critical assessments have derided her behaviour as 'the epitome of manic hysterical behavior' (Grigg, 2001: 120) that exhibits a 'total neglect of the socio-political world' (Stavrakakis, 2005: 173). Such Lacanian-inflected readings largely overlook the significance of burial in Ancient Greece, as noted above. Disregarding the 'responsibility for the Other' that anchors this bond, Lacan (1992) characterizes Antigone's concerns as those of a 'self-willed victim' (p. 247).

From a Levinasian perspective, however, such readings of *Antigone* uncritically reflect the materialist 'reasonableness' of the norms of *Totality.* An alternative reading casts doubt on the claim that the play's heroine either neglects the norms of 'the socio-political world' or fully transcends them.[18] She is all-too-human, suspended between possibilities alternating between *Totality* and *Infinity.* Yet, ultimately, her actions demonstrate her responsibility for the Other. In this Levinasian reading, Antigone's resistance is profoundly Other-oriented. It is not an example of 'désintéressement' that psychologizes and discredits the challenge posed by agents of resistance as hysteria (Contu, 2014). Rather, the play explores how comparatively less powerful, and often unexceptional, actors – such as Antigone or the inhabitants of Le Chambon – act in a moment of singularity that, for Levinas, speaks of *Infinity*. In the case of the inhabitants of *Le Chambon*, systems and agents of oppression were unobtrusively resisted in ways that also contributed, albeit in a small way, to the discrediting and unravelling of the fascist Vichy regime.

In the case of Antigone, her resistance traverses the fantasy (to adopt Lacanian terminology) of obtaining ontological closure and security through identification with (contingent) norms, rights or laws (*Totality*), as manifest in Creon's bullying and in Ismene's compliance. Antigone's embrace of *Infinity* is evident in a willingness to die in order to ensure that her brother, despite his treachery, is recognized and buried as a valued human being, and not treated as a carcass to be devoured by dogs or vultures. Creon personifies an egological order that denies *Infinity* – a denial that, karmically,[19] results in the demise of Creon and contributes to the collapse of the normative order of Thebes. In a late flash of self-awareness, precipitated by the suicides of his wife and son, Creon acknowledges how his '*blind heart* has brought [him] from darkness to final darkness' (ll.987–988,

emphasis added). So immersed had Creon become in vengeful, claustrophobic *Totality* that the light of *Infinity* is all but extinguished within him.

Parrhesia. On the issue of 'speaking truth to power', most evident in the examples of Ellsberg, Snowden, the medical practitioner and, especially, Antigone, it would be remiss to be silent on analysis that interprets such resistance as '[p]arrhesiastic truth-telling' conceived as 'a voluntary act as the subject uses his or her freedom to follow their own duty ("the duty to challenge and speak", Foucault, 2011: 27) in the sense of a moral obligation' (Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016: 1625). From a Levinasian perspective, this framing of resistance is potent, yet also limited by its neglect of *what makes possible* the sense of 'moral obligation'. As noted above, for Lacan, it is the singularity of 'pure desire' that is unblemished by any utilitarian or virtue-striving calculus. For Levinas, 'responsibility for the Other' precedes or, better, is the condition of possibility of Lacanian desire. The self, as conceived in Foucauldian and Lacanian studies of resistance, has, from a Levinasian perspective, '*lost* from its horizon of meaning the capacity to hear the primordial call to be responsible for the Other, our brother or sister' (Goodman et al., 2010: 682, emphasis added).[20] *Insensible*, rather than 'lost', to that 'primordial call' better conveys this limitation. Markers of oppression that signal the 'loss' – deception, bullying, harassment, discrimination and so on (Branch et al., 2013) – are interpreted, from a Levinasian perspective, as an effect of a sameness-invested consciousness that disregards or mystifies *Infinity*, although it can never fully suppress it.

Dynamics of ethics in resistance: Contingency, commitment and universality

Informed by the application of Levinasian thinking to the diverse examples presented in the previous sections, ethics in resistance is now theorized as comprising three interconnected *moments* (contingency, commitment and universality) and three *impediments* (dogmatism, motivational deficit and egotism; see Figure 1). In this context, *Totality* and *Infinity* are conceived as ends of a spectrum of their numerous blendings, such that specific actions identified as resistance to oppression incorporate some blending of each. The blending has been repeatedly signalled by the phrase 'at least in part' to recall how, typically, in practice, elements of *Infinity* and *Totality* coexist in acts identified as resistance.

