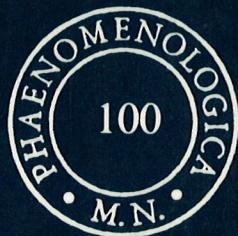


E. LEVINAS

COLLECTED
PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS

Translated by Alphonso Lingis



MARTINUS NIJHOFF PUBLISHERS

PHAENOMENOLOGICA

COLLECTION FONDÉE PAR H.L. VAN BREDA ET PUBLIÉE
SOUS LE PATRONAGE DES CENTRES D'ARCHIVES-HUSSERL

100

EMMANUEL LEVINAS

COLLECTED PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS

Comité de rédaction de la collection:

Président: S. IJsseling (Leuven)

Membres: L. Landgrebe (Köln), W. Marx (Freiburg i. Br.),
J.N. Mohanty (Oklahoma), P. Ricoeur (Paris), E. Ströker (Köln),
J. Taminiaux (Louvain-La-Neuve), Secrétaire: J. Taminiaux

COLLECTED PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS

EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Translated by Alphonso Lingis

1987 **MARTINUS NIJHOFF PUBLISHERS**
a member of the KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS GROUP
DORDRECHT / BOSTON / LANCASTER



Distributors

for the United States and Canada: Kluwer Academic Publishers, P.O. Box 358, Accord Station, Hingham, MA 02018-0358, USA

for the UK and Ireland: Kluwer Academic Publishers, MTP Press Limited, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN, UK

for all other countries: Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, Distribution Center, P.O. Box 322, 3300 AH Dordrecht, The Netherlands

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lévinas, Emmanuel.

Collected philosophical papers of Emmanuel Levinas.

(Phaenomenologica ; 100)

Contents. Reality and its shadow -- Freedom and command -- The ego and the totality -- Philosophy and the idea of infinity -- [etc.]

1. Philosophy--Collected works. I. Title.

II. Series.

B2430.L482E6 1986 194 85-28430

ISBN 90-247-3272-7

ISBN 90-247-3272-7 (hardback)

ISBN 90-247-3395-2 (paperback)

Copyright

© 1987 by Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers,

Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, P.O. Box 163, 3300 AD Dordrecht,
The Netherlands.

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION	VII
1. REALITY AND ITS SHADOW	1
2. FREEDOM AND COMMAND	15
3. THE EGO AND THE TOTALITY	25
4. PHILOSOPHY AND THE IDEA OF INFINITY	47
5. PHENOMENON AND ENIGMA	61
6. MEANING AND SENSE	75
7. LANGUAGE AND PROXIMITY	109
8. HUMANISM AND AN-ARCHY	127
9. NO IDENTITY	141
10. GOD AND PHILOSOPHY	153
11. TRANSCENDENCE AND EVIL	175

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This volume contains translations of the most important texts of Emmanuel Levinas in which his own philosophical positions were elaborated; we have excluded his studies on other philosophers and on religious issues.¹ These writings originally appeared separately as lectures or in various journals. Our Introduction will try to help the reader by first mapping out the terrain and then outlining the most important findings.²

A. TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PROBLEMATIC

The theoretical structure of Levinas's work begins in an ontological – or in “ontic” – elucidation of what it means to be an existent. And in a new analysis of the intentional or transcending movement in our existence. These investigations lead Levinas to a region “otherwise than being”.

¹ An early text, “De l'évasion,” published in *Recherches Philosophiques V*, 1935–36, pp. 373–92, was excluded in accordance with the wishes of the author.

² An Introduction is of course a partial view into a work. And here we join the sentiments of Jacques Derrida (*Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 312, n. 7): “Partial not only due to the point of view chosen, the amplitude of the works, the material and other limits of this essay. But also because Levinas's writing, which would merit an entire separate study itself, and in which stylistic gestures (especially in *Totality and Infinity*) can less than ever be distinguished from intention, forbids the prosaic disembodiment into conceptual frameworks that is the first violence of all commentary. Certainly, Levinas recommends the good usage of prose which breaks Dionysiac charm or violence, and forbids poetic rapture, but to no avail: in *Totality and Infinity* the use of metaphor, remaining admirable and most often – if not always – beyond rhetorical abuse, shelters within its pathos the most decisive movements of the discourse.

By too often omitting to reproduce these metaphors in our disenchanted prose, are we faithful or unfaithful? Further, in *Totality and Infinity* the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself. Because of all these challenges to the commentator and the critic, *Totality and Infinity* is a work of art and not a treatise.”

1. Existence and Existents

Mental processes and states – even representations, even feelings – were all to be reinterpreted as behaviors – as spontaneous and self-organizing forms of movement teleologically directed to exterior objects or objectives. Directed to objects not in order to capture them, or their reflections, in one's own substance, but in order to grasp them, operate them or with them, or support oneself on them in proceeding toward the next term, in a field that opens in paths and horizons. The mental sphere in man was to be conceived not as a substance a subsistent core receiving modifications upon itself from the outside and supporting effects and affects, but as movement, intentional or ecstatic and not physical movement – as ex-istence. Existential philosophy proposes that ex-istence is man's essence.

Man's existence is teleologically oriented toward presence (Husserl), or is a concern for the world (Heidegger). The world is not only the stage on which man pursues his destiny; articulating a world is his destiny. In bringing out the ecstatic character of man's way of being, existential analysis meant not only to define the specific form of the movement common to all his dealings with objects, whether instrumental, affective, or comprehending, but to characterize the movement that sets up objects – the primary objectification or the articulating of a world, by which appearances acquire identity or by which a clearing opens and a field of entities takes form.

Thus existential anthropology becomes a transcendental inquiry. Further, it becomes ontology: subjectivity and objectivity, more fundamentally, beings existing into the world and beings that are within the world, do not only differ by virtue of distinctive properties nor even by virtue of different categories predictable of them. Beings existing into the world cannot be categorized in the same sense as the mundane objects and objectives of their movements; it is the way they have being that is distinctive. They break forth from their own being unto the being of all things.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* set out to analyze the essential structures of mundane things and of the behaviors of *Dasein*, especially in the aspects they show when they first take form, so as to determine the different ways of being characteristic of beings within the world and of beings existing unto the world. The formulation of the ways of being of the principal types of entities was to prepare for an explication of the meaning of being in general. Being is not a supposit or a substance; this verb designates an event. The separation of entities into beings existing unto the world and beings that are within the world is not just that of a de facto multiplicity comprised within being in general – nor is it brought about by a power of our existence to separate itself from, and confront, the rest of what is. The separating is internal to being and is its work. Heidegger went back over the metaphysical thought which distinguished becoming, appearance, thought, and the ought in the *Physis* and contrasted them with being, so as to see and to show how these

dimensions – reconceived as earth, heavens, mortals, and immortals – form the inner play of the process of being that differentiates into beings.

Levinas in his first writings directed his attention to elucidating the meaning of beings. He observes that Heidegger takes as given the fact that there are beings, in order to study the sense of this “there are”, this being they have or that holds them, but does not deduce, or show the formation of, existents within existence. Later Levinas will argue for a certain priority of existents – a priority for intelligibility, for existents which begin in the midst of immemorial existence, which form beginnings, initiate intelligibility.³

Levinas elaborated a form of ontical discourse which does not simply itemize the determinations of and the relations between entities, but aims to elucidate the hypostasis by which substrates, terms, identities, take form in existence.⁴ One may be tempted to object that the ontological inquiry in Heidegger’s sense was intended to do just that, by showing how a space-time, a clearing, opens, an ordaining order, within which entities can take a stand and be exposed. But for an existent to take form it is not enough that there be opened a space for it to take place and an order or context in which it could acquire significance. An existent takes form through a certain relationship with existence; it assumes its existence, it is a term which has its existence, determines its existence. The ancient thesis of the analogical meaning of being implies that existence does not simply sustain or maintain existents, but is positively determined by them – that an existent possesses existence as its own.⁵

An elucidation is then called for of the movement by which an existent receives its existence, contracts it as its own, and thereby becomes an existent. Such an inquiry is necessary to make intrinsically intelligible the entities that are posited and that bear identities in the world. It is in particular necessary in order to elucidate that existent which can disclose entities and ascribe identity because it first identifies itself, maintains itself in identity by identifying itself. This existent is the ego, whose essence it is to be – for itself – the same.

This existent ex-ists: its essence, its way of being, is to break forth out of itself. But in addition to, and as a condition for, the movement within it by which it projects itself forth or transcends itself, there is a movement by which it contracts existence as its own, becomes an existent. It posits itself, takes a stand, breaks with the continuity of existence, commences. Prior to the movement of ex-isting there is in an existent a constitutive movement of insistence; prior to its project is its position.

³ Does this not amount to the contradictory construction of a transcendental empiricism (Jacques Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence*, pp. 224–26)? But what is proper to existential philosophy is that it seats the transcendental in the existing of an existent, declaring the existent “ontico-ontological.”

Later Levinas will no longer suggest a priority of the existent over existence, for the interrogator and interrogated are no longer conceived as entities. (cf. *infra*, pp. 149–50.)

⁴ E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 17–18, 82–83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Time, or temporality, is the internal structure of an existent; it articulates the relationship an existent has with its existence. The Heideggerian concept of an existent as ecstatic, projecting itself out of itself, makes what an existence is already something yet to come. Its presence is pure transport; the sense, the direction and the meaning, of this ecstatic presence comes to it as its future.⁶ Its actuality consists in projecting a potentiality of itself and casting itself – casting what has come to pass, come to be, in itself – into that potentiality.⁷

⁶ In *Being and Time* the form and the formation of the present are not existentially diagnosed, and the puzzling nonparallelism of the formal structure of the treatise is such as to not leave place for that analysis. When the existential constitution of the “there” of Dasein is first laid out, it is said that understanding and affectivity are its constituent existentialia. Discursivity is apparently not to be taken as a separate existential of the same order as the first two, but rather intrinsic to them as the form of both (pp. 203–204). It is then puzzling to find Heidegger subsequently referring to the triad existentiality, facticity, and fallenness as the equiprimordial constitutive existentialia of Dasein. For if existentiality is disclosed in understanding and facticity in affectivity, there are surely a fallen and an authentic mode of each! When, in Part II of the treatise, the existential constitution of Dasein is reinterpreted in terms of temporality, understanding is shown to be effected by the ecstasy of the future and affectivity by the ecstasy of the “having-been.” And discursivity is correlated with all three temporal ecstases in their entanglement. It is then only within this discussion of the understanding that the presentation of the present is dealt with. There the mode of the inauthentic, fallen, present is named presentation (*Gegenwärtigen*), which Heidegger reads as a “waiting-towards” which is a “leaping away” from the possibility which the authentic future harbors. And the mode of the authentic present is named “moment of insight” (*Augenblick*); this insightful present is not set up as an existential alongside of understanding, but is rather a phase of understanding itself. Small wonder then that it is defined as the rapture with which Dasein is carried away to the *possibilities* of the situation! It differs from the inauthentic present in that it grasps, and does not leap away from, the possibilities, that is, the future in the situation. Both *Gegenwärtigen* and *Augenblick* are infrastructures of understanding, that is, of the futural ecstasy. The present has been given an existential, but not an existential analysis.

In the fact the treatise tends to drift into an opposition between the future-determined authenticity and the present (in the sense of *Gegenwärtigen*) – obsessed fallenness.

⁷ For Heidegger death is the possibility of my (total and definitive) impotence. But ontological possibilities are not given to an impassive contemplation, but to an existence that projects itself into them: to a power. Thus for Heidegger the sense of my imminent possible impotence is a power and indeed constitutive of all my existence qua potentiality-for-being. It brings me forth unto all the potentiality-for-being that I am. The power that lies in me to sense my mortality is not only my most uncanny and far-reaching power, it is the very basis of all the power in me, indeed of my life qua power. For Nietzsche my affirmation as immortal (via recurrence) works the apotheosis of my existence qua will to power; for Heidegger it is my affirmation as mortal. And that is why for Heidegger the most negative experience, that of nothingness itself anticipated, is utterly positive in its effects. Nowhere is there any suggestion that the approach of death may be disintegrating.

But what is the structure being expressed by the seductive formula “possibility of impossibility”? And what is the relationship between this possibility and those possibilities constitutive of mundane entities as instrumentalities, among which my existence knows itself as power? Heidegger, in calling my mortality the possibility of my impossibility, and in putting the accent on the “possibility” involved, takes this possibility to be delivered over to my power; in projecting myself resolutely unto my end I become not momentarily a being menaced with extinction but authentically potentiality-for-being. And yet is not the “possibility of impossibility” not an impossibility harbored in, held in a possibility – but just the approach of impossibility? I can anticipate my death, and that is a power; yet what I anticipate is just my impotence, the vanishing of my power. Then is not the “possibility of impossibility” a possibility that is quite ungraspable – the extramundane event that will rather take hold of me to extinguish me not only as a power but even as a substrate for undergoing effects.

Then it would not be the projection unto my death that would open the future before me qua field

The insistent movement by which Levinas sees an existent posit itself, take a stance, structures its presence as an instant. Instant – mode of time that stands in itself, that commences, and that is therewith evanescent, not reserving itself to form a heritage, nor projecting itself beyond itself.

Ecstatic ex-isting, the common structure, the existential analyses showed, of man's thoughts, sentiments and moves, is not disintegration but power, mastery, freedom. Heidegger had seen this power to consist in determining, terminating; Levinas sees it essentially in initiating , commencing. In an existent a movement goes forth, coming out of itself – an existent is a standpoint. Without the movement of the existent breaking with the continuity, the beginningless, endless happening of existence, standing in itself, beginning, the ecstasy of the existing of an existent would be but dissipation.

2. The Meaning of Transcendence

The existent that takes form exists ecstatically; the very instant of its presence is evanescent. What is the meaning of a being that ex-ists to no longer be? What is the meaning of existing?

For Sartre, as for Hegel, transcendence is but a means in view of immanence; the existent that flees itself establishes a distance from itself only in order to make itself present to itself, to achieve an immanence to itself which for Sartre is impossible. This vain project retrospectively indicates a metaphysical or mythical whole which broke up into existents; their flight from themselves would represent a vain effort to heal the evil they constitute. For Heidegger it is toward nothingness, its own nothingness, that an existent projects itself. The flight from its own being functions to articulate the exteriority of a world – which, in *Being and Time*, is for-the-sake-of that existent which is fleeing itself, and, in the later texts, is rather that for the sake of which Dasein itself is.⁸ But nothingness is in the clearing of the world; the thrust into the world is deathbound.

of articulatable possibilities. My death is yet to come, always yet to come, to be sure, future then – but this future may be already for the next instant; the distance between now and it is utterly indeterminate. The ecstasy toward this future would be neither the Heideggerian *Vorlaufen* nor the Heideggerian *Gewärtigen*, but the anxiety or the fear that senses the time of imminence.

⁸ In *Being and Time* the definition of man's essence and destiny as Being-in-the-world, where “in” is to be taken in the sense of “inhabiting,” is undermined by the theme of “uncanniness,” (*Unheimlichkeit*), not being at home here, which is the state of the authentic Dasein, and which gives this book its metaphysical character (cf. p. 233). Later texts rather identify the existing as not at home in the world as the existentiell form of alienation characteristic of the metaphysical epoch. Thus Heidegger reinterprets the sacred or the ideal in such a way to constitute a primal dimension of coming to be at home here, via building and dwelling (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 145–61), and this function of the sacred in the fourfold play constitutive of things and of the world excludes the metaphysical function of the sacred which constitutes man as *homo viator*. The sacred is not immanent then to the world (the god remains absent; it is but the

That an existent would exist in a continual flight from itself is indeed strange. In Levinas's first writings this escape from oneself is not the illusory form of an attempt to achieve possession of oneself, but a flight from being possessed by oneself.

An existent does not produce the existence it contracts and which it flees. The existent that can identify terms in the flow of the world, that can posit identity terms in an ideal order and synthesize the real, does not have its own identity for itself in the way the terms it identifies have: it does not posit itself but is possessed by itself, does not synthesize itself but adheres to itself. Its identity is a weight, a materiality. Weariness and indolence, the pain of effort, are not just psychic byproducts of physical states; they affect our relations with all our projects, with the movement of ex-isting in us, which flees itself and is a burden to itself.

