



NORTH AMERICAN LEVINAS SOCIETY
Seventh Annual Conference and Meeting
“Levinas, the Environment, and Cultures of Place”
May 13-15, 2012 | Anchorage, Alaska

CALL FOR PAPERS

...[E]arth, sea, light, city. Every relation or possession is situated within the non-possessable which envelops or contains without being able to be contained or enveloped. We shall call it the elemental... The element has no forms containing it; it is content without form. Or rather it has but a side [face]: the surface of the sea and of the field, the edge of the wind... “Nothing ends, nothing begins.” [. . .] Hence we can say that the element comes to us from nowhere.... It is wind, earth, sea, sky, air.

~Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*

The North American Levinas Society is excited to announce that our seventh annual meeting and conference will take place May 13-15, 2012 in beautiful downtown Anchorage, Alaska.

Our 2012 conference hopes to take advantage of the distinctive environmental and cultural opportunities unique to Alaska in order to open our readings of Levinas’ work to a number of difficult questions and challenges. “Alaska”—derived from the Aleut word, *alaxsxaq*, meaning “the Great Land”—is a land of unparalleled beauty, and while its very name often conjures wilderness images of sublime geological landscapes and rich ecological diversity, it is a land marked also by complicated histories—of rich indigenous cultures, brutal colonialism, devastating militarism, mercantilism, and frontierism.

Abundant with wildlife and natural resources, Alaska is at the center of a number of national debates regarding wildlife management and ecological conservation. These debates are often mobilized around fundamentally different conceptions of the ontological and ethical status of “nature.” Such questions regarding the environment and natural resources are, in turn, further complicated by an entangled colonial history that has left deep cultural scars within Alaska Native communities and continues to prop up an enduring mercantile economy. In short, the history of this great state is infinitely more complicated than ordinary romanticized notions of “Alaska” suggest.

With this in mind, Alaska offers a unique context in which to think through *ethics as first philosophy* in all its difficult hermeneutical, cultural, political, and economic fields. Indeed, across many regions of the world, similar cultural dynamics play out between nature, environmentalism, indigenous traditions, local cultures, colonialism, and the forces of global political economy. For our 2012 conference, we invite you to bring your questions and work on “Levinas, the environment, and cultures of place” to Alaska. The proposals do not need to specifically concern Alaska, but “Alaska” will serve as a signifier for such national and international matters.

We are especially interested in organizing the conference around considerations of the following:

- How might a careful scrutiny of Levinas’ notion of “nature” help invigorate different environmental movements?
- How might we develop Levinas’ work with regard to Alaska Native, American Indian, and indigenous cultures in contemporary and/or historical social, political, and cultural contexts?
- What “Eurocentric” aspects of Levinas’ work must we contend with when considering indigenous cultures of place and the boundaries/contact zones between cultures, times, places?
- What is the role of the erotic with regard to the elemental and the ecological?
- How can Levinas’ work help us think through an ethical relation with wildlife and, in particular, non-human animals?
- How can the rich oral histories and traditions of Alaska Native and American Indian culture help develop Levinas’ insights on expression, sincerity, truth, temporality, vulnerability, and communication?

Although preference will be given to papers that address the conference theme, it is Society tradition to consider papers and panels on any topic related to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

SUBMISSIONS

Please prepare materials for blind review and send them vial email attachment (preferably Microsoft Word, .doc format) to submissions@levinas-society.org:

- **Individual paper proposals** should be 200-300 words for a 20-minute presentation.
- **Panel proposals** should be 500 words for 75-minute sessions. Please include the session title and name of organizer or chair, along with participant’s names, institutional affiliations, disciplines or departments, and brief abstracts detailing the focus of each paper

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS DECEMBER 20, 2011.

CONTACTS

Please direct all inquires concerning the conference to the organizers:

- Dan Kline, University of Alaska Anchorage (afdtk@uaa.alaska.edu)
- Sol Neely, University of Alaska Southeast (sjneely@uas.alaska.edu)

General questions regarding the Society should be directed to

- Michael Paradiso-Michau, NALS Executive Secretary (secretary@levinas-society.org)
- Sol Neely, NALS President (sjneely@uas.alaska.edu)

SOUTH-CENTRAL ALASKA IN MID-MAY

With a population approaching 300,000 municipal residents, Anchorage is Alaska's largest city and contains nearly half of the entire state's population. Located on a strip of coastal lowland at the foot of the Chugach Mountains, Anchorage offers a unique metropolitan environment blended with diverse wildlife populations. We have selected the conference dates for mid-May in hopes of providing conference participants with an especially advantageous time to explore South Central Alaska and beyond. After the break-up of winter snow and ice in early May, travelers usually have open access to most of the region's destinations; however, because the official "tourist season" does not begin until Memorial Day weekend, these destinations are uncongested by traffic and people. We invite you to attend the conference and then stay a while longer to explore the diverse wildlife and ecology and gain an appreciation for the rich cultural history of "the Great Land."

Information on local arrangements, excursion opportunities, and other is forthcoming.