For analytical purposes, each moment is associated with a primary impediment. Contingency is obstructed by dogmatism, which masks the openness of social arrangements by presenting them as necessary or beyond challenge. Commitment is hindered by motivational deficit, where awareness that things could be otherwise does not generate sufficient resolve to act. Universality is impeded by egotism, where a concern for the Other is displaced by self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement or the defence of a threatened identity. These pairings are heuristic rather than exclusive as each impediment spills over into the other moments, just as acts of resistance blend *Totality* and *Infinity*.

Contingency and the impediment of dogmatism

Contingency recalls that social worlds, however apparently stable and self-sustaining, are fluid and precarious (Harding et al., 2017; McCabe et al., 2019), and therefore are vulnerable to disruption by acts identified as resistance, such as whistleblowing or industrial sabotage. As Courpasson (2016: 96) notes, demonstrations of resistance manifest 'openness to the indefinite possibility that things could be different, even if one does not know exactly how' (Hoy, 2004: 10). When this openness is restricted, difference is reduced to the self-perpetuating sameness of *Totality*.

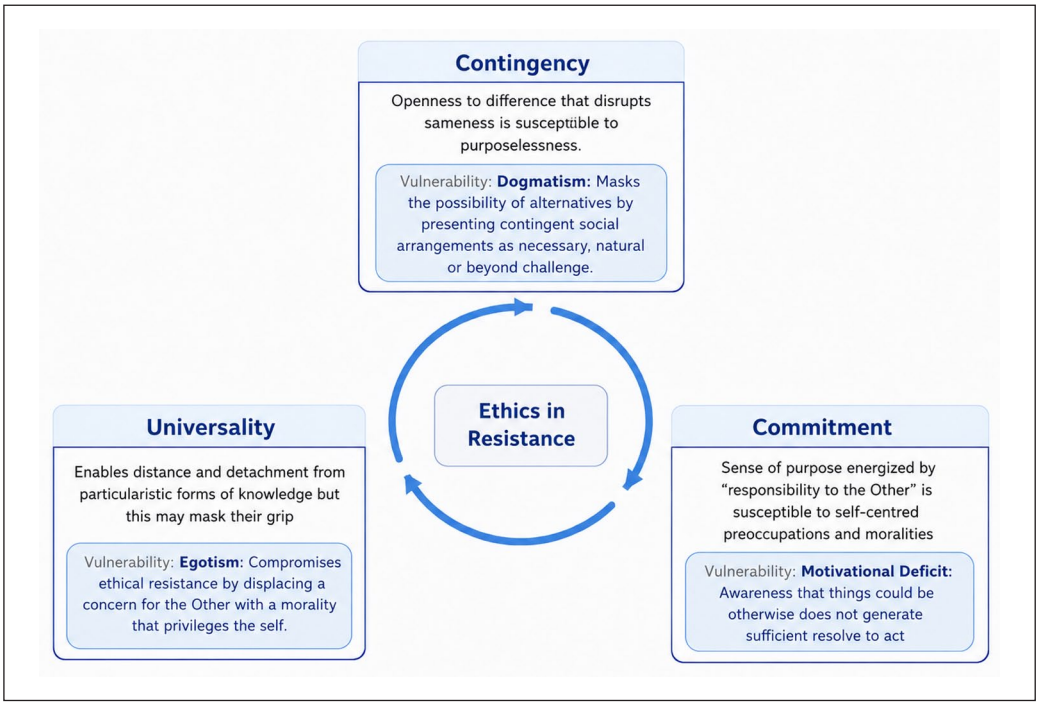


Figure 1. Ethics in resistance.

Prior to leaking the *Papers*, sameness was evident in Ellsberg's preoccupation with retaining his standing as an expert revered by significant others, including his colleagues at RAND. In *Antigone*, Ismene is similarly gripped by sameness when, referring to her sister's defiance of Creon's decree, she says: 'You should be cold with fear' (l. 720). Antigone's response reminds Ismene that there is no necessity to comply with Creon's decree. Ethical resistance may be terrifying, and even terminal, but it remains possible where the prevailing order is no longer regarded as given, sacrosanct or inevitable.

The principal obstacle to contingency is dogmatism. Dogmatism masks the possibility of alternatives by presenting social arrangements as necessary, natural or beyond challenge. It converts historically specific practices, institutions and hierarchies into seemingly self-evident truths. In organizational settings, such dogmatism may appear as managerial necessity, professional duty, market discipline, national security or loyalty to the institution. The medical practitioner's accusation that members of the PCT had neglected their 'professional duty' (McMurray et al., 2011: 555), for example, may be interpreted as an appeal to a professional dogma that seeks to secure its authority by denying its contestability.