For Heidegger the ecstatic movement of existing has the affective and practical overtones of a care. Our existing is concern for equipment, solicitude for others, care for being – and, only as a phase of these outer-directed movements, care for oneself. For Levinas there is a care for oneself that is prior to, and explains, these outer-directed concerns: one's own existence is a burden, a charge for oneself, one is encumbered by the excess, the plenitude, the definitiveness of the existence one has contracted – and one flees. It is not the menace of the nothingness toward which its own essence projects it that makes life a care, but the weight its existence is for itself.

Levinas's earlier texts thus understood the ecstatic movement of existence, which concerns itself with the world, this existence escaping itself, as an evasion from the burden the existent is unto itself. But *Totality and Infinity* elaborated a different analysis. There an existent, and in particular that existent that first identifies itself and is then the source of the identification of existents generally – the ego – is seen as an excrescence, an excess in existence. The ego is not an object before itself; it is affected with itself. It is felt in affectivity rather than observed or intuited. This feeling is neither indirect nor negative; it is not a negative feeling such as anxiety, sensing the outer limits, the nothingness beyond, that delimits or circumscribes the being one is. To feel delimited comes second, after a feeling of being – a feeling one has from within. In the positive feeling of contentment the ego feels itself posited. To be an ego is to be vibrant with the plenitude of oneself; the possibility of an ego is a possibility of pleasure. This plenitude is open to the elemental reality of the world, nourished by its sensuous sustenance.

Totality and Infinity separated the two movements, the movement of separation or insistence constitutive of an existent, effected in enjoyment, and the movement of ecstatic existence, experience or transcendence, by which it opens to exteriority – the

scintillations of the sacred, the messengers or angels of the divine, that play in things as their worth) but constitutes our transcendence as the form of our immanence within the world.

movements of position, stance, recollection, inhabitation, possession, and labor by which an existent possesses itself as an identity, and those of discourse, desire, and voluptuousness, by which it transcends that identity and itself. The flight from oneself, the movement to exteriority, is not now said to issue out of the burden the existent is unto itself, but rather to be provoked from the outside in our being contented with the content it is unto itself.

This exteriority, this alterity, is not the world. The world of objects, but also the Heideggerian world of means upon which it is founded – and also a world of ends, answering to the needs, hungers, pleasures of our existence, the “elements” of the sensibility, which Levinas disclosed beneath the articulation of implements – remain relative to our existence, are articulated, identified and given sense by our existence.

If the world belongs to subjectivity, subjectivity does not belong to the world; being-in-the-world does not define its essence. Subjectivity takes form, identifying itself, by a retreat from the world – it is inwardness, recollection, a *quant-à-soi*-and by an escrescence out of the world, in the excess of its feeling vibrant upon itself, an exhilaration in a mundane effect exceeding what was in its causes.

In the transcendence of such subjectivity there is a movement toward an alterity beyond the externality of the things of the world. An alterity that is not comprehended or appropriated, not mundanized, that is aimed at in its alterity – that answers to and calls up the transcending desire that makes our existing ecstatic.

Our transcending existing then is not so because its existentiell modes can be shown to have the structure of intentionality, where intentionality is a going out to the other but also a constituting of that other, reducing its alterity in the illumination which renders it permeable to subjectivity. Levinas set out to define a mode of excentric movement that goes out toward a term without that term having been first present within, without it having been conceived a priori, nor prehended in a *Vorhabe*. The dilemma of the Meno – how can we know what we are searching for, unless we have already found it, and how can we search, unless we have not yet found it? – must be able to be resolved without explaining that the term aimed at was either present in subjectivity from the start as an a priori form forming its aim, or explaining that the term when attained is constituted by subjectivity. There is a movement that is provoked by an outer term that remains exterior, uncomprehended and unappropriated and not even identified except as alterity, and that affects that movement in an affectivity that is not synoptic receptivity.

This kind of movement, which for Levinas alone merits the names experience, ecstasy, transcendence, or existence, he found in speech and eroticism. Its explication comprises the core of the analyses of *Totality and Infinity*.

Speech does not only presuppose a world of objects which it articulates; it also presupposes the other to whom it is addressed. This alterity is not simply that of an alter ego, parallel to though divergent from the ego that is me, and conceived through empathy. It is not conceived, comprehended, by varying the attributes I grasp in myself. It does not consist in a simply spatial or temporal remoteness from

me, nor is it reducible to the privation of some content of cognition which de facto eludes me. The alterity of the alter ego is positive, a force,⁹ in the experience of being addressed, appealed to, and contested. Speech has not only an indicative function but also an imperative and vocative force. In his alterity the other is faced, that is, not recognized, cognized, but answered, by a speaking that is a response. To face another is to answer to him. Or, we may say, speech structured as response is the modality of recognition that recognizes irreducible alterity. This recognition involved in intentional expression is not an intentionality; it is not a passing beyond signs to an eidos signified by those signs, it is not a synthesizing of a stream of data by positing an ideal identity in function of which data can first be taken as signs. It is not pure spontaneity, but subjection to an order that ordains me to the alterity that faces. The other manifests his alterity by taking a stand before me; his alterity is not negative as a content of cognition that yet eludes me but as a destitution that appeals to me, is not remote as an externality out of reach but as a height or a perfection that contests me. The other faces me in the poverty and nakedness, and the majesty, of his face. To recognize the alterity of the other is not to grasp, to conceive it, but to answer to his solicitation and to answer for my being; it is to give – not a spontaneous giving of meaning (*Sinngebung*), but a giving of what is meaningful for him. The cognition of objects and the recognition of the alterity of the other, acts of different structures, are not separate performances; it is in signifying a world of objects that I recognize the alterity of the other. In signifying object-terms, that is, in putting the environment I have grasped in the perspective of another, in constituting an objective world, I also respond to his appeal and his contestation.

Thus a non-representational relationship subtends the possibility of representation. This in addition to the prethematic or preobjective relationship with the world Merleau-Ponty called *sauvage*, uncultured, a relationship Husserl identified with perception, the primordial dator intuition, operating according to a predicative logic *avant la lettre*, but which Heidegger's analysis showed to be subtended in its turn by practico-affective moves, "dealings" operating according to a relational logos. Beneath the relationship with the contents of the world Heidegger exposed the non-representational relationship with, and within, being, an openness upon the clearing in which gear, percepts, and objects can be encountered and represented. Levinas argues that the presentation of beings and the relationship with the clearing in which they are presented is itself subtended by a non-representational relationship with an entity which, without being void or clearing, is other than objects and other than me, is otherness itself.

The a priori relationship with the clearing in which mundane beings can be represented makes the simultaneity and succession of entities into a totality. But the

⁹ A force that is only moral, i.e. absolutely exterior. Thus not a force but interdiction that one cannot fight, even touch.

other in his alterity, other than all entities, is exterior to the totalization that integrates them into an order, a cosmos, a world; his alterity is incessantly, unendingly – infinitely¹⁰ – beyond the totality of beings.

The relationship with the totality, and with the clearing that opens to make it possible, is the topic of ontology, as defined by Heidegger. The relationship with alterity, conditioning the possibility of representation and truth, Levinas identifies as the topic of ethics. For this relationship does not pursue appropriation through representation, but recognizes an appeal that makes demands on me, a contestation that sanctions me. The movement of critique and justification in the discourse in which the object is objectified, that is, rendered common, made a given, is identified as the ethical dimension of cognition. The possibility of truth is founded not only on the non-representational, ontological, relationship with the clearing of being, but also on the ethical relationship with alterity.

For Levinas, then, ethical existence does not begin once a field of objects and their appropriate relationships are represented objectively; it already figures in the constitution of represented objectivity. It is in effect prior to the knowledge of principles, of the ends of the mundane field of means, and prior to the knowledge of the telos of existents that project potentialities. It is also in effect prior to the constitution of authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*, of existents capable of existing on their own, whose analysis Heidegger developed in *Being and Time* as a discipline prior to ethics taken as the science of the principles for proper action.¹¹ For for Levinas authenticity is not formed simply in the relationship with the clearing of the world; this state of a being capable of answering for what it is and says and does, of being possessed with a passion for justification, arises in a relationship not with nothingness which attracts and threatens, but with alterity which appeals and contests. The ethics prior to ethics will be the study of the conditions for the possibility of responsible acts and the study of the relationship with alterity that is contracted when the other is faced, when there is speech.

The second area in which Levinas found a relationship with alterity that could not be analyzed as intentional, or existentiel in Heidegger's sense, is eroticism. Neither Husserl nor Heidegger applied intentional or existential analysis to the erotic drive, but Sartre and Merleau-Ponty set out to show that phenomenology could do justice to the sense and structure of this "mode of existence" – left customarily by philosophies for mechanico-physiological theory – as part of that generalized extension of the concept of intentionality from the sphere of phenomenological analysis of expressive language to the spheres of perception, action, and feeling –

¹⁰ Alterity is infinity not in the sense of transcendence of the whole beyond its parts, nor as indefinite horizon. Rather in the sense involved in the Cartesian idea of infinity overflowing the mind that conceives it, without limiting it or absorbing it, but exalting it. Such an idea is not a concept, but desire. It is in the concrete experience that my responsibilities increase in the very measure that I assume them.

¹¹ P. 326, 328

which extention constitutes existentialism. The structure of erotic behavior becomes comprehensible in function of its sense, and this behavior is meaningful because it is intentional. The erotic gestures, the caresses, according to Sartre, are objectifying acts, peculiar in that they aim to objectify subjectivity, in an affective context of struggle. Merleau-Ponty understood erotic attitudes and gestures as *parole parlante*, answering to and articulating an erotic organization of another's body – and showed them no longer possible in the subject whose body expressivity has been damaged or reduced to a concrete use of speech alone.

But for Levinas erotic gestures, described always equivocally in physico-chemical, mechanical, hydraulic, electrical, cognitive, or mystical metaphors, are not actions, words, and feelings in which an existential consciousness of ... takes form, but, more than and beyond that, transmutation of action into play, words into laughter and nonsense by excess, feelings into voluptuous craving incited by the full presence of its "object." The erotic drive is not a form of disclosure. The erotic denuding does not discover a latent meaning, but profanes, uncovers a secrecy without illuminating anything. The caress, unlike the exploratory touch, does not gather impressions, does not grope for an object to subdue a freedom it divined, and does not say anything. Nonteleological action, play, search that remains, insatiably, search, addressed to someone who can face, but whose face is clouded with ardor and trouble, before whom speech becomes equivocation, nonsense, and laughter, the erotic movement is a movement not of presentification but of approach, closeness with the irreducibly alien, contact with an alterity that does not appeal but incites, does not contest but provokes. Here consciousness is not appropriation;¹² erotic existence projects itself unto an alterity approached without being conceived or comprehended, an alterity that touches, afflicts, obsesses, and remains incessantly out of reach. Voluptuousness, provoked by an excessive, exhibitionist presence of someone uncovered and exposed, opens ecstatically upon a future beyond what one can project, upon futurity not representable in advance, the alterity that comes.

This futurity is also that of fecundity. Fecundity belongs to the essence of a human existent. It belongs to our essence that our existence casts itself forth to a new unity of existence which is not substantially unified with it while really being it nonetheless, a propulsion of existence that no longer synthesizes itself in the transcendental unity of one time. Our existence ex-ists to the point of transubstantiation. For the offspring of my existence is my existence, mine without being substantially synthesized in the unity of my time – and not me, on his own, starting a new time. Here the movement toward alterity in existence becomes a passage into alterity.

¹² For Sartre too the alien subjectivity which the erotic movements seek to appropriate remains out of reach. But for him eroticism is nothing but the convulsive and vain effort to achieve that appropriation, to subdue an alien freedom. For Levinas the proximity with the alterity of the other is for the sake of itself.

Levinas found the sense of alterity in the regions of speech and eroticism. But his later writings, especially *Otherwise than Being*, locate the exposure to alterity already in sensibility, taken not as a synopsizing receptivity for data, but as susceptibility, vulnerability – exposedness to wounds and outrage. Through sensibility there is not only the presence of an entity, which always forms across a distance, but contact with it, a contact that reverberates as sensation, where sentient and sensed are not apart. As exposedness, and exposing its exposedness, susceptibility is expression. Expression, speech addressed to another, and eroticism, approach for the sake of contact, are thus activities that arise out of the passivity or passion of sensibility, out of susceptibility and vulnerability. Sensibility is originally sensibility for alterity.

3. Otherwise than Being

The constitution of phenomenological ontology, taking phenomena to be produced by the work, event or essence, of being, requires seeing subjectivity as a function of being, as *Da-sein*. Thus for Heidegger the essence of subjectivity is not to be elucidated by taking it as an entity that is alongside of other entities, and specifying its similarities with and interactions with them, but by elucidating the *sum* of the *cogito*, its being, which maintains a relationship with being as such, is the pivot of the circuit of being returning to itself. Levinas from the start conceived subjectivity to be outside of being. But he refused to conceive it in terms of nonbeing or negativity, which could only function as distinction at work in, or articulation of, being. His early texts conceived subjectivity as an archetypal or superlative existent, which breaks with being, and does not only hypostasize or articulate it. The later writings mean to formulate subjectivity in terms “otherwise than being.”

Being producing beings works as an order in which beings delimit and determine one another, in Heraclitean polemos and in the Logos which composes them into a history. Being is immanent in them as their war or their reason.

The other is other than me, and in his facing other too than the phenomenal surfaces the beings present me. His approach among the phenomena leaves a trace of a passage of what was never present, an interruption or disturbance of the order of being – ordered or ordering itself into a totality in my consciousness, the *Da-sein* of *Sein*. That of which I speak, and the other of whom I speak, represented in discourse, is addressed to the other to whom I speak, and who arises each time beyond the one the thought has conceived. His incessant withdrawal – his infinitum – opens the exteriority across which the significations of beings signify. His move makes possible not the determination by which entities, produced by the force of being, determine one another in any direction, but the sense, the direction, the univocity of their signification.

The alterity of the other is not non-being exterior to being, nor negativity that

XVIII

nihilates only by articulating being. Appealing to, contesting what is, this alterity “otherwise than is.”

Though the early writings formulate the subjectivity that I know as my own – not “the ego,” but me – as an existent, Levinas’s later studies of the sentient, expressive, and active dimensions of subjectivity lead him to reformulate my subjectivity as the “less than nothing” which is at the same time the support that bears the weight, the gravity, of the totality.

For the ego is (or I am) the force of a responsibility. Before it exists for itself, it is the term given to itself. It is in itself, an identity. It finds itself in itself in being unable to retreat, unable to back away, unable to substitute another, before the appeal that comes from without and singles it out. It finds itself responsible, existing for another, and does not constitute itself as responsible by an action of initiating enterprises or by assuming them. It is from the start responsible, with a responsibility it will never catch up to, ever in deficit. It is thus in itself as not being enough. And, as responsible, it is a putting itself in the place of another, answering for another as well as to another, a substitution, as though its substance and its situation oppose no resistance to occupying any, every, place, as though it does not support itself on its own and maintained no identity of its own. It is “less than nothing,” less than the nothingness that excludes being.

This less than nothing of subjectivity is its being-for-another. Its expressivity, its saying, cannot be conceived as a simple synthesizing force, a pure identifying of beings; in its vocative and imperative dimensions, subjectivity answers to alterity as it identifies being. It then does not coincide with the logos by which being is articulated. Subjectivity as for-another forms the existential (or infraexistential) structure that is articulated in expressions, in significant behaviors. It is the way of being – or the way to otherwise than be – of their signifyingness.

Levinas’s analysis of sensibility also led him to conceive of subjectivity “otherwise than being.” *Totality and Infinity* sought to define sensibility in its own essence; it is not the simple synoptic operation of gathering sense data for understanding, it occurs through sustenance and enjoyment. Its inner movement is enjoyment of the elemental reality, by which a being, contented with being and with itself, exults in itself, vibrates upon itself. Sensuous sensibility is the exorbitance of a being that is and that enjoys its being and thus more than is. But sensibility, susceptibility, is also vulnerability; Levinas’s later writings showed that the receptivity in sensibility is not positive and sovereign action and actual being, but exposure. By being sensitive the sentient subject is not only open to the messages or signs emitted by things, but is exposed to their force, exposed to wounds and outrage.

In no longer defining the essence of sensibility as synopsizing activity, the essence of expression as synthesizing activity, the essence of responsibility as spontaneity, Levinas no longer sees in the essence of subjectivity the force, the ingathering, or the essence of being. He introduces the concept of absolute passivity to express its

status “otherwise than being.” In famous pages of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre had denounced the paradox of the idea of creation, which should be a transitive activity, but cannot have anything outside of itself, for the creature, yet to be created, could not have even the passivity required to receive the creative influx. It is just this paradoxical concept of creature that Levinas takes as a first philosophical formulation of the status “otherwise than being” of the subjectivity I am.

