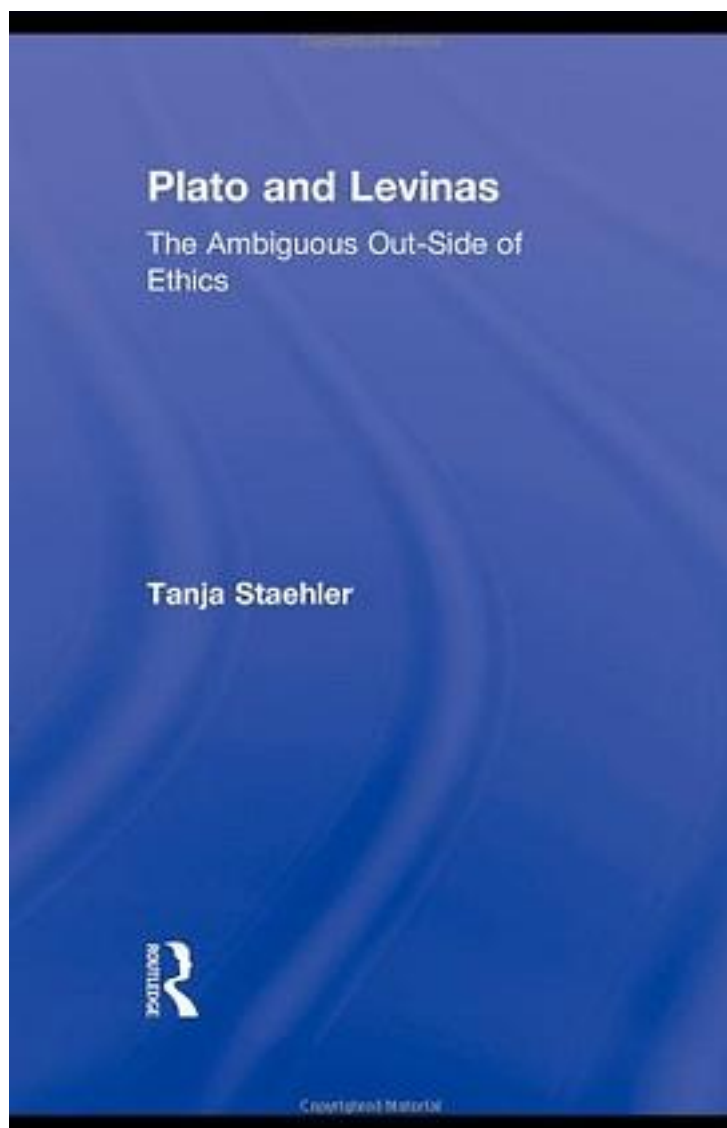


Plato and Levinas



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著者:Staehler, Tanja

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In the second half of the twentieth century, ethics has gained considerable prominence within philosophy. In contrast to other scholars, Levinas proposed that it be not one philosophical discipline among many, but the most fundamental and essential one. Before philosophy became divided into disciplines, Plato also treated the question of the Good as the most important philosophical question. Levinas's approach to ethics begins in the encounter with the other as the most basic experience of responsibility. He acknowledges the necessity to move beyond this initial, dyadic encounter, but has problems extending his approach to a larger dimension, such as community. To shed light on this dilemma, Tanja Staehler examines broader dimensions which are linked to the political realm, and the problems they pose for ethics. Staehler demonstrates that both Plato and Levinas come to identify three realms as ambiguous: the erotic, the artistic, and the political. In each case, there is a precarious position in relation to ethics. However, neither Plato nor Levinas explores ambiguity in itself. Staehler argues that these ambiguous dimensions can contribute to revealing the Other's vulnerability without diminishing the fundamental role of unambiguous ethical responsibility.

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