Dogma is often communicated in slogans of closure: 'There is no alternative', 'America first' or similar formulations that present a particular order as if it were the only possible order. Conversely, acts of ethical resistance challenge such closures by unveiling the contingency they conceal. In the case of the *Le Chambon* villagers, 'the lack or void at the heart of social relations' (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 197), which made their resistance possible, was imperfectly mystified by the efforts of the Vichy regime to impose closure. The regime's replacement of 'Liberty, equality, fraternity' with 'Work, family, fatherland' exemplifies this attempt to contain plurality within a homogeneous order. The villagers' resistance valorized fraternity, or answerability to the Other, against the Vichy reverence of *Totality*.

Awareness of contingency, therefore, problematizes certainties and opens possibilities of resistance. In *Antigone*, Antigone regards Creon's edict denying Polyneices a proper burial as contingent and contestable, and not as an unquestionable test of loyalty. Yet the disclosure that things could be otherwise is not, by itself, sufficient to produce action. It must be joined by commitment.

Commitment and the impediment of motivational deficit

Commitment names the moment in which unease is translated into action. It responds to the obstacle of motivational deficit: the condition in which a person or group recognizes injustice yet lacks the courage, energy or resolve to resist it. Awareness that things could be otherwise may leave actors suspended in hesitation, fear, self-protection or cynical accommodation. They may know that the existing order is injurious but lack the animating force required to disrupt it.

This motivational deficit cast Ellsberg into a limbo of indecision before increasing discomfort about his complicity in the continuation of suffering spurred him into action (Ellsberg, 2003). A similar dynamic is suggested by Snowden's account of the 'voice' that gradually persuaded him that he had not only the right but also the responsibility to reveal the NSA files. In both cases, commitment did not arise simply from subscribing to a moral principle or political identity. Rather, it emerged through a growing inability to remain complicit in practices whose consequences for others became increasingly intolerable.

Commitment, therefore, counters motivational deficit by transforming unease, discomfort or shame into practical resolve. It does not remove fear, risk or ambiguity. Indeed, resistance often becomes compelling precisely when the costs of acting are severe. Ellsberg, Snowden, the villagers of *Le Chambon, Antigone* and the medical practitioner all acted under conditions in which resistance carried significant personal, professional or political risks. What connects these cases is not purity of motive but a sense of purpose that weakens the inclination to remain indecisive, compliant or merely cynical.

In Levinasian terms, such commitment is animated by an ethical demand that exceeds the subject's desire for security, recognition or self-preservation. It does not follow that acts of resistance are free from worldly motives, social identifications or political calculations. Rather, the argument is that these motives do not exhaust what is at work. Commitment arises when concern for others becomes sufficiently compelling to disarm, at least partially, the demons of indifference, doubt and fear that inhibit resistance.

Commitment must, nevertheless, be distinguished from fanaticism or moral certainty. Its ethical significance lies not in stubborn adherence to a cause as such, but in its orientation towards those who are exposed, harmed or denied by the prevailing order. Without contingency, commitment may harden into dogma and become a vehicle for self-affirmation. This points to the third moment: the universality that reaches beyond particularistic self-interest, self-image and self-righteousness.

Universality and the impediment of egotism

Universality is a precondition of attaining sufficient distance from particularistic forms of knowledge, defensive rationalizations and self-affirming identities. When Ismene refuses to join Antigone in resisting Creon's edict, she is unable to detach herself from identification with the authority vested in the state. By contrast, Antigone appeals to something beyond Creon's decree when she declares that 'final Justice That rules the world below makes not such laws' (l. 358). The 'world below' is Hades, and the appeal to final justice gestures beyond the immediate political order of Thebes.

Universality presages a shift from identification with self-confirming forms of recognition – such as the superior expertise of the RAND consultant, the moral authority of the medical practitioner or the dutiful obedience of Ismene – towards a more open, undivided orientation to the Other. It is the moment when the resistance-averse impulse to seek security through a particular persona or self-identity becomes less compelling. As egoistic priorities are disrupted or at least partially suspended, concern for the life and wellbeing of others becomes increasingly salient, embodied and forceful.