But does not the I answering to the alterity of the other come into the presence of the other in the field of presence which is the world, and do they not there determine one another, form an order and a totality? No – and for their contact Levinas has reserved the term *proximity*, which he distinguishes from the ontological concept of *presence*. The alterity of the other is not determined, not grasped nor comprehended, by the I; alterity weighs on the I with the force, the disturbance, of its passing, its infinite and unrepresentable withdrawal. And the I is not determined by the other, but opened ecstatically to a transcendence by which it signifies beyond itself and supports the weight of the totality in its responsibility.

Thus for Levinas responsibility and signification in being¹³ are not produced by the play of being, but form a sphere “otherwise than being.”

B. SUBJECTIVITY, BEINGS, ALTERITY

Levinas’s work presents itself as an “ontics,” or theory of the existent, an ethics prior to any science of norms, elucidation of the structure of the ethical relationship, and a heterology, a theory of the “otherwise than being.”¹⁴ Its positive content breaks up into a number of theses, concerning subjectivity, the structure of things and of the world, and alterity. These were organized together in the treatise *Totality and Infinity*, and in the papers we translate in this collection are individually elaborated, reworked, and revised.

1. There are original theses concerning the inner structure of the faculties – powers or existential constituents – involved in subjectivity, concerning the unity of subjectivity, and concerning its temporalization.

Sensibility. Kant, Husserl – and also Merleau-Ponty – envisaged sensibility in relationship with predicative cognition; sensibility is the receptivity that supplies data for representation, and itself effects a first, prepredicative synopsis of those data. Heidegger argued that perception as representation of individual things is

¹³ Heidegger locates signification in existence qua project, making entities exist for-the-sake-of (*worum-wollen*) oneself. Its form, we can say, is the other for the one. Levinas locates it in responsibility – the one for the other.

¹⁴ For which Levinas has appropriated the terms metaphysics, eschatology, and even theology. By “abuse of language.”

already derivative; they are subtended by a field of forces or network of routes which are not represented but traveled – a dynamic relational system. Levinas scrutinized the specifically sensuous dimension of sensibility. Sensation is not just reception of data for cognitive synthesis; contact with quality and intensity make up the specifically sensuous character of sensible things – quality and intensity that do not only constitute opaqueness in things, blocking the ray of sight or the touch, but also support, sustain, uphold, nourish the sight and the mobile sentient touch. The sensuous core of sensibility he conceived as savoring – nourishment and enjoyment. Sight is upheld and sustained and filled with colors, and not only blocked by them. The contact with the sense contents fills the sensibility and intensifies it. Sensibility is enjoyment: involution in sense contents and not taking them as signs by a signifying act that goes beyond them to their meaning, *agrément* which is concordance with them (*agréer à...*) and pleasure, affirmation of them in which the sensibility is itself affirmed, exalted.

Levinas contrasts presence, achieved in representation, and proximity, effected in sensibility. Cognition represents, it renders present across a distance.¹⁵ Sensibility, which is enjoyment, involution, effects proximity and contact, approaches across that distance.¹⁶

The most recent texts introduce the concept of vulnerability: sensibility, affectivity, is the capacity to be affected by things, not only to receive their effects in oneself as signs of their exterior layouts, but to be afflicted by them, susceptible, exposed not only to their sense but to their force, capable of being pained by them.

Exposure to exterior beings, exposure to alterity, sensibility has the structure of being-for-another. By virtue of this structure our existence is a sign, its positions and moves significant. Levinas understands the sense, the meaning that forms in sensibility out of this vulnerability, this being-for-another, and not out of a synopsizing activity that would assemble and relate data.

Consciousness. Self-consciousness does not constitute consciousness, and from the earliest texts Levinas set out to show how consciousness does not go without unconsciousness. The unconscious is not to be conceptualized by negation merely, nor, as the phenomenologists have done, as a second current of meaning-giving intentionalities. The relationship between consciousness and its unconscious is not in turn an intentional structure. Levinas explicates the inner movement constitutive of sleep as a peculiar manner of relating to a site qua base – repose. Awakening to ..., that ec-static, intentional, ex-istential movement, is a commencement; it takes

¹⁵ The distance of time; the mind is memory

¹⁶ The concept of proximity – encroaching across the distance at which cognition represents, envisions the presence of, its object – was first worked out in the analysis of the caress. Later this movement is extended to the touch qua sentient: “But caresses are dormant in all contact, and contact in all sensible experience.. · the thematized disappears in the caress, in which the thematization becomes a proximity.” *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, p. 191, n. 10

form in a contraction, a movement that assumes a present, suspending participation in the continuous flow of existence; one awakens from sleep, on the basis, the position, of sleep. Ecstatic movement and position necessitate one another. This analysis will be transposed in *Totality and Infinity* to show our existence-in-the-world in a polarity of action and indwelling.

Saying. The saying and the said, expression and expressed, are not correlative, as noesis and noema. Saying is not reducible to the act that signifies, by positing the said as signs related to intended meanings. Levinas has gone beyond this Husserlian schema of expression, which, as many critics have seen, is a theory that is framed in terms of explaining how words are meaningful.¹⁷ Saying synchronizes the given things in the totality of a narration, an epos. And it hypostasizes their verbal flow into entities, into identities.

But in addition to the act presenting the said, the saying itself passes, leaving a trace of its own passage. Husserl had already shown the dual reference in expressive signs: a sign signifies its ideal signification, but also indicates the state of mind of its issuer, and first his presence. He had defined an index as a reality associated with another reality; signs laterally indicate a state of mind akin to mine. The sayer, presenting the said, signifies, without presenting, himself; his words signify as indices of his own reality. But they indicate not so much the difference of his psychophysical reality, presented in perception, from my own – as his alterity, indicated in its remoteness from all presence. For this kind of reference Levinas has introduced the concept *trace*. A sign functions as a trace inasmuch as it refers to what has never been presented, nor represented in the ideal presence of ideality, refers to what passes. The trace does not refer to the sayer in his empirical content, as state of mind and quality of intention, but in his very alterity. What is said is articulation of the given word; but in the saying there is the trace of alterity.

Ipseity. Ipseity, identity for-oneself required for the synthesizing work of representation, is not itself identified in representation. Not present before itself, but present in itself, encumbered with itself, affected with itself, ipseity is given in an experience of the affective order. This affectivity is not the negative Heideggerian anxiety, where ipseity has the sphere of its own being delimited by the sense it has of the nothingness beyond. Prior to that delimitation, existence has a positive sense of its own being from within, as a plenitude vibrant upon itself. Enjoyment is the involution by which the positive being of the existent is affected with itself as with a content. The ego takes form in the plenitude, the superabundance or goodness, of elemental being.

The ego is not an atomic unity, but a unity for itself; it refers to itself. This reference is not objectification and representation, nor the circuit of care, involving distance; it is recurrence. It is being affected with oneself, being encumbered with oneself. The ego is a weight for itself; such is its constituent materiality. The inner

¹⁷ But the meaningful fabric of language does not break up into words.

difference by which the identity of the ego comes to exist for itself occurs in an intensification, an exhilaration over and above its being. It is felt as pleasure – in the singularity of pleasure. The possibility of the ego is a possibility of pleasure.

But the full concept of the ego is not only that of a term that exists as an identity for itself, through an internal process of identification, but that of a term that exists unto itself, that answers for itself. Unlike Sartre, Levinas does not see the responsibility by which the ego ascribes its acts and states to itself to lie in authorship, in being their point of original emanation. Nietzsche had already brought out the paradox of an instance, a will, that arises in the midst of a multiplicity of processes and movements with different finalities and acting in different organs, to answer for them, a will he situated in language. (“One” sleeps, a respiratory system breathes, a gastric system eats, thoughts occur to one, or insights arise, one knows not how, within one – but I say *I sleep, I breathe, I am eating, I think*. Nietzsche sarcastically wrote that the “I” is a grammatical fiction. But the phenomenon is not dissipated thereby; there remains to be explained the origin of this will, this powerful will, this will to power, which ascribes to itself, in the element of language, these multiple acts and states originating in diverse regions of that chaos which is one’s vital substance.) For Levinas too responsibility is originally detected in the structure of speech: I enter language, taking on language as my own, in the first person singular, not by inventing it but by response. In this movement there is made that ascription to myself in which the ego is set forth.

The inner flow of existence, wholly excentric in its acts or states, is cast back upon itself, in the movement of ascription, from the outside. Heidegger located the reflux constitutive of existence “on its own” (*eigentlich*, authentic) in the encounter with the pure exteriority of nothingness. Levinas is convinced the recurrence requires an exteriority that has the force to appeal to, and to contest, the ego. The language of ego-ascription, the language in which the I arises and lives, is judgment – not only having a primary logical form of judgment but containing evaluation (Nietzsche had defined man as the evaluating animal). To say “I sleep, eat, breathe, think” is to accept to answer for them in an apologetic movement. It is to justify them, not only in the sense of assigning oneself as the one who has the reasons for them, and the reasons for the reasons (science, according to Husserl’s Introduction to his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, is existentially seated here), but in the sense of rendering just what has been contested. The ego, then, without having been produced dialectically, as by antithesis, by the other positing himself (for life is already egoism in the solitude of its pleasure), is nonetheless called to its full, responsible, status by the approach of the other.

Levinas’s treatment of responsibility centers on two characteristics which he takes to be phenomenologically given, and already detectable in the responsibility operative in language; his exposition aims to deduce the structure of ipseity from them. First, the ascription of responsibility does not amount to a recognition of authorship; I answer for operations effected anonymously in me, and for what I

could have done, but in addition I answer for the other, as well as to him.¹⁸ Responsibility is double substitution: a putting my deeds and omissions in the perspective of another, and recognizing myself responsible for his misfortune, his suffering, his very faults, and, eventually, his very faults in my regard. The figure of the hostage, responsible for everyone and before everyone for what he has not legislated, is an essential figure of responsibility.

This expanse of responsibility is operative in language where I answer for what was set forth, for that which I did not invent but took up in my turn. The I that speaks prefers a unicity over and beyond the individual that could be designated by family name, profession, function, and at the same time is substitutable for everyone – I say I as each one says I.

The I arises as a point in the universe to which demands are put for whom no one else is to answer. Its singularity is constituted by being singled out to answer by the eyes that face it.¹⁹ But at the same time this unique positivity is constituted in a movement of substitution for all, as though its content and its situation oppose no resistance to occupying any, every, place, as though, even, it could not help but occupy every other place. This structure does not only make it impossible for us to define the being of the I with the coordinates that define a material being, but makes it impossible for us to define it with the concepts that define a being at all. The I is even “less than nothing,” less than the nothingness that excludes a being.

The second basic fact in the phenomenon of responsibility is that responsibilities increase in the measure that they are assumed. The more responsibilities one takes on the more responsibilities one discovers oneself afflicted with: there is an infinitude in the life of responsibility. Responsibility is the way alterity touches me,²⁰ has afflicted me from the start in a movement of unending appeal. Responsibility is the contact of the I with a dimension of infinity. This character of responsibility too can be seen in the movement of language – in which the last word is never yet said.

Late texts of Levinas argue that the ego formed by sensibility qua enjoyment is itself founded on responsibility. Responsibility to alterity subtends even the susceptibility, the vulnerability for beings which makes itself felt as sensibility. This

¹⁸ Heidegger too argued that the sense of responsibility is not measured by the degree to which the subject stands behind its act as pure agency – but by the degree to which it does not. In returning to itself in responsibility Dasein finds itself factual, born; it has to be an existence it has not constituted, and has to be one possibility by renouncing others. The authentic, responsible, agent is always in deficit, guilty. For Levinas it is not so much the thrown character of the projection of Dasein, which has to answer for what it was already before any decision, that leaves the agent in deficit, as the fact that I have to answer for what the others have done.

¹⁹ For Heidegger it is death, which no one can go through for me, that singles me out; the authentified or singularized I is toward-death. For Levinas the I, singled out by the convergence of demands, by the destitution and suffering of others, exists essentially against-death, succor against death.

²⁰ My responsibilities are never assumed – there is always more. There is an initial affliction, passivity, never assumed by an act. This is the very form of our existence as for-another. Which is not yet (Sartre) being-exposed to foreign objectifying consciousness, nor (Heidegger) the susceptibility of projects to be attuned to one another.

thesis opposes Heidegger, for whom the anxiety before nothingness opens and makes possible exposure to beings.

Authenticity. For Heidegger authenticity – an existence on its own, seat of answerability, an existent in the strong sense – is constituted by the inner movement that projects one unto the nothingness, the death, that circumscribes one, a movement that thus projects one's being over its full expanse, takes possession of all one's own time. The anticipation of the end subtends the constitution of an authentic time, a time of one's own. This time is generated by the authentic futurity, the dimension of the *Zu-Kunft*, that of the possible being to come to one and of the eventual nonbeing to come for one. For Levinas the movement by which I take possession of the full expanse of my own temporalizing existence is a movement elicited not by the nothingness that draws and that delimits, but the alterity that appeals and contests. I am on my own in a movement of critique, finding myself called to account, rather than in resolute decisiveness. In making contact with the approach of alterity in the other my existence opens upon a futurity which is no longer the correlate of, the possibility projected by, my powers, my potentiality-for-being, but is veritable futurity in its ungraspableness, its essential surprise.

A new analysis of the inner form of time commands all of Levinas's analytic work. Husserl had distinguished the inner temporalization, a priori form of subjectivity or internal ordering synthesis of subjectivity, from the constituted time of nature, not only showing that the order of the latter presupposes the ordering of the former, but that present, past, and future have a different form in the two. But the two are implicated as founded and founding, the internal synthesis of subjective temporality founding the temporal order of nature. Heidegger brought to light another function for inner time; the authentic time projects itself from its birth unto its death, takes possession of or closes in on its own itinerary, and does not only found the temporal order of nature, made of an unending series of nows. Authentic time, negatively defined as this break with natural continuity, is positively grasped as a fate (*Schicksal*) forming a figure on the ground of the destiny (*Geschick*) of a generation. The time that is one's own is thus a moment of history.²¹ Levinas separates internal time both from nature and from history; for subjectivity to have a time of its own is for it to close in upon itself and separate itself from the time of history. Mortal existence goes from its birth to its death in a dimension that does not run parallel to the time of history and does not acquire its sense nor its form from that time.

Its birth does not acquire its sense only from the continuum of generation, transformation and corruption continually woven by being and its Logos into an order and into history. Its birth – and each “act” of consciousness, each awakening to ..., is a birth – is not only assumption of an existence with which it is charged, but interruption of the continuum of existence, coming forth as from itself,

²¹ *Being and Time*, p. 436.

commencement. The psyche is the possibility of the *cogito*: a presence that sustains itself by itself – be it but for a moment, the moment of presence – and turns to its very past as to something yet to appear, something yet to come, constituted in the innocence and positivity of its position by its very ignorance of forgetting or break with the universal transmission of the past; turns to its own site in the cosmos as something that will become its *illuc*, its “here,” by its own movement of repose, of position, of supporting itself on a base. Its presence is constituted in the tonality of pleasure, surplus of a being posited that was not inherited from the past. And if its death marks not an end but a conjuncture in the time of history, for itself its dying proceeds into a future of a wholly different sort than the future of history, made of possibilities projected. In dying one finds oneself not grasping a future but drifting, aimless, toward an ungraspable futurity approaching, but not across the horizons of the articulated world, to take one. The dying comes to pass in this temporal interval which Levinas names *l'entre-temps*, between-time, of *le temps mort*, dead time. The psyche does not exist in this dead time only during the historically last moments of its life, but also in the irresponsibility of the dis-interested contemplation of the shadows of reality in art. For art does not form a world for an existing being to be in, by inhabitation and concern and the exercise of its potentialities-for-being; art produces not things that are nodes of possibility in the instrumental field of the world, but images, sealed in the closure of their artistic perfection, the obscurity of shadows of being held in a petrified present unable to germinate any future,²² offering to the subject²³ not the temporally extended expanse of possibilities, but rhythm, time qua recurrence and fatality. And the time of dying is also to be found in aging, different from the Husserlian temporalization by which the ego enriches itself with its habitualities, where nothing is lost and all initiatives turn into skills and powers. Aging is not the augmentative empowering of the agent through all the intentions and actions it has formed and lived through, but its being encumbered with them, encumbered with all its own initiatives, a process of initiative turning into the irrevocable. In aging there is a *lapse* of time, falling away of a time that passes and cannot be recuperated.

Levinas thus discovers a form of the present, of the past, and of the future which the existential analysis of inner time in terms of a unity of ecstases was unable to grasp. The present is not only to be defined as point of juncture of immediate and remote possibilities;²⁴ it takes form as an instant, pulse of time standing in itself, ignoring, forgetting, positively breaking with or releasing itself from its past, vibrant upon itself as pleasure. In addition to the existential past – phase of existence bypassed by the projection into presence, forming the definitive base from

²² Or as though fixed in a present before a future that is exterior – not held by the present and which will never be present – like the futurity of death.

²³ Not inter-ed but enchanted.

²⁴ We have noted that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, defines the authentic present, the *Augenblick*, only as the movement of a rapture by which Dasein is carried away to the possibilities of the situation.

which the momentum of the projection thrusts, a past thus ever retained by every present – there is a past as pure lapse of time. And for Levinas the future, dimension of possibility, is not constituted as such for the psyche by the movement anticipating the possibility of its death. The future is future by reason of its ungraspability, and not by reason of the possibilities already delineated, already within reach, present. That futurity has multiple senses is one of Levinas's theses. Futurity is sensed, in the plenitude of the enjoyment immersed in the fathomless elemental qualities, as the zone of the absolutely indeterminate lying beyond the thickness of the present, the region of the pure “there is,” which is not nothingness (does not threaten the plenitude of being), but is the indeterminacy of the beginningless, endless, inexorable current of being. What threatens the contentment of pleasure is the menace of this indetermination.²⁵ There is an important constitution of the sense of the future in action and labor, to be sure, inasmuch as every dealing with things grasps for the possibilities in them. However, it is not the possibilities already delineated on them that open a future, but rather the surprise possible, the gaps in the instrumental ordination, the ingredient of indetermination.

Thus the handling of things contains an element of groping.²⁶ The futurity of death, finally, approaches as pure menace, time to come that is completely ungraspable.²⁷

But futurity is not to be defined negatively, in function of the present, as a present not yet present,²⁸ whose essence is revealed in absolute absence, in death. The sense of the future is the sense of what constitutes itself outside the present and brings to the order of the present the new; its essence is structured as a positive alterity. It does not spring from the present, but – like the caress of the consoler²⁹ – comes from without to draw the present, mired in itself, out of itself. In a series of lectures given in 1947,³⁰ Levinas argued that the psyche breaks out of its instant into a temporality by a relation made with the approach of the other; existence is futural not because it can project itself forth out of itself (on the contrary, it forms itself by forming an instant), but because its self-sufficiency is contested by the approach of alterity. The relationship with alterity does not occur within a temporal format; rather existence temporalizes out of a projection unto alterity.

In later texts, Levinas situates alterity in the past. What is present of the other – his face qua plastic form – is not a *sign* of his identity, grasped wholly and instantaneously as one grasped in ideal signification; it is a trace of his passage. The other in his alterity has never been present, and one cannot proceed from his face,

²⁵ *Totality and Infinity*, p. 144.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁷ *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), pp. 59–61; *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 232–36.

²⁸ Although Heidegger and already Bergson, according to Levinas (*Le temps et l'autre*, p. 64) sought to justify the essential fact that the future brings the *new* to being. Thus for Heidegger possibility is ontologically more than actuality.

²⁹ *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague; Martinus Nijhoff, 1978, p. 91.

³⁰ *Le temps et l'autre*. Cf. also infra. pp. 149–50, 156.

the trace of his passage that is visible in the present, to him by re-presentation. The trace opens upon something that has come to pass, which is not an intentional modification of any present – the immemorial past, pure *lapse* of time.

Beneath the temporalization that retains and anticipates, represents in the living present, that whose past is represented and future projected, the temporalization that is active synthesis, history – the temporalization existential philosophy situates in the ecstatic character of existence – Levinas brings out a temporalization that is passive synthesis. This passive synthesis is not comprehensible through the idea of intentionality. Subjectivity *ages*. It does not only represent, renew, its past; it is encumbered by its past. Its instants are exterior to one another, do not emanate out of one another but take form in excluding one another. The future comes from the exterior, new, a surprise, not prepossessed. The moment past is not only retained; it passes, there is an irrecuperable loss of time, a lapse of time. The anticipation of the death to come is not a power but lassitude, patience, passive exposedness to a death that comes prematurely, a violence. The living present is, to be sure, the locus in which the passing of time is unified. But not because it is the power to represent the past and project the future. Rather because the passing of the past leaves a trace in the present – trace of the irrecuperable – and because its very presence is called forth by a future over which it had no power.

2. Levinas assembled, in *Totality and Infinity*, original analyses of the categories of exterior being, analyses of the categories of the “there is,” of things, of the world, of the face, various aspects of which were worked out in some of the texts of the present collection.

The there is (il y a). We are in the midst of be-ing, in the verbal form, in existence, in the midst of a *there is*. Which, Parmenides understood, is a beginningless, endless continuity, internally structured by negation but not menaced by it. Nothingness comes second; negation operates among beings without negating being. The expression “there is” expresses the facticity of being which is not an effect of some antecedent agent that is (not the German *Es gibt*, where one might, following late Heideggerian texts, find an *Es* which gives being – “there is” taken as “it rains,” where the *il* of *il pleut, il y a*, does not posit a subject of this occurrence). But the concept of being prior to negation and undermined by it is not only a concept formed by logical analysis; our logical thought arrives at it because our existence is already in contact with it. Our sensibility awakens to a sensuous medium in which it finds itself; the first awakening to ... is already in contact with air, light, earth, a sensuous density. Beyond the fullness of the medium present to the sensibility there is a sense of the uncharted expanses of being, indeterminate but full, like a field of forces. It is not equivalent to the spatial format of a world we project; spatiality is not laid out in being, nor being in spatiality. In the night, where the contours and gradated tones of things and of the spaces between things fade out, we are left not adrift in void, but in a plénitude, a spatiality without planes nor

separations but full and oppressive.³¹ In insomnia our vigilant existence opens upon a state of being without contours and without ends nor beginnings, like a field or flow of forces, which the vigilance cannot objectify or posit before itself, in which it finds itself held. For Levinas not the anxiety which contains a sense of nothingness, but the nocturnal vigilance which senses being in a purely verbal form, non-nominalized, is the primary ontological experience.

The world. Levinas refuses the conception of *Being and Time* according to which things, rather than being ontologically defined as substances with properties, are conceived as pure nodes of appropriatenesses, nexus of relatedness, and the world opening about them as the order, the spatio-temporal exteriority, formed by the network of those references. Levinas returns to the concept of substance, but giving it a phenomenological, non-metaphysical, meaning. Things are not only means, but ends, correlates not only of a practical intention, but terms of desire and sensibility which end in them, are contented in them. If they are correlates of an appropriating grasp, this position has its own structure, in addition to supporting the handling by a Dasein and leading it further into the articulations of an instrumental system. As substance, formed matter and solidity, the fathomless flow of the elemental is held in them. And for Levinas, being-in (in the sense of inhabiting)-the-world does not reduce, as for Heidegger, to “being among the things (qua implements)”;³² indwelling delineates in the alien a zone of the intimate. This essentially appropriative movement is also a retreat from the world, a recollection, by which ipseity takes the form of a *bei-sich-Sein*, an *être chez soi*, a being-for-itself based on the substance of things, a being-for-itself in the form of a being-at-home-with-itself. Being-in-the-world qua inhabitation simultaneously institutes a zone of the intimate and itself qua inwardness. Thus the circuit of ipseity is not the movement of a separated substance, a spiritual entity metaphysically alien to the being, the materiality, of the world, a pure consciousness able to close in over itself of itself, but neither is it a circuit that throws itself forth from itself into things which are but references – in the mode of “for-the-sake-of-Dasein” (*worum-willen*) – reflecting it back to itself. It is a movement which recollects itself, by constituting for itself a base in a zone of the world appropriated, made intimate, at-home-in-the-world and thereby with-itself. Then for Levinas not the concept of *Zeug*, implement, but that of *meuble* – “movable goods,” furnishings – names the ontological essence of things; as formed matter they answer to the hand that takes and com-prehends, as substances they endure beneath the elemental flow of

³¹ Not a contraction where direction and sense can no longer extend, but an expanse where each direction and sense are as it were overlaid with all the others and univocity engulfed.

³² Which is the existential justification for Dasein interpreting itself according to the mode of the present-at-hand. The text “Building Dwelling Thinking” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* defines an authentic inhabiting among things no longer conceived implementally – but as polyvalent nodes of the world, assembling terrestrial closure, celestial openness, mortals and immortals. In *Being and Time* authenticity is *unheimlich* (p. 232).

qualities and remain at the disposition of an existence that dominates, as furnishings of a home rather than implements in a workshop of the world they take form for the pleasure of the sensibility as well as for the uses of the laborious existence.

The world for Levinas is not coextensive with the exteriority about a Dasein. The world takes form in the medium in which the sensibility finds itself immersed, in the elemental medium which is without profiles or sides to grasp, differentiates itself by tonalities, qualitative intensities, and extends in depth. If things are formations in a technical system possessed in advance, implements in the workshop of the world, they are found in the air, on the earth, in the light, along the way, by a hand that is not technical operation but groping. And the openness or clearing of the world qua world, the *Lichtung*, is not constituted by the totalization of instrumental references, linking up before a com-prehending projection, but by the phosphorescence of being. Things are together, form an order, a cosmos, a world, because they refer to one another by virtue of their own constitutive structure, but it is the medium of the light that exposes them to one another. Discursive elucidation leads, as for Husserl, to intuition, which is the givenness of the object in its own light and not a tracing of relations in turn. The comprehensibility of things lies in their clarity rather than in their distinctness; it is the phosphorescence of their being rather than the ways they polarize against one another that undoes their alienness and delivers them over to subjectivity. The world is not a totality, one system of references continually totalizing itself, but nonsystematic assemblings or totalizations for the autonomous finalities of life which ignore one another.

The face. The concept of a face is the central moment of all of Levinas's phenomenology. While Husserl and Heidegger take the problem of the nature of the contact with the other to be a problem of the alter *ego* – and Sartre circumscribes the other as a “faceless obsession” (Merleau-Ponty³³), for Levinas everything is centered on the alterity of the alter ego. The other is other than me, but also other than things and other than others, pure alterity, singularity. Husserl's explication, which constitutes the other as an intentional modification of my egoity across empathizing perception, as well as Heidegger's, which finds the other in the world as a project being pursued alongside of me and interchangeable with me,³⁴ miss the central issue of the constitution of intersubjectivity. The other does indeed appear to my perception in the form of a face, and the essence of the relation with a face does not have the form of a contemplative perception, but that of a practical dealings, within a world of equipment, or furnishings. But a face expresses; it is a

³³ *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 72

³⁴ For Heidegger the other is constituted as alter ego, fellow-man, in substitution, and as other in a dis-cernment (in fact a dimension of the *Ent-schlossenheit* yielded by the anxiety in which I come to appropriate my own zone of existence) of his practical field from having “lept beyond” it (*Vorausspringen*). But this still produces the other as an intentional modification of me, a divergency Cf also Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 82–83

locus of signs, signs signifying objects of the world. And a face also expresses an alien signifier. This reference may be conceived as a Husserlian indication of states of mind and intentions grasped by intentional modification from my perception of my own states and intentions; but it also refers to the alterity of the other mind. In this it figures as *trace*, sensory datum which refers to what eludes all grasp and all comprehension, never present and not re-presentable, pure passing of alterity, whose initiative disturbs the order of things.

One, then, with the representational function of language, there is a relationship with the alterity of the other which is not representational, but ethical. It is enacted in practical dealings inasmuch as one's practical dealings with things are interrupted, and contested. In answering practically to the other's appeal and his contestation, the relationship with the alterity of the other is made.³⁵

The other is both my fellow-man and other; ego and alter. This alterity is not produced as a subjectivity that is the simple negation of his objectivity (Sartre's "the look hides the eyes").³⁶ It is *presented* in the face, simultaneously sign signifying objects of the world, index indicating akin states of mind and intentions,³⁷ and trace referring to the passing of an alterity, disturbing my order, appealing and contesting.

3. This phenomenological analysis which determines in new terms the eidetic structures of the different sorts of phenomena delineates the locus for analyses which are no longer phenomenological, intentional, concerning alterity that is beyond the given.

The ethical. Ethical reflection does not thematize behavior which issues from the comprehension of the totality or from the legislation of norms.³⁸ Ethical normativity commences in the encounter with alterity, with the face. Its conceptualization begins with an ontological, or ultra-ontological, explication of its mode of being – or otherwise than being.

Beyond Ontology, and God. Levinas means to break with being conceived as the One, which phenomenology has maintained, by equating letting be with the essence of subjectivity, and identifying truth, unconcealment, as the ultimate sense of the e-vent (or ess-ence) of being. If objectivity – and the inter-world from which it arises, is constituted as a totality, there is an ultimate pluralism in inter-subjectivity,

³⁵ The face then faces in language. To face someone is both to perceive him and to answer to him.

³⁶ Nor, as for Merleau-Ponty (*The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 232-33), as the reverse and obverse of a relief in the sensible.

³⁷ For Levinas this kinship, this fraternity of men is not rooted in the collaboration of a *Mitsein*, mediated through a world, dwelling-place for all, or through an objectivity constituted as common to all, nor in an intercorporeality constituted by perception and empathy, but is already ethical. My fellow-man is the one who has claims on me, and appeals to me and judges me.

³⁸ Levinas identifies his project with Kantism, in the measure that it set out "to find a meaning to the human without measuring it by ontology, without knowing and without asking 'how does it stand with ...?', outside of mortality and immortality." Infra, p. 158.

for inter-subjectivity is the paradoxical situation of a subject *with* what is utterly other than it. And there is a pluralism in subjectivity itself, separated not only by its mortality but by its fecundity.

The alterity of the other, that by which he withdraws as he approaches, Levinas has named “illeity” – the third person constituting the second person singular with which I enter into intimacy. As positive in his force that summons and contests, greater in his absence by his force to judge the present, the alterity of the other is beyond being by a beyond that designates the superlative and not the remoteness of potentiality striving to reach actuality. But this elevation, this nobility, of the third person is also in the singular: not a dimension of the divine or the sacred scintillating on the contours of mundane things and in which the figure of a god could take form, but signification without a context, singular, God.

The exploration of each of these theses will be strikingly deepened in *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*.

Alphonso Lingis

The notes added to Chapters 2 through 6 were prepared by Professor Adrian Peperzak, of the University of Nijmegen. His notes to Chapter 6 were translated from the Dutch by Professor Mary Patrisko.

Chapter 10 was translated by Alphonso Lingis and Professor Richard Cohen, of Loyola College in Baltimore.

The preparation of this volume was made possible in part by a grant from the Division of Research Programs of the national Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency.

Grateful acknowledgement is also due to the Liberal Arts Research fund of the Pennsylvania State University for financial assistance in the preparation of this translation.

CHAPTER 1

REALITY AND ITS SHADOW*

Art and Criticism

It is generally, dogmatically, admitted that the function of art is expression, and that artistic expression rests on cognition. An artist – even a painter, even a musician – tells. He tells of the ineffable. An artwork prolongs, and goes beyond, common perception. What common perception trivializes and misses, an artwork apprehends in its irreducible essence. It thus coincides with metaphysical intuition. Where common language abdicates, a poem or a painting speaks. Thus an artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as knowledge of the absolute. Though it be disparaged as an aesthetic canon, realism nevertheless retains all its prestige. In fact it is repudiated only in the name of a higher realism. Surrealism is a superlative.

Criticism too professes this dogma. It enters into the artist's game with all the seriousness of science. In artworks it studies psychology, characters, environments, and landscapes – as though in an aesthetic event an object were by the microscope or telescope of artistic vision exposed for the curiosity of an investigator. But, alongside of difficult art, criticism seems to lead a parasitic existence. A depth of reality inaccessible to conceptual intelligence becomes its prey. Or else criticism substitutes itself for art. Is not to interpret Mallarmé to betray him? Is not to interpret his work faithfully to suppress it? To say clearly what he says obscurely is to reveal the vanity of his obscure speech.

Criticism as a distinct function of literary life, expert and professional criticism, appearing as an item in newspapers and journals and in books, can indeed seem suspect and pointless. But it has its source in the mind of the listener, spectator or reader; criticism exists as a public's mode of comportment. Not content with being absorbed in aesthetic enjoyment, the public feels an irresistible need to speak. The fact that there might be something for the public to say, when the artist refuses to say about artwork anything in addition to the work itself, the fact that one cannot

* “Reality and Its Shadow” was published in French as “La réalité et son ombre” in *Les Temps Modernes* 38 (1948): pp.771–89.

The notes in this chapter have been added by the translator.

contemplate in silence, justifies the critic. He can be defined as the one that still has something to say when everything has been said, that can say about the work something else than that work.

One then has the right to ask if the artist really knows and speaks. He does in a preface or a manifesto, certainly; but then he is himself a part of the public. If art originally were neither language nor knowledge, if it were therefore situated outside of “being in the world” which is coextensive with truth,¹ criticism would be rehabilitated. It would represent the intervention of the understanding necessary for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into the mind.

Perhaps the tendency to apprehend the aesthetic phenomenon in literature, where speech provides the material for the artist, explains the contemporary dogma of knowledge through art. We are not always attentive to the transformation that speech undergoes in literature. Art as speech, art as knowledge, then brings on the problem of committed art, which is a problem of committed literature.² The completion, the indelible seal of artistic production by which the artwork remains essentially disengaged, is underestimated – that supreme moment when the last brush stroke is done, when there is not another word to add to or to strike from the text, by virtue of which every artwork is classical. Such completion is different from the simple interruption which limits language and the works of nature and industry. Yet we might wonder if we should not recognize an element of art in the work of craftsmen, in all human work, commercial and diplomatic, in the measure that, in addition to its perfect adaptation to its ends, it bears witness to an accord with some destiny extrinsic to the course of things, which situates it outside the world, like the forever bygone past of ruins, like the elusive strangeness of the exotic. The artist stops because the work refuses to accept anything more, appears saturated. The work is completed *in spite of* the social or material causes that interrupt it. It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue.

This completion does not necessarily justify the academic aesthetics of art for art’s sake. The formula is false inasmuch as it situates art *above* reality and recognizes no master for it, and it is immoral inasmuch as it liberates the artist from his duties as a man and assures him of a pretentious and facile nobility. But a work would not belong to art if it did not have this formal structure of completion, if at least in this way it were not disengaged. We have to understand the value of this disengagement, and first of all its meaning. Is to disengage oneself from the world always to go *beyond*, toward the region of Platonic ideas and toward the eternal which towers above the world? Can one not speak of a disengagement on the hither

¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), § 44.

² Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel, 1964).

side – of an interruption of time by a movement going on on the hither side of time, in its “interstices”?

To go beyond is to communicate with ideas, to understand. Does not the function of art lie in not understanding? Does not obscurity provide it with its very element and a completion *sui generis*, foreign to dialectics and the life of ideas? Will we then say that the artist knows and expresses the very obscurity of the real? But that leads to a much more general question, to which this whole discussion of art is subordinate: in what does the *non-truth* of being consist? Is it always to be defined by comparison with truth, as what is left over after *understanding*? Does not the commerce with the obscure, as a totally independent ontological event, describe categories irreducible to those of cognition? We should like to show this event in art. Art does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow. To put it in theological terms, which will enable us to delimit however roughly our ideas by comparison with contemporary notions: art does not belong to the order of revelation. Nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction.

The Imaginary, the Sensible, the Musical

The most elementary procedure of art consists in substituting for the object its image. Its image, and not its concept. A concept is the object *grasped*, the intelligible object. Already by action we maintain a living relationship with a real object; we grasp it, we conceive it. The image neutralizes this real relationship, this primary conceiving through action. The well-known disinterestedness of artistic vision, which the current aesthetic analysis stops with, signifies above all a blindness to concepts.

But the disinterestedness of the artist scarcely deserves this name. For it excludes freedom, which the notion of disinterestedness implies. Strictly speaking, it also excludes bondage, which presupposes freedom. An image does not engender a *conception*, as do scientific cognition and truth; it does not involve Heidegger’s “letting be,” *Sein-lassen*, in which objectivity is transmuted into power.³ An image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity. Possessed, inspired, an artist, we say, harkens to a muse. An image is musical. Its passivity is directly visible in magic, song, music, and poetry. The exceptional structure of aesthetic existence invokes this singular term magic, which will enable us to make the somewhat worn-out notion of passivity precise and concrete.

The idea of rhythm, which art criticism so frequently invokes but leaves in the

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 405. Also “On the Essence of Truth,” trans. John Sallis in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Basic Writings*, pp. 127–30.

state of a vague suggestive notion and catch-all, designates not so much an inner law of the poetic order as the way the poetic order affects us, closed wholes whose elements call for one another like the syllables of a verse, but do so only insofar as they impose themselves on us, disengaging themselves from reality. *But they impose themselves on us without our assuming them.* Or rather, our consenting to them is inverted into a participation. Their entry into us is one with our entry into them. Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation. It is so not even despite itself, for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity. This is the captivation or incantation of poetry and music. It is a mode of being to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in a dark light, *present*. Such is a waking dream. Neither habits, reflexes, nor instinct operate in this light. The particular automatic character of a walk or a dance to music is a mode of being where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing. To listen to music is in a sense to refrain from dancing or stepping; the movement or gesture are of little import. It would be more appropriate to talk of interest than of disinterestedness with respect to images. An image is interesting, without the slightest sense of utility, interesting in the sense of *involving*, in the etymological sense – to be *among* things which should have had only the status of objects. To be “among things” is different from Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world”; it constitutes the pathos of the imaginary world of dreams – the subject is among things not only by virtue of its density of being, requiring a “here,” a somewhere,” and retaining its freedom; it is among things as a thing, as part of the spectacle. It is exterior to itself, but with an exteriority which is not that of a body, since the pain of the I-actor is felt by the I-spectator, and not through compassion. Here we have really an exteriority of the inward. It is surprising that phenomenological analysis never tried to apply this fundamental paradox of rhythm and dreams, which describes a sphere situated outside of the conscious and the unconscious, a sphere whose role in all ecstatic rites has been shown by ethnography; it is surprising that we have stayed with metaphors of “ideo-motor” phenomena and with the study of the prolongation of sensations into actions. Here we shall use the terms rhythm and musical while thinking of this reversal of power into participation.

Then we must detach them from the arts of sound where they are ordinarily envisioned exclusively, and draw them out into a general aesthetic category. Rhythm certainly does have its privileged locus in music, for the musician’s element realizes the pure deconceptualization of reality. Sound is the quality most detached from an object. Its relation with the substance from which it emanates is not inscribed in its quality. It resounds impersonally. Even its timbre, a trace of its belonging to an

object, is submerged in its quality, and does not retain the structure of a relation. Hence in listening we do not apprehend a “something,” but are without concepts: musicality belongs to sound naturally. And indeed, among all the classes of images distinguished by traditional psychology, the image of sound is most akin to real sound. To insist on the musicality of every image is to see in an image its detachment from an object, that independence from the category of substance which the analysis of our textbooks ascribe to pure sensation not yet converted into perception (sensation as an adjective), which for empirical psychology remains a limit case, a purely hypothetical given.

It is as though sensation free from all conception, that famous sensation that eludes introspection, appeared with images. Sensation is not a residue of perception, but has a function of its own – the hold that an image has over us, a function of rhythm. What is today called being-in-the-world is an existence with concepts. Sensibility takes place as a distinct ontological event, but is realized only by the imagination.

If art consists in substituting an image for being, the aesthetic element, as its etymology indicates, is sensation. The whole of our world, with its elementary and intellectually elaborated givens, can touch us musically, can become an image. That is why classical art which is attached to objects – all those paintings, all those statues representing *something*, all those poems which recognize syntax and punctuation – conforms no less to the true essence of art than the modern works which claim to be pure music, pure painting, pure poetry, because they drive objects out of the world of sounds, colors and words into which those works introduce us – because they break up representation. A represented object, by the simple fact of becoming an image, is converted into a non-object; the image as such enters into categories proper to it which we would like to bring out here. The disincarnation of reality by an image is not equivalent to a simple diminution in degree. It belongs to an ontological dimension that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm.

Image and Resemblance

The phenomenology of images insists on their transparency. The intention of one who contemplates an image is said to go directly through the image, as through a window, into the world it represents, and aims at an *object*.⁴ Yet nothing is more mysterious than the term “world it represents” – since representation expresses just that function of an image that still remains to be determined.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Imagination, a Psychological Critique*, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), and *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966).

The theory of transparency was set up in reaction to the theory of mental images, of an inner tableau which the perception of an object would leave in us. In imagination our gaze then always goes outward, but imagination modifies or neutralizes this gaze: the real world appears in it as it were between parentheses or quote marks. The problem is to make clear what these devices used in writing mean. The imaginary world is said to present itself as unreal – but can one say more about this unreality?

In what does an image differ from a symbol, a sign, or a word? By the very way it refers to its object: resemblance. But that supposes that thought stops on the image itself; it consequently supposes a certain opacity of the image. A sign, for its part, is pure transparency, nowise counting for itself. Must we then come back to taking the image as an independent reality which resembles the original? No, but on condition that we take resemblance not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image. Reality would not be only what it is, what it is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image.

Being is not only itself, it escapes itself. Here is a person who is what he is; but he does not make us forget, does not absorb, cover over entirely the objects he holds and the way he holds them, his gestures, limbs, gaze, thought, skin, which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face, alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness. The picturesque is always to some extent a caricature. Here is a familiar everyday thing, perfectly adapted to the hand which is accustomed to it, but its qualities, color, form, and position at the same time remain as it were behind its being, like the “old garments” of a soul which had withdrawn from that thing, like a “still life.” And yet all this is the person and is the thing. There is then a duality in this person, this thing, a duality in its being. It is what it is and it is a stranger to itself, and there is a relationship between these two moments. We will say the thing is itself and is its image. And that this relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance.

This situation is akin to what a fable brings about. Those animals that portray men give the fable its peculiar color inasmuch as men are seen *as* these animals and not only *through* these animals; the animals stop and fill up thought. It is in this that all the power and originality of allegory lies. An allegory is not a simple auxiliary to thought, a way of rendering an abstraction concrete and popular for childlike minds, a poor man’s symbol. It is an ambiguous commerce with reality in which reality does not refer to itself but to its reflection, its shadow. An allegory thus represents what in the object itself doubles it up. An image, we can say, is an allegory of being.

A being is that which is, that which reveals itself in its truth, and, at the same time, it resembles itself, is its own image. The original gives itself as though it were at a distance from itself, as though it were withdrawing itself, as though something

in a being delayed behind being. The consciousness of the absence of the object which characterizes an image is not equivalent to a simple neutralization of the thesis, as Husserl would have it, but is equivalent to an alteration of the very being of the object, where its essential forms appear as a garb that it abandons in withdrawing. To contemplate an image is to contemplate a picture. The image has to be understood by starting with the phenomenology of pictures, and not the converse.

In the vision of the represented object a painting has a density of its own: it is itself an object of the gaze. The consciousness of the representation lies in knowing that the object is not there. The perceived elements are not the object but are like its “old garments,” spots of color, chunks of marble or bronze. These elements do not serve as symbols, and in the absence of the object they do not force its presence, but by their presence insist on its absence. They occupy its place fully to mark its removal, as though the represented object died, were degraded, were disincarnated in its own reflection. The painting then does not lead us beyond the given reality, but somehow to the hither side of it. It is a symbol in reverse. The poet and painter who have discovered the “mystery” and “strangeness” of the world they inhabit every day are free to think that they have gone beyond the real. The mystery of being is not its myth. The artist moves in a universe that precedes (in what sense we will see below) the world of creation, a universe that the artist has already gone beyond by his thought and his everyday actions.

The idea of shadow or reflection to which we have appealed – of an essential doubling of reality by its image, of an ambiguity “on the hither side” – extends to the light itself, to thought, to the inner life. The whole of reality bears on its face its own allegory, outside of its revelation and its truth. In utilizing images art not only reflects, but brings about this allegory. In art allegory is introduced into the world, as truth is accomplished in cognition. These are two contemporary possibilities of being. Alongside of the simultaneity of the idea and the soul – that is, of being and its disclosure – which the *Phaedo* teaches, there is the simultaneity of a being and its reflection. The absolute at the same time reveals itself to reason and lends itself to a sort of erosion, outside of all causality. Non-truth is not an obscure residue of being, but is its sensible character itself, by which there is resemblance and images in the world. Because of resemblance the Platonic world of becoming is a lesser world, of appearances only. As a dialectic of being and non-being, becoming does indeed, since the *Parmenides*, make its appearance in the world of Ideas. It is through imitation that participation engenders shadows, distinct from the participation of the Ideas in one another which is revealed to the understanding. The discussion over the primacy of art or of nature – does art imitate nature or does natural beauty imitate art? – fails to recognize the simultaneity of truth and image.

The notion of shadow thus enables us to situate the economy of resemblance within the general economy of being. Resemblance is not a participation of a being

in an idea (the old argument of the third man shows the futility of that); it is the very structure of the sensible as such. The sensible is being insofar as it resembles itself, insofar as, outside of its triumphal work of being, it casts a shadow, emits that obscure and elusive essence, that phantom essence which cannot be identified with the essence revealed in truth. There is not first an image – a neutralized vision of the object – which then differs from a sign or symbol because of its resemblance with the original; the neutralization of position in an image is precisely this resemblance.

The *transdescendence* Jean Wahl speaks of, when separated from the ethical significance it has for him and taken in a strictly ontological sense, can characterize this phenomenon of degradation or erosion of the absolute which we see in images and in resemblance.

The Meanwhile

To say that an image is a shadow of being would in turn be only to use a metaphor, if we did not show *where* the hither side we are speaking of is situated. To speak of inertia or death would hardly help us, for first we should have to say what the ontological signification of materiality itself is.

We have envisioned the image as the caricature, allegory or picturesque element which reality bears on its own face. All of Giradoux's work effects a casting of reality into images, with a consistency which has not been fully appreciated, despite all Giradoux's glory. But up to now we seemed to be basing our conception on a fissure in being between being and its essence which does not adhere to it but masks and betrays it. But this in fact only enables us to approach the phenomenon we are concerned with. The art called classical – the art of antiquity and of its imitators, the art of ideal forms – corrects the caricature of being – the snub nose, the stiff gesture. Beauty is being dissimulating its caricature, covering over or absorbing its shadow. Does it absorb it completely? It is not a question of wondering whether the perfect forms of Greek art could be still more perfect, nor if they seem perfect in all latitudes of the globe. The insurmountable caricature in the most perfect image manifests itself in its stupidness as an idol. The image qua idol leads us to the ontological significance of its unreality. This time the work of being itself, the very *existing* of a being,⁵ is doubled up with a semblance of existing.

To say that an image is an idol is to affirm that every image is in the last analysis plastic, and that every artwork is in the end a statue – a stoppage of time, or rather its delay behind itself. But we must show in what sense it stops or delays, and in what sense a statue's existing is a semblance of the existing of being.

⁵ Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 17

A statue realizes the paradox of an instant that endures without a future. Its duration is not really an instant. It does not give itself out here as an infinitesimal element of duration, the instant of a flash; it has in its own way a quasi-eternal duration. We are not thinking just of the duration of an artwork itself as an object, of the permanence of writings in libraries and of statues in museums. Within the life, or rather the death, of a statue, an instant endures infinitely: eternally Laocoön will be caught up in the grip of serpents; the Mona Lisa will smile eternally. Eternally the future announced in the strained muscles of Laocoön will be unable to become present. Eternally, the smile of the Mona Lisa about to broaden will not broaden. An eternally suspended future floats around the congealed position of a statue like a future forever to come. The imminence of the future lasts before an instant stripped of the essential characteristic of the present, its evanescence. It will never have completed its task as a present, as though reality withdrew from its own reality and left it powerless. In this situation the present can assume nothing, can take on nothing, and thus is an impersonal and anonymous instant.

The immobile instant of a statue owes its acuteness to its non-indifference to duration. It does not belong to eternity. But it is not as though the artist had not been able to give it life. It is just that the life of an artwork does not go beyond the limit of an instant. The artwork does not succeed, is bad, when it does not have that aspiration for life which moved Pygmalion. But it is only an aspiration. The artist has given the statue a lifeless life, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life. Its presence does not cover over itself and overflows on all sides, does not hold in its own hands the strings of the puppet it is. We can attend to the puppet in the personages of a tragedy and laugh at the Comédie-Française. *Every image is already a caricature.* But this caricature turns into something tragic. The same man is indeed a comic poet and a tragic poet, an ambiguity which constitutes the particular magic of poets like Gogol, Dickens, Tchekov – and Molière, Cervantes, and above all, Shakespeare.

This present, impotent to force the future, is fate itself, that fate refractory to the will of the pagan gods, stronger than the rational necessity of natural laws. Fate does not appear in universal necessity. It is a necessity in a free being, a reverting of freedom into necessity, their simultaneity, a freedom that discovers it is a prisoner. Fate has no place in life. The conflict between freedom and necessity in human action appears in reflection: when action is already sinking into the past, man discovers the motifs that necessitated it. But an antimony is not a tragedy. In the instant of a statue, in its eternally suspended future, the tragic, simultaneity of necessity and liberty, can come to pass: the power of freedom congeals into impotence. And here too we should compare art with dreams: the instant of a statue is a nightmare. Not that the artist represents beings crushed by fate – beings enter their fate because they are represented. They are enclosed in their fate but just this is the artwork, an event of darkening of being, parallel with its revelation, its truth. It is not that an artwork reproduced a time that has stopped: in the general economy

of being, art is the falling movement on the hither side of time, into fate. A novel is not, as M. Pouillon thinks, a way of reproducing time; it has its own time, it is a unique way for time to temporalize.

We can then understand that time, apparently introduced into images by the non-plastic arts such as music, literature, theater and cinema, does not shatter the fixity of images. That the characters in a book are committed to the infinite repetition of the same acts and the same thoughts is not simply due to the contingent fact of the narrative, which is exterior to those characters. They can be narrated because their being *resembles* itself, doubles itself and immobilizes. Such a fixity is wholly different from that of concepts, which initiates life, offers reality to our powers, to truth, opens a dialectic. By its reflection in a narrative, being has a non-dialectical fixity, stops dialectics and time.

The characters of a novel are beings that are shut up, prisoners. Their history is never finished, it still goes on, but makes no headway. A novel shuts beings up in a fate despite their freedom. Life solicits the novelist when it seems to him as if it were already something out of a book. Something somehow completed arises in it, as though a whole set of facts were immobilized and formed a series. They are described between two well-determined moments, in the space of a time existence had traversed as through a tunnel. The events related form a *situation* – akin to a plastic ideal. That is what myth is: the plasticity of a history. What we call the artist's choice is the natural selection of facts and traits which are fixed in a rhythm, and transform time into images.

This plastic issue of the literary work was noted by Proust in a particularly admirable page of *The Prisoner*. In speaking of Dostoyevsky, what holds his attention is neither Dostoyevsky's religious ideas, his metaphysics, nor his psychology, but some profiles of girls, a few images: the house of the crime with its stairway and its *dvornik* in *Crime and Punishment*, Grushenka's silhouette in *Brothers Karamazov*. It is as though we are to think that the plastic element of reality is, in the end, the goal of the psychological novel.

Much is said about atmosphere in novels. Criticism itself likes to adopt this meteorological language. Introspection is taken to be a novelist's fundamental procedure, and one supposes that things and nature can enter into a book only when they are enveloped in an atmosphere composed of human emanations. We think, on the contrary, that an exterior vision – of a total exteriority, like the exteriority in rhythm we have described above, where the subject itself is exterior to itself – is the true vision of the novelist. Atmosphere is the very obscurity of images. The poetry of Dickens, who was surely a rudimentary psychologist, the atmosphere of those dusty boarding schools, the pale light of London offices with their clerks, the antique and second-hand clothing shops, the very characters of Nickleby and Scrooge, only appear in an exterior vision set up as a method. There is no other method. Even the psychological novelist sees his inner life on the outside, not necessarily through the eyes of another, but as one participates in a rhythm or a

dream. All the power of the contemporary novel, its art-magic, is perhaps due to this way of seeing inwardness from the outside – which is not all the same as the procedures of behaviorism.

Since Bergson it has become customary to take the continuity of time to be the very essence of duration. The Cartesian teaching of the discontinuity of duration is at most taken as the illusion of a time grasped in its spatial trace, an origin of false problems for minds incapable of conceiving duration. And a metaphor, one that is eminently spatial, of a cross-section made in duration, a photographic metaphor of a snapshot of movement, is accepted as a truism.

We on the contrary have been sensitive to the paradox that an instant can stop. The fact that humanity could have provided itself with art reveals in time the uncertainty of time's continuation and something like a death doubling the impulse of life. The petrification of the instant in the heart of duration – Niobe's punishment – the insecurity of a being which has a presentiment of fate, is the great obsession of the artist's world, the pagan world. Zeno, cruel Zeno – that arrow...

Here we leave the limited problem of art. This presentiment of fate in death subsists, as paganism subsists. To be sure, one need only give oneself a constituted duration to remove from death the power to interrupt. Death is then sublated. To situate it in time is precisely to go beyond it, to already find oneself on the other side of the abyss, to have it behind oneself. Death qua nothingness is the death of the other, death for the survivor. The time of *dying* itself cannot give itself the other shore. What is unique and poignant in this instant is due to the fact that it cannot pass. In *dying*, the horizon of the future is given, but the future as a promise of a new present is refused; one is in the interval, forever an interval. The characters of certain tales by Edgar Allan Poe must have found themselves in this empty interval. A threat appears to them in the approach of such an empty interval; no move can be made to retreat from its approach, but this approach can never end. This is the anxiety which in other tales is prolonged like a fear of being buried alive. It is as though death were never dead enough, as though parallel with the duration of the living ran the eternal duration of the interval – the *meanwhile*.

Art brings about just this duration in the interval, in that sphere which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilized. The eternal duration of the interval in which a statue is immobilized differs radically from the eternity of a concept; it is the meanwhile, never finished, still enduring – something inhuman and monstrous.

Inertia and matter do not account for the peculiar death of the shadow. Inert matter already refers to a substance to which its qualities cling. In a statue matter knows the death of idols. The proscription of images is truly the supreme command of monotheism, a doctrine that overcomes fate, that creation and revelation in reverse.

For Philosophical Criticism

Art then lets go of the prey for the shadow.

But in introducing the death of each instant into being, it effects its eternal duration in the meanwhile, has there its uniqueness, its value. Its value then is ambiguous – unique because it is impossible to go beyond it, because, being unable to end, it cannot go toward the *better*. It does not have the quality of the living instant which is open to the salvation of becoming, in which it can end and be surpassed. The value of this instant is thus made of its misfortune. This sad value is indeed the beautiful of modern art, opposed to the happy beauty of classical art.

On the other hand, art, essentially disengaged, constitutes, in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion.

Here we rejoin the most common and ordinary experience of aesthetic enjoyment. It is one of the reasons that bring out the value of art. Art brings into the world the obscurity of fate, but it especially brings the irresponsibility that charms as a lightness and grace. It frees. To make or to appreciate a novel and a picture is to no longer have to conceive, is to renounce the effort of science, philosophy, and action. Do not speak, do not reflect, admire in silence and in peace – such are the counsels of wisdom satisfied before the beautiful. Magic, recognized everywhere as the devil's part, enjoys an incomprehensible tolerance in poetry. Revenge is gotten on wickedness by producing its caricature, which is to take from it its reality without annihilating it; evil powers are conjured by filling the world with idols which have mouths but do not speak. It is as though ridicule killed, as though everything really can end in songs. We find an appeasement when, beyond the invitations to comprehend and act, we throw ourselves into the rhythm of a reality which solicits only its admission into a book or a painting. Myth takes the place of mystery. The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility. The poet exiles himself from the city. From this point of view, the value of the beautiful is relative. There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague.

Art then is not committed by virtue of being art. But for this reason art is not the supreme value of civilization, and it is not forbidden to conceive a stage in which it will be reduced to a source of pleasure – which one cannot contest without being ridiculous – having its place, but only a place, in man's happiness. Is it presumptuous to denounce the hypertrophy of art in our times when, for almost everyone, it is identified with spiritual life?

But all this is true for art separated from the criticism that integrates the inhuman work of the artist into the human world. Criticism already detaches it from its irresponsibility by envisaging its technique. It treats the artist as a man at work. Already in inquiring after the influences he undergoes it links this disengaged and proud man to real history. Such criticism is still preliminary. It does not attack the

artistic event as such, that obscuring of being in images, that stopping of being in the meanwhile. The value of images for philosophy lies in their position between two times and their ambiguity. Philosophy discovers, beyond the enchanted rock on which it stands, all its possibles swarming about it. It grasps them by interpretation. This is to say that the artwork can and must be treated as a myth: the immobile statue has to be put in movement and made to speak. Such an enterprise is not the same as a simple reconstruction of the original from the copy. Philosophical exegesis will measure the distance that separates myth from real being, and will become conscious of the creative event itself, an event which eludes cognition, which goes from being to being by skipping over the intervals of the meanwhile. Myth is then at the same time untruth and the source of philosophical truth, if indeed philosophical truth involves a dimension of intelligibility proper to it, not content with laws and causes which connect beings to one another, but searching for the work of being itself.

Criticism, in interpreting, will choose and will limit. But if, qua choice, it remains on the hither side of the world which is fixed in art, it reintroduces that world into the intelligible world in which it stands, and which is the true homeland of the mind. The most lucid writer finds himself in the world bewitched by its images. He speaks in enigmas, by allusions, by suggestion, in equivocations, as though he moved in a world of shadows, as though he lacked the force to arouse realities, as though he could not go to them without wavering, as though, bloodless and awkward, he always committed himself further than he had decided to do, as though he spills half the water he is bringing us. The most forewarned, the most lucid writer nonetheless plays the fool. The interpretation of criticism speaks in full self-possession, frankly, through concepts, which are like the muscles of the mind.

Modern literature, disparaged for its intellectualism (which, nonetheless goes back to Shakespeare, the Molière of *Don Juan*, Goethe, Dostoyevsky) certainly manifests a more and more clear awareness of this fundamental insufficiency of artistic idolatry. In this intellectualism the artist refuses to be only an artist, not because he wants to defend a thesis or cause, but because he needs to interpret his myths himself. Perhaps the doubts that, since the renaissance, the alleged death of God has put in souls have compromised for the artist the reality of the henceforth inconsistent models, have imposed on him the onus of finding his models anew in the heart of his production itself, and made him believe he had a mission to be creator and revealor. The task of criticism remains essential, even if God were not dead, but only exiled. But we cannot here broach the “logic” of the philosophical exegesis of art; that would demand a broadening of the intentionally limited perspective of this study. For one would have to introduce the perspective of the relation with the other without which being could not be told in its reality, that is, in its time.

CHAPTER 2

FREEDOM AND COMMAND*

To command is to act on a will. Among all the forms of doing, to act on a will is to truly act. It is to act on an independent reality, on what does not only offer great resistance, but absolute resistance, resistance of a different order from great resistance. It is not he who labors, that is, moves matter, that we call a man of action, not he who makes war, but he who orders others to labor and to war.

Action does not only imply the freedom of the agent, or one's not being influenced by some exterior thing; it also implies an efficacious transition and determines something exterior and independent. But a reality that is exterior and independent can only be free. Yet freedom is just what refuses to undergo an action.

How then is action possible? For how can one bend a freedom which by definition is inflexible? How can one act on what does not involve anything passive? How can one move an unmoved mover?

Since antiquity this impossibility of commanding and of action has been resolved by affirming that to command is to be in advance in accord with the will that one commands.

In the *Republic* Plato says that qua leader no leader proposes or orders what is useful for himself, but what is useful for the one he commands.¹ To command is then to do the will of the one who obeys.

The apparent heteronomy of a command is in reality but an autonomy, for the freedom to command is not a blind force but a rational act of thought. A will can accept the order of another will only because it finds that order in itself. The exteriority of the command is but inwardness. If the order is contrary to reason, it will come up against the absolute resistance of reason.

A rational being can, to be sure, risk death in refusing an absurd order, but it is said that it is enough for him to accept death to remain free. In his freedom of thought he preserves an unlimited power of refusal.

Yet things are not so simple. A freedom of thought reduced to itself, a freedom

* "Freedom and Command" was published in French in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 58 (1953): pp. 236-41.

The notes in this chapter have been added by Professor Adrian Peperzak.

¹ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 412-421c.

of thought which is nothing but freedom of thought, is, by that very fact, a consciousness of tyranny. Along with the rational orders of the philosopher-king appears the tyrant's orders, which the freedom of thought resists, knowing itself to be violated. In these conditions would not tyranny be real action, and the tyrant the only free being?

This possibility, and the disquietude such a possibility awakens, constitute, we know, a major theme of ancient philosophy, and especially Platonic philosophy. While affirming action as a relationship between man and man, since action appeals to the reason in man, Plato's philosophy is as it were obsessed by the threat of tyranny.

This is because free thought is not simply the consciousness of a tyranny exercised over our animality; it is not a mere spectator of this destitute animality agitated by fear and love; reason does not simply recognize the animality in us – it is as it were infected by it from within. The threat of tyranny is not simply known by reason; it puts reason in distress, paradoxical as the expression “a reason moved” may seem. The despotism of the senses constitutes the source of tyranny. The incomprehensible union of reason and animality, a union underlying their distinctness, makes a mockery of autonomy.

But the power of tyranny over reason, which Plato knew, goes much further than he sometimes seems to say. In his execution Socrates is free. He has a fine death. His body becomes progressively benumbed, and from bottom upwards.² It is an unjust death, but a fine death. Up to the last instant his thinking remains a refusal. He keeps his friends, who do not deny him. Yet we know that the possibilities of tyranny are much more extensive. It has unlimited resources at its disposal, those of love and wealth, torture and hunger, silence and rhetoric. It can exterminate in the tyrannized soul even the very capacity to be struck, that is, even the ability to obey on command.

True heteronomy begins when obedience ceases to be obedient consciousness and becomes an inclination. The supreme violence is in that supreme gentleness. To have a servile soul is to be incapable of being jarred, incapable of being ordered. The love for the master fills the soul to such an extent that the soul no longer takes its distances. Fear fills the soul to such an extent that one no longer sees it, but sees from its perspective.

That one can create a servile soul is not only the most painful experience of modern man, but perhaps the very refutation of human freedom.

Human freedom is essentially unheroic. That one could, by intimidation, by torture, break the absolute resistance of freedom, even in its freedom of thought, that an alien order no longer hits us in the face, that we could accept it as though it came from ourselves, show how derisible is our freedom.

So great is the power of the tyrant, so total does its efficacy prove to be, that

² Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 116a–118a.

in the final analysis it is null, for the absolute on which this tyranny is exercised is but so much material exposed to violence. The substance forcibly seized upon by the tyrant is nowise a substance; there is no one in front of him. The tyrant has never commanded, has never acted; he has always been alone.

But what does remain free is the capacity to foresee one's own degradation, and arm oneself against it. Freedom consists in instituting outside of oneself an order of reason, in entrusting the rational to a written text, in resorting to institutions. Freedom, in its fear of tyranny, leads to institutions, to a commitment of freedom in the very name of freedom, to a State.

Freedom, as obedience to law, certainly is bound to the universality of maxims, but also to the incorruptibility of the exterior existence of law, whereby it is protected from subjective degradation, sheltered from feeling. The supreme work of freedom consists in guaranteeing freedom. It can only be guaranteed by setting up a world where it would be spared the ordeals of tyranny.

Let us remember Cephalus, at the beginning of the *Republic*, who sees in wealth the possibility of not committing injustice: he finds the possibility of being free outside of himself.³

To conceive of and to bring about a human order is to set up a just State, which then is the possibility of surmounting the obstacles that threaten freedom. It is the only way to preserve freedom from tyranny. One can, if one likes, scoff at this preoccupation with making permanent our privileged instants, acting like property-owners with them, but that is the sole possibility we can have of not abdicating.

Here then is our conclusion at this point: we must impose commands on ourselves in order to be free. But it must be an exterior command, not simply a rational law, not a categorical imperative, which is defenseless against tyranny; it must be an exterior law, a written law, armed with force against tyranny. Such are commands as the political condition for freedom.

But the commands of written law, the impersonal reason of institutions, despite their origin in free will, become in a certain way alien to the will, which is at every instant renewed. Institutions obey a rational order in which freedom no longer recognizes itself. The freedom of the present does not recognize itself in the guarantees that it has provided itself against its own degradation. The last will and testament drawn up with a lucid mind can no longer be binding on the testator who has survived. The will experiences the guarantees that it has provided against its own degradation as another tyranny.

One can, to be sure, declare this resistance of the will to its former decisions, and to the impersonal form they have taken on, to be unreasonable. The possibility of this contradiction of the will with itself, or, more exactly, of the former will with the present will, of the written law with my freedom, is clearly an admission of

³ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 331c.

unreason; but probably one cannot purely and simply identify the will with the order of impersonal reason.

The individual act of freedom which decided for impersonal reason does not itself result from impersonal reason. For no one wants to force another to accept the impersonal reason of the written text, unless out of tyranny. Were it done by persuasion, that would already presuppose the prior acceptance of impersonal reason.

At the beginning of the *Republic*, at the very beginning, before the persuasion begins, it is asked: would you be able to convince people who do not want to hear?⁴

Yet there is a sort of necessity for persuasion in favor of a coherent discourse. It is perhaps this persuasion, this reason prior to reason, that makes coherent discourse and impersonal reason human. Before placing themselves in an impersonal reason, is it not necessary that different freedoms be able to freely understand one another without this understanding being already present in the midst of that reason? Is there not a speech by which a will for what we call coherent speech is transmitted from freedom to freedom, from individual to individual? Does not impersonal discourse presuppose discourse in the sense of this face-to-face situation? In other words, is there not already between one will and another a relationship of command without tyranny, which is not yet an obedience to an impersonal law, but is the indispensable condition for the institution of such a law? Or again, does not the institution of a rational law as a condition for freedom already presuppose a possibility of direct understanding between individuals for the institution of that law?

This idea of a discourse before discourse, of a relationship between particulars prior to the institution of rational law, this attempt to bring someone into our discourse without doing so violently, is also something Plato alluded to, when Thrasymacus refuses to make a speech, refuses to talk at all, then consents to nod yes or no, and finally is drawn into the discussion by Socrates. And Socrates was happy to find Thrasymacus not just marking what Socrates was saying with a yes and a no.⁵ This situation, the condition for even the commands of the State, which in turn is the condition for freedom, is what we would like to describe now.

To do that, let us return to the analysis of tyrannical or violent action.

Violent action does not consist in being in a relationship with the other; it is in fact an action where one is as though one were alone. Violent action, which appears as direct action, immediate action, in fact has to be thought of as an action that does not touch the individuality of the one who receives the action, or does not touch his substance. Action on things, work, consists in finding the point of application where the object, by virtue of general laws to which its individuality is completely

⁴ Plato, *Republic* 331c.

⁵ Cf. *Republic* 350e and 351c.

reducible, will submit to the worker's will. Work neither finds nor seeks in the object anything strictly individual.

Violence applied to a free being is, taken in its most general sense, war. War surely does not differ from labor solely by virtue of the greater complexity of forces that have to be overcome, or by virtue of the unforeseeable character of those forces and of their composition; it differs also by a new attitude on the part of the agent with regard to his adversary. Is not the adversary himself recognized to be a freedom? But this freedom is an animal freedom, wild, faceless. It is not given to me in its face, which is a total resistance without being a force, but in my fear and in my courage which overcomes it. Courage is not an attitude that faces the other, but is an attitude concerning oneself. I do not face the freedom with which I struggle, but throw myself against it blindly. War is not the collision of two substances or two intentions, but an attempt made by one to master the other by surprise, by ambush. War is ambush. It is to take hold of the substance of the other, what is strong and absolute in him, through what is weak in him. War is looking for the Achilles's heel; it is to envisage the other, the adversary, with logistics calculations, like an engineer measuring the effort needed to demolish the enemy mass. The other becoming a mass is what describes the relationship of war, and in this it approximates the violence of labor.

In other words, what characterizes violent action, what characterizes tyranny, is that one does not face what the action is being applied to. To put it more precisely: it is that one does not see the face in the other, one sees the other freedom as a force, savage; one identifies the absolute character of the other with his force.

The face, the countenance, is the fact that a reality is opposed to me, opposed not in its manifestations, but as it were in its way of being, ontologically opposed. It is what resists me by its opposition and not what is opposed to me by its resistance. This means that this opposition is not revealed by its coming up against my freedom; it is an opposition prior to my freedom, which puts my freedom into action. It is not that to which I oppose myself, but what is opposed to me. It is an opposition inscribed in its presence before me. It does not at all follow my intervention; it opposes itself to me insofar as it turns to me.

The opposition of the face, which is not the opposition of a force, is not a hostility. It is a pacific opposition, but one where peace is not a suspended war or a violence simply contained. On the contrary, violence consists in ignoring this opposition, ignoring the face of a being, avoiding the gaze, and catching sight of an angle whereby the *no* inscribed on a face by the very fact that it is a face becomes a hostile or submissive force.

Violence is a way of acting on every being and every freedom by approaching it from an indirect angle. Violence is a way of taking hold of a being by surprise, of taking hold of it in its absence, in what is not properly speaking it. The relationship with things, the domination of things, this way of being over them, consists in fact in never approaching them in their individuality. The individuality of a thing, the

τόδε τι, that which is the designated and seems to alone exist, is in reality only accessible starting with generality, the universal, ideas and law. One grasps hold of a thing out of its concept.

Violence, which seems to be the direct application of force to a being, in fact denies that being all its individuality, by taking it as an element of its calculus, and as a particular case of a concept.

This way for sensible reality to present itself across its generality, to have a meaning not out of itself, but out of the relations which it maintains with all the other elements of representation, within a representation which has already taken in the world, is what we can call the form of this reality. The reality subjected to tyranny is an informed reality; it is already absent in the relationship the agent has with it. It is in the third person, hidden by that which represents it. Revelation or disclosure⁶ (according to the terminology of our time) gives us a phenomenal reality, that is, subjects it to us, gives it to us in the accusative case, as something already put in a category. Its particularity is already clothed with a generality. It is correct to say, with Hegel, that in the world of knowledge and action nothing is strictly individual. The *τόδε τι* is already in a system of relations.

But the direct relationship with a being is not the relationship with the *τόδε τι*, which comes to meet us in experience because we have designated it and situated it. It is that which puts us in contact with a being that is not simply uncovered, but divested of its form, of its categories, a being becoming naked, an unqualified substance breaking through its form and presenting a face.

This way for a being to break through its form, which is its apparition, is, concretely, its look, its aim. There is not first a breakthrough, and then a look; to break through one's form is precisely to look; the eyes are absolutely naked. A face has a meaning not by virtue of the relationships in which it is found, but out of itself; that is what *expression* is. A face is the presentation of an entity as an entity, its personal presentation. A face does not expose, nor does it conceal an entity.⁷ Over and beyond the disclosure and the dissimulation⁸ which characterize forms, a face is an expression, the existence of a substance, a thing in itself, *καθ' αὐτό*.⁹

For expression does not consist in presenting to a contemplative consciousness a

⁶ *Dévoilement* (disclosure) is the standard translation used by French phenomenologists (e.g., Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, pp. 12–16) of Heidegger's *entdecken* (*Sein und Zeit*, pp. 35–36, 87–88, 218–23, etc.).

⁷ The opposition of *découvrir* (expose, disclose) and *recouvrir* (conceal) reflects Heidegger's opposition of *entdecken* and *verdecken* (*Sein und Zeit*, pp. 35–36, 219, 222–26).

⁸ *Dissimulation* translates Heidegger's *verstellen*, which is connected with *verdecken*.

⁹ An expression used by Plato to designate an idea which, as the most true being, exists for and in itself (cf. *Phaedo* 100b: the beautiful, the good, the great *καθ' αὐτό*; *Republic* 475, 516b5, "the sun in and for itself"); the term is also used by Aristotle, who explains *τὸ καθ' αὐτό* as that which exists independently, in opposition to the accidental (cf. *Metaphysics* 1017a8–30, 1022a13–35). Cf. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 64–68.

sign which that consciousness interprets by going back to what is signified. What is expressed is not just a thought which animates the other; it is also the other present in that thought. Expression renders present what is communicated and the one who is communicating; they are both in the expression. But that does not mean that expression provides us with knowledge about the other. The expression does not speak about someone, is not information about a coexistence, does not invoke an attitude in addition to knowledge; expression invites one to speak to someone. The most direct attitude before a being $\kappa\alpha\theta' \alpha\nu\rho$ is not the knowledge one can have about him, but is social commerce with him.

The being that presents itself in expression already engages us in society, commits us to enter into society with him. The formal structure of the presence *of one to another* cannot be put as a simple multiplicity; it is subordination, an appeal from one to the other. The being that is present dominates, or breaks through its own apparition; it is an interlocutor. Beings which present themselves to one another subordinate themselves to one another. This subordination constitutes the first occurrence of a transitive relation between freedoms and, in this very formal sense, of command. One being commands another, but this is not simply because it embraces a whole, a system, nor is it already an exercise of tyranny.

Here is where expression differs from signs or symbols, which in narratives suggest by their revelation the mysterious and the hidden. Expression is not less, but more direct than intuition; it is the archetype of direct relationship. A veritable “phenomenology” of the noumenon¹⁰ is effected in expression. The encounter with a face is not only a fact belonging to anthropology. It is, absolutely, a relationship with that which is. Perhaps man \supset one is a substance, and therefore is a face.

We can bring out in still another way the originality of the encounter with a face, and the structure of command, the command prior to institutions, which this encounter articulates.

The absolute nakedness of a face, the absolutely defenseless face, without covering, clothing or mask, is what opposes my power over it, my violence, and opposes it in an absolute way, with an opposition which is opposition in itself. The being that expresses itself, that faces me, says *no* to me by his very expression. This *no* is not merely formal, but it is not the *no* of a hostile force or a threat; it is the impossibility of killing him who presents that face; it is the possibility of encountering a being through an interdiction. The face is the fact that a being affects us not in the indicative, but in the imperative, and is thus outside all categories.

The metaphysical relationship, the relationship with the exterior, is only possible as an ethical relationship. If the impossibility of killing were a real impossibility, if the alterity of the other were only the resistance of a force, his alterity would be no

¹⁰ The “for itself” of the $\kappa\alpha\theta' \alpha\nu\rho$ is thus linked to the meaning of the *an sich* of German idealism.

more exterior to me than that of nature which resists my energies, but which I come to account for by means of reason; it would be no more exterior than the world of perception which, in the final analysis, is constituted by me. The ethical impossibility of killing is a resistance made to me, but a resistance which is not violent, an intelligible resistance.

The light proper to expression, which enters into relationship with me through speech, this absoluteness of a thing in itself, revealed by the impossibility of murder, belongs neither to the order of the disclosure of forms, nor to that of irrational contact. It is rational, but with a rationality prior to all constitution. Expression is just this way of breaking loose, of coming toward us, yet without deriving its meaning from us, without being a work of our freedom. If a face is not *known*, that is not because it does not have meaning; it is not known because its relationship with us does not refer to its constitution and, to use Husserl's term, is prior to all *Sinngebung*.¹¹ This sense, this plenitude of meaning prior to any *Sinngebung*, but which is nonetheless a relationship enacted by understanding, a nonviolent relationship, describes the very structure of a created being.

I can be led without violence to the order of institutions and coherent discourse because beings have a meaning before I constitute this rational world along with them. Creation is the fact that intelligibility precedes me. It is just the contrary of the notion of *Geworfenheit*.¹² This is not a theological thesis; we reach the idea of creation out of the experience of a face.

To be in a relationship with a face, with expression, in a relationship with a being in itself, is then to situate oneself on the plane of a transitivity without violence which is that of creation. The order of creation is the order from which tyranny is excluded. And yet when one reaches it – and one has reached it in discovering a face – one has already denied that every exteriority must first have been immanent, that every past must have been present, that every command is an autonomy, and every teaching a reminiscence. If a signification preexists me or is exterior to me (and the infinite resistance to murder in a face is this signification independent of *Sinngebung*), and if I can be in a relationship with the meaning that comes from it, that is, which is expressed, then the primary fact of a relationship with tyranny is command.

When one sets up freedoms alongside of one another like forces which affirm one another in negating one another, one ends up with war, where each limits the others. They inevitably contest or are ignorant of one another, that is, exercise but violence and tyranny. Plato has shown that the tyrant is neither free, nor happy.

¹¹ Cf. E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, trans. F. Kersten, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), pp. 203ff, 294–95.

¹² Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), §38.

This order of tyranny and exteriority can be replaced by a rational order where the relations between separate wills are reduced to the common participation of wills in reason, which is not exterior to wills. This is the State. It is the interiorization of external relations. “Every one had better be ruled by divine wisdom dwelling within him; or, if this be impossible, then by an external authority, in order that we may be all, as far as possible, under the same government, friends and equals.”¹³ Likewise in the myth of Er of Pamphyly¹⁴ the simple fact of having lived in a well-governed State does not keep one from making a bad choice, and it is philosophy, that is, the divine wisdom dwelling within us, that makes us immune to tyranny.

We find here expressed a necessity of an order without tyranny in order to ensure freedom. Despite its apparent action and freedom, tyranny is seen to be neither action nor freedom. The struggle against the myths of a tyrannical religion in Books II and III of the *Republic* leads, in Book X¹⁵, to freeing human action from the gods and from fate, limiting necessity to the responsibility which derives from choice, and leaving the order in which choices are made to chance, without this resulting in the least impediment to the freedom of choice. The struggle against the prestige of incantatory art, in Book VIII, and the denunciation of poetry aim at the violence and tyranny involved in them. All these Platonic teachings constitute an absolutely valid part of the political solution of the problem of action and freedom.

But the subordination of the will to impersonal reason, to discourse in itself, to written laws, requires discourse as the encounter of man with man. In the light of a face we have sought to bring out the relationship that is nontyrannical, and yet transitive. We have sought to set forth exteriority, the other, as that which is nowise tyrannical and makes freedom possible, opposes us because it turns itself toward us. This exteriority is beyond the violence of brutality, but also that of incantation, ecstasy and love. One could call this situation religion, the situation where outside of all dogmas, all speculation about the divine or – God forbid – about the sacred and its violences, one speaks to the other. We have taken the position that commanding is speech, or that the true speech, speech in its essence, is commanding.

¹³ *Republic* 590d. Trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937).

¹⁴ Cf. *Republic* 566d–566a, 576c ff.

¹⁵ *Republic* 614b ff.

CHAPTER 3

THE EGO AND THE TOTALITY*

1. The Problem: The Ego in the Totality, or Innocence

A particular being can take itself to be a totality only if it is thoughtless. Not that it is deceiving itself or thinking badly or foolishly; it is not thinking. We do of course see the freedom or violence of individuals. For us thinking beings, who have knowledge of the totality and situate every particular being relative to it, and seek a meaning for the spontaneity of violence, this freedom seems to give evidence of individuals who confuse their particularity with the totality. This confusion in individuals is not thought, but life. A being that has life in the totality exists as a totality, lives as though it occupied the center of being and were its source, as though it drew everything from the here and now, in which it was nonetheless put or created. For it the forces that traverse it are already forces assumed; it experiences them as already integrated into its needs and its enjoyment. What a thinking being perceives as exteriority that calls for work and appropriation, a living being as such experiences as its substance, consubstantial with it, essentially immediate, an element and a vital medium. This – in the philosophical sense of the term – *cynical*¹ behavior of a living being we find also in man – through abstraction, to be sure, since thought has already transfigured life in concrete man. It figures as the relation one has with nourishment, in the very general sense that every enjoyment enjoys something, a “something” whose independence has been taken away. The being that is assumed by a living being, the assimilable – are nutriments.²

A simply living being is thus in ignorance of the exterior world. Not with an ignorance which marks the frontiers of the known, but with an absolute ignorance,

* “The Ego and the Totality” was published in French in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 59 (1954): pp. 353–73.

The notes in this chapter have been added by Professor Adrian Peperzak, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ The *Cynici*, members of the philosophical school founded by Antisthenes (who died in 336 B.C.), led a “dog’s” life, alien to culture, the State, and the customs of the accepted morality.

² Cf. Levinas’s analyses of life, nourishment, and enjoyment in *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 43ff; *Le temps et l’autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), pp. 40–52; and *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), pp. 110–51.

due to the absence of thought. The senses bring it nothing, or supply it only with sensations. It is its sensations: a statue is the rose smell.³ Sensibility, which is the very consciousness of a living being, is not a thought which is confused; it is not thought at all. Therein lies the basic truth of the sensualist philosophies, which survives the criticism which Husserlians made of them; sensation is not the sensation of a sensed. And that is perhaps why Husserl himself remained faithful to an element of sensualism in persistently maintaining, in the midst of intentional analysis, the notion of “hydatic data.”⁴ Therein resides also the eternal truth of the Cartesian thesis that affirms the purely utilitarian character of sensibility, and takes a sensible datum to be radically relative to a subject. The useful is a being that is sensed, taken up by life. The confusion and obscurity of sensibility contrast with the clarity in which a horizon opens.⁵ The adventure of a living being is stated in it in terms of intimacy (if the term state can still be meaningful here) – like the snowstorm in “The Goldrush,” which threatens to push Charlie Chaplin’s cabin down into the chasm below, is for Charlie, closed up in that cabin without windows upon the world, reduced to disturbances of equilibrium inside. If, on the floor, already a physicist, he gropingly studies the elementary laws of those shaken balances, and rejoins the world, it is precisely because he thinks.

A living being as such is then not without consciousness, but it has a consciousness without problems, that is, without exteriority; it has a purely inner world whose center it occupies. This consciousness is not concerned with situating itself relative to an exteriority, does not grasp itself as part of a whole (for it precedes all grasping); it is a consciousness without consciousness to which the term the unconscious (which covers over no fewer contradictions) or instinct corresponds. The inwardness which, for a thinking being, is opposed to exteriority, occurs in a living being as an absence of exteriority. There is nothing mysterious in the identity of a living being throughout its history: it is essentially the same, the same determining every other, without the other ever determining it.⁶ If the other did determine it, if exteriority were to strike it, it would kill this instinctual being. A living being lives under the sign of Freedom or Death.

³ “La statue est odeur de rose” is, according to information given us by Levinas, a quotation from the *Treatise on the Sensations* by E.B. de Condillac (1715–1780), one of the leading figures of sensualism.

⁴ Cf. E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), pp. 237–39. Levinas’s commentary can be found in his dissertation *The Theory of Intuition in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, trans. André Oriol (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) pp. 76–85, 88ff, and in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), pp. 118–21 and 145–62.

⁵ Cf. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), pp. 41–42. On sensibility, cf. pp. 18, 70–72, 84.

⁶ The opposition of the Same and the Other goes back to the Platonic pair of concepts *ταὐτόν* and *τὸ ἄτοπον* (or *θάτερόν*). See *Sophist* 254c–256b; *Timaeus* 35ab and *Theaetetus* 185c.

Thought begins at the very point that consciousness becomes conscious of its particularity, that is, conceives of the exteriority which lies beyond its nature qua living being and encloses it; when it becomes self-conscious at the same time that it becomes conscious of the exteriority that lies beyond its nature – when it becomes metaphysical. Thought establishes a relationship with an exteriority which is not assumed. Qua thinker man is the one for whom the exterior world exists. From that moment on, his so-called biological life, his strictly inward life, is illuminated with thought. The object of need, which is henceforth an external object, transcends utility. Desire recognizes the desirable in an exotic world. Bergson's expression, "instinct illuminated by intellect"⁷ (here setting aside Bergson's particular theory concerning reason), designates a transformation which self-consciousness brings to biological consciousness, which is blind to exteriority. This central existence, welcoming every exteriority in function of its own inwardness, but capable of conceiving an exteriority as something foreign to the inward system, and of representing to itself an exteriority that is not yet assumed, makes a life of labor possible. Thought does not spring forth from labor and the will; it is not the same as labor interrupted or will neutralized; labor and will rest on thought. The positing of man, the rational animal, in being is brought about as will and labor. Rational animal cannot mean an animal saddled with reason; the interpenetration of the terms indicates an original structure.

The inward system of instinct can run up against exteriority as against a completely unassimilable obstacle which sends the system to its death. In this sense death would be a radical transcendence. But exteriority can have no significance for instinct, since its entry into this system means the disappearance of vital consciousness. The relationship between instinct and exteriority is not a type of knowledge, but death. Through death a living being enters the totality, but no longer thinks anything. In thinking, a being which situates itself in the totality is not absorbed into it. It exists in relationship with a totality, but remains here,⁸ separated from the totality – me.

How then is this situation of being simultaneously a position in the totality, and a reserve with respect to it or a separation, brought about? What can a relationship with an exteriority which remains non-assumed in this relationship mean? Such is the problem of the ego and of totality which we wish to raise. It is the very problem of innocence. It is not resolved by simply affirming separation between free beings – since innocence involves a relationship between beings and engagement in a totality. Innocence is not a sovereign inward state. For exteriority to be able to present itself to me, it, as exteriority, must overflow the "terms" of vital consciousness, but at the same time, as present, it must not be fatal to consciousness. This penetration of a total system into a partial system which cannot

⁷ Cf. H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1937), pp. 146–48.

⁸ The I is a "here and now," *róde τι*, not an instance of a general idea "I;" Cf *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 194, n. 9.

assimilate it is a miracle. The possibility of thought is the consciousness of a miracle, or wonder. This miracle breaks up biological consciousness; it has an intermediary ontological status, between the lived and thought. It is the *beginning* of thought, or *experience*. As thought begins, it finds itself before the miracle of facts. The structure of facts as distinct from ideas lies in this miracle. Thought then is not simply reminiscence, but always cognition of the new.

But the miracle does not explain the beginning of thought; it already presupposes it. One cannot *deduce* thought from biological consciousness. For the miracle to hold the attention of vital consciousness, for an event such as attention to first be able to appear in this consciousness, it must already have been in relationship with the whole, and this relationship must be not reducible to absorption by the whole, or death. The *a posteriori* of facts refers to the *a priori* of a thought. This *a priori* cannot be a foreknowledge of the facts themselves. It must on the one hand consist in the thinking individual positing himself in the totality, so as to be part of it – in defining himself,⁹ that is, situating himself with respect to other parts, in acquiring his identity from what distinguishes him from the other parts with which he is compromised; but, at the same time, it must consist in remaining outside, in not coinciding with his concept, acquiring his identity not from his place in the whole (from his character, work, or heritage), but from *himself* – in being *me*. The individuality of the ego is distinguished from every given individuality by the fact that its identity is not constituted by what distinguishes it from others, but by its self-reference. The totality in which a thinking being is situated is not a pure and simple addition of beings, but an addition of beings which do not make up a number with one another. That is what is distinctive of society alone. The simultaneity of participation and non-participation is an existence which moves between guilt and innocence, between ascendancy over others, the betrayal of oneself, and the return to oneself. This relationship of an individual with the totality which thought is, in which the ego takes account of what is not itself and yet is not dissolved into it, presupposes that the totality is manifested not as a milieu that as it were only brushes up against the skin of a living being, as the element in which it is immersed, but is manifested as a face in which a being confronts me. This relationship of both participation and separation which marks the advent of, and the *a priori* proper to, thought, in which the bonds between the parts are constituted only by the freedom of the parts, is a society, is beings that speak, that face one another. Thought begins with the possibility of conceiving a freedom external to my own. Conceiving of a freedom external to my own is the first thought. It marks my very presence in the world. The world of perception manifests a face: things affect us as *possessed* by the other. Pure nature, when it does not attest to the glory of God, when it is no one's, indifferent and inhuman nature, is situated on the fringes of this human

⁹ To define (cf. Aristotle's *ορίζειν* and *ορισμός*) is to locate a being within a horizon or circumscription, to draw a line around it, to circumscribe, determine and encompass or comprehend it.

world, and is only understandable as such on the plane of the human world of property. Things qua things derive their first independence from the fact that they do not belong to me; and they do not belong to me because I am in relationship with those men from whom they come. Then the relationship of the ego with the totality is a relationship with human beings whose faces I recognize. Before them I am guilty or innocent. The condition that is necessary for there to be thought is a conscience.

The problem of the relationship between the ego and the totality thus comes down to that of describing the moral conditions for thought. They are realized – such is our thesis – in the work of economic justice. We wish to show how the work of economic justice is not an enterprise determined by the contingencies of a history which has turned out badly, but that it articulates the relationships which make possible a totality of beings external to the totality, their aptitude for innocence, and their presence to each other. The work of economic justice is then not a prelude to spiritual existence, but already accomplishes it (sections 4 and 5). But first we shall have to see why love does not fulfill this condition, and how the impersonal and coherent discourse which is substituted for it destroys the singularity and the life of spiritual beings (sections 2 and 3).

2. The Third Man¹⁰

Guilt and innocence presuppose a being, an ego, which does not coincide with the totality of being, since it is guilty or innocent with respect to the other, or at least with respect to a principle which transcends the ego; but they also presuppose a free ego, which consequently is equivalent to the totality, or separates itself radically from a totality of which it is a part. And guilt and innocence presuppose that a free being can injure a free being, and undergo the repercussions of the wrong it has caused; the separation of free beings in the midst of totality remains therefore incomplete.

The ontological schema offered by the revealed religions – an ego in relationship with a transcendent God – reconciles these contradictions. It maintains the insufficiency of the human being, as well as its character of being a totality, or being a freedom. Guilt or innocence are taken to be only conceivable with respect to God, who is exterior to this world where man is everything. The transcendence of a condescending God ensures both separation and relationship. In addition, the divine pardon restores its initial integrity to the ego at fault, and guarantees its sovereignty, which will thus be unalterable.

¹⁰ An ironic allusion to Aristotle's argument of the "third man" against Plato's hypostatization of the Ideas. Cf. *Metaphysics* 990b17, 991a2–5, 1032a2–6, 1059b3, 1079a13. Cf. also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans, Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 377.

But religions have lost their guiding role in modern consciousness. They have not done so because of their mysterious dogmas, eroded away by reason, or their incomprehensible and shocking practices, such as magic. Neither the "mystification of priests" nor the moral inefficacy of rites, which the Age of Enlightenment denounced, have sufficiently shaken the religiosity of souls. By a path which some call mysterious, but which obeys, if not logic, at least a psychological necessity, pious souls are returning to the historically constituted religions. When they create for themselves an individual religion, they live off of the wreckage of shipwrecked churches, like Robinson Crusoe who achieves independence on his island only thanks to the rifles and casks of gunpowder he recovered from his lost ship.

But does modern consciousness recognize itself in the pious soul? An important part of humanity no longer finds in religion or in religiosity the way of spiritual life. Not that they feel themselves to be less guilty than past generations; they feel themselves to be guilty in a different way. The fault which weighs on them does not find its pardon in piety – or, more exactly, the evil which weighs on them does not belong to the order of pardon. What matters, then, the existence or non-existence of God, the interest in or the indifference of God toward men! The goodness to which religion urges men does not achieve the Good, and the purification it proposes no longer washes clean.

The fault that can be pardoned, separated from all magical signification, is either intentional, or turns out upon analysis to have been intentional. Whence the primary value given to the examination of conscience. But pardon presupposes, above all, that the one wronged received all the evil of the wrong, and consequently disposes completely of the right to pardon. By contrast with mystical fault, committed by the involuntary violation of a taboo, the idea of an intentional fault, open to pardon, represents a definite spiritual advance. But the conditions for legitimate pardon are only realized in a society of beings that are totally present to each other, in an *intimate society*. Such is a society of beings which have chosen each other, but have done so in such a way as to keep a hand on all the ins and outs of the society. Such a truly intimate society is in its autarchy quite like the false totality of the ego. In fact, such a society is dual, a society of me and you. We are just among ourselves. Third parties are excluded. A third man essentially disturbs this intimacy: the wrong I did to you I can recognize to have proceeded entirely from my intentions; but this recognition is then found to be objectively falsified by reason of your relations with *him*, which remain hidden from me, since I am in my turn excluded from the unique privilege of your intimacy. If I recognize the wrong I did you, I can, even by my act of repentance, injure the third person.

Hence my intention does not measure exactly the meaning of my act. Limited to the intimate society, faced with the only freedom which the act concerned, I could, in dialogue, receive absolution for it. The ego, in dialogue, would thus recover, be it only after the fact, through pardon, its solitary sovereignty. The ego, capable of forgetting its past and renewing itself, but which by its action creates the irreparable,

would through the pardon be liberated from this last shackle to freedom, since the only victim of its act would or could consent to forget it. Absolved, the ego would become again absolute. But the violence undergone by a victim who is capable of annulling it is not properly speaking violence; it does not encroach upon the offended freedom, which, as quasi-divine, retains wholly its power to absolve. Violence in intimate society offends, but does not wound. It is beyond, or on this side of, justice and injustice. Justice and injustice presuppose a violence exercised on a freedom, a real wound; they reside in the work effected and not in the thoughts which would be pious or impious, in the hold on a freedom and not in respect or disrespect. The intimate society which makes pardon possible frees the will from the weight of the acts which escape it and engage it, and through which, in a real society, every will runs the risk of self-alienation.

Posited in a configuration of wills which concern one another through their works, but which look at one another in the face – in a true society – I act in a sense that escapes me. The objective meaning of my action overrides its intentional signification; I am properly speaking no longer an *I*, I am the bearer of a fault which is not reflected in my intentions. I am objectively guilty, and my piety cannot cleanse me of this. “I did not will that” is the paltry excuse with which the “*I*,” which holds itself back in the intimate society where it was fully free, continues to exculpate itself of a fault that is unpardonable not because it exceeds pardon, but because it does not belong to the order of pardon. The pious soul can, to be sure, suffer from its social guilt, but since this differs from the wrong which *I* commit with respect to *you*, it is reconciled with a “good conscience.” Conscience torments the pious conscience only with a secondary torment. One is healed of it after a fashion by charity, the love of the neighbor who knocks at the door, alms given to the poor, philanthropy, or an action undertaken for the first one to come along.

One could legitimately accept pardon only if the other is God or a saint. The emotion in society that founds a society that is master of all its ins and outs is love. To love is to exist as though the lover and the beloved were alone in the world. The intersubjective relationship of love is not the beginning, but the negation of society. And in that there is, to be sure, an indication of its essence. Love is the ego satisfied by the *you*, apprehending in the other the justification of its being. The presence of the other exhausts the content of such a society. The affective warmth of love brings about the consciousness of this satisfaction, contentment, plenitude found outside of, and eccentric to, oneself. The society formed by love is a dual society, a society of solitudes, excluding universality. The universality of love can only be built up in time, by means of successive infidelities, or by the change of friends. The love of the neighbor depends on chance proximity; it is hence love of one being to the detriment of another, always privilege even if it is not preference. The morality of respect presupposes the morality of love. Love makes blind the respect which is impossible without blindness toward the third person and is only a pious intention oblivious of the real evil.

We cannot, of course, act from day to day approaching our neighbor as though he were alone in the world; the cobbler makes shoes without asking his client where he is going, the physician gives freely of his medical skills to the sick person that turns up, the priest comforts whatever soul in distress comes to him for help. And we do not put into this activity our concern for justice – except for being assured that the general laws of society are just, and that all effects of our action on third persons have been allowed for in the conditions where our everyday acts will be done. Respect and love of the neighbor, as they are imposed by religion, belong to our private activities, and do not make innocence, in the etymological sense of the word, possible.

The love which contemporary religious thought, cleared of magical notions, has promoted to the rank of the essential situation of religious existence, does not then contain the social reality. Society inevitably involves the existence of a third party. The real you is not the beloved, detached from the others; he presents himself in a different situation. The crisis of religion in contemporary spiritual life is due to the consciousness that society goes beyond the confines of love, that a third party is wounded as he witnesses amorous dialogue, and that the society of love itself does him wrong. The lack of universality is not here due to a lack of generosity, but is due to the intimate essence of love. All love – unless it becomes judgment and justice – is the love of a couple. The couple is a closed society.¹¹

The crisis of religion thus comes from the impossibility of isolating oneself with God and forgetting all who remain outside of the amorous dialogue. The true dialogue is elsewhere. One can, to be sure, conceive the isolation with God to include the totality, but unless one gives to this affirmation a mystical or sacramental sense,¹² the notion of God and of his worship will have to be developed starting with the inescapable necessities of a society that contains third parties. (It is not certain that this has never been attempted). God would then not appear as the correlate of the ego in an amorous and exclusive intimacy, nor as a Presence in which the universe would be engulfed, and from whom would flow an infinite source of pardon. He would be the fixed point exterior to society, from which the law comes. This is not to make him the allegorical personification of my conscience. Is there a conscience before the *we* has been uttered? Is it certain that conscience can be separated from a command received, a certain heteronomy, a relationship

¹¹ H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesly Brereton (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1935), pp. 30–34 opposes “closed society” and “open society;” Levinas is here arguing against a Christian defense of charity and love, and also against Bergson, for whom love coincides with the