The principal obstacle to universality is egotism. Egotism compromises ethical resistance by displacing concern for the Other with a morality that privileges the self. It does not necessarily prevent resistance but it corrupts or narrows it. Resistance may appear ethically motivated when actually energized by self-aggrandizement, resentment, revenge, moral superiority or the defence of a threatened identity. Sceptics may then suspect that Ellsberg, for example, acted from a desire for recognition, Snowden from misplaced patriotism, the villagers of *Le Chambon* from guilt, the medical practitioner from a threatened professional identity, or Antigone from a vengeful and deranged impulse to defy Creon.

Such suspicions cannot simply be dismissed. They point to the unavoidable entanglement of ethical action with egological investments. The resistor may 'angelize' themselves, imagining their own position to be pure, while totalizing opponents as a faceless 'Them'. This is evident in McMurray et al.'s (2011) account of the medical practitioner whose complaint to the PCT is interpreted as ethically responsive to the Other *and* compromised by a self-elevating sense of righteousness.

Universality counteracts egotism by loosening the attachment of resistance to heroic self-understanding, injured identity or moral superiority. It does not require the impossible purification of motives. Rather, it requires vigilance towards the many ways in which the ethical demand may be appropriated by the ego. To acknowledge the ethical significance of resistance is not to deny that responsibility is, in practice, channelled and compromised by social positioning, political media and self-preserving moralities. It is to insist that these do not fully account for the impulse to resist.

The three moments should not be read as a linear sequence. They form a recursive dynamic. Contingency interrupts dogmatic closure by indicating that things could be otherwise. Commitment responds to motivational deficit by translating unease into action. Universality checks the egotistical appropriation of resistance by loosening attachment to self-confirming identities and rationalizations. The three moments are interdependent. Without contingency, commitment hardens into dogma; without commitment, contingency lapses into indecision or cynicism; without universality, resistance risks becoming self-righteous rather than an answerability to the Other. In sum, ethical resistance animated by Levinasian 'responsibility for the Other' requires openness to alternatives, courage to act, distance from particularistic forms of knowledge and vigilance against the egocentric tendency to appropriate the ethical demand for itself.

Conclusion

By engaging a Levinasian conception of 'ethics as first philosophy', it has been conjectured that acts identified as resistance (e.g. Snowden's whistleblowing) and beyond (e.g. the harbouring of Jewish refugees by the inhabitants of *Le Chambon*) are animated, albeit imperfectly and partially, by a 'responsibility for the Other' that, in Levinasian terminology, speaks of *Infinity*.

Conceiving of ethics as 'responsibility for the Other' offers an alternative to studies of resistance that are framed exclusively by *Totality*, where ethics are either marginalized or conflated with the morality of normative orders. This Levinasian alternative speaks of a radically different conception of social reality in which 'moral-political order is inspired and directed by ethical

responsibility to the other . . . and not the other way around' (Diprose, 2002: 169 cited by McMurray et al., 2011: 546). Accordingly, acts identified as resistance are understood primarily as an expression of an answerability to the Other (*Infinity*) that is more or less realized, denied or subverted by the prevailing 'moral-political order' (*Totality*).

Of immediate relevance to the mission of this journal, in which management learning is broadly defined, this analysis of resistance has entailed an interdisciplinary dialogue between management and philosophy. Levinas' 'ethics as first philosophy' has been shown to provide a fresh and, arguably, penetrating perspective on resistance that, along with the study of control, is of perennial interest to management theorists and practitioners. An established preoccupation with managerial mastery and closure is unsettled by Levinasian ethics. By challenging conceptions and accounts of resistance presently confined within the domain of 'egocentric' *Totality*, an avenue is opened for other ways of thinking, acting and learning that are respectful of radical contingency, and which valorize the openness of not-knowing, as symptomatic of *Infinity*. To this end, the dynamics of ethics in resistance have been theorized as interconnected moments of contingency, commitment and universality, and associated impediments of dogmatism, motivational deficit and egotism.

Levinasian analysis complements, but also counteracts, the hegemony of accounts of resistance that exclude consideration of the constitutive operation of the 'ethics of ethics' (Rhodes, 2022: 15). A key task for the future study of resistance is to address and evaluate *whether* and *how* Levinasian 'responsibility' is experienced, and how it is articulated and realized, or rationalized and disavowed. Specifically, such studies would investigate and assess how in workplaces, but also in learning about ethics, the operation of the three interconnected moments and impediments of ethics in resistance.

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Notes

1. 'Normative order' is conceived as a 'set of generalized rules and common practices oriented around a common value' (Herbert, 1998: 347), recognizing that it emerges and changes through processes of contestation.
2. Ten Bos (1997), Bauman (1990), Ten Bos and Willmott (2001), Roberts (2001), Jones (2003), Aasland (2004), Jones et al. (2005), Clegg et al. (2006), Aasland (2007), Bevan and Corvellec (2007), Byers and Rhodes (2007), Desmond (2007), Introna (2007), Lim (2007), Soares (2007), Mansell (2008), Hancock (2008), McMurray et al. (2011), Deroy and Clegg (2011), Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2012), Rhodes (2012), Jones (2014), Pullen and Rhodes (2014), Ezzamel and Willmott (2014), Dale and Latham (2015), Kenny and Fotaki (2015), Rhodes (2016), Rhodes (2017), Bruna and Bazin (2018), Bigo (2018), Hatami

and Firoozi (2019), Mandalaki and Fotaki (2020), McGhee (2020), Rhodes (2022), Huber and Knights (2023) and Rhodes (2023).

3. A set of ideas and assumptions, often largely implicit, that underlie what is accepted as knowledge (see O'Leary and Chia, 2007).
4. These 'framings' are set out in Fox (1974).
5. It has been suggested that suicides at France Telecom (and Foxconn) 'call[ed] into question the legitimacy of political elites' (Waters, 2017: 208) by connecting them to the bullying, harassment and intimidation by members of the senior management team (Chabrak et al., 2016).
6. See https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/middle-aged-academics-are-greater-suicide-risk-students. And https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vijayawada/woman-attempts-self-immolation-due-to-workplace-harassment/articleshow/52019120.cms?from=mdr (accessed 9 June 2023).
7. This section is intended to give some reassurance to readers that the interpretation of Levinas' 'first philosophy' is grounded in a close reading of primary sources.
8. Žižek castigates Levinas' thinking on several counts: for idealizing the Other by disregarding violence and trauma; for substituting moral responsibility for political struggle as a means of social liberation; and also for its susceptibility to being invoked to justify dubious interventions intended to save the vulnerable Other.
9. *Jouissance* is the intense form of pleasure (*plaisir*) associated with transgression of 'normality' that often involves considerable uncertainty and pain (e.g. anxiety). It is produced by deviations from the Symbolic that touch the Real.
10. Van der Ven (2011) is not included here as it relies mainly upon short vignettes drawn from consultancy experience. Other Levinasian studies, such as Huber and Knights (2023), do not connect ethics to resistance.
11. Primary Care Trusts were statutory National Health Service bodies in England charged with responsibility for commissioning healthcare services, improving public health, and managing community health services. They were abolished in 2013.
12. See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/08/edward-snowden-surveillance-excess-interview (accessed 4 March 2020).
13. The dominant interpretation of *Antigone* presented by Contu (2014) – which is shared by Butler (2000), Žižek (2001) and numerous others – is not uncontested; see, notably, Honig (2009).
14. A city in central Greece.
15. It has been suggested that Polyneices is a *special* case because, to Antigone, he is unique and irreplaceable as her parents are both dead. However, the authenticity of the passage in which Antigone declares that 'My husband being dead, . . . no brother could have been born again' (cited by Contu, 2014: 398) has been questioned and removed from some translations of the play. That is because it is considered discordant with the content and sound of Sophocles' writing. For this reason, it is not assigned the significance here that Contu (2014) attributes to it. Antigone's concern about the importance of giving all deceased persons a proper burial is, accordingly, increased. For a discussion of this issue, see Cropp (1997).
16. In the context of Ancient Greece, this right excludes women as well as slaves.
17. Citations of *Antigone* refer to Sophocles (1939 [442 BC]).
18. Consider, for example, Antigone's tetchy and withering rebukes directed at Ismene.
19. 'Karmically' refers to how intentional actions shape future experience by strengthening patterns of mind and behaviour. Karmically, actions matter because they leave traces: they make some responses more likely in the future and others less likely. Take, for example, the receipt of criticism by reviewers to one's work. Reacting with resentment likely deepens the habit of ego-defence such that criticism is subsequently also experienced as attack. Alternatively, receiving the criticism with openness, even when it is uncomfortable, can cultivate humility, learning and less attachment to status.
20. This limitation is evident in the following quotation: 'What characterizes the parrhesiastic utterance is precisely that . . . the parrhesias is someone who emphasizes *his own freedom as an individual* speaking' (Foucault, 2010: 65 cited by Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016: 1625–1626). See also Huber and Knights' (2023) Foucauldian-inflected reading of Levinas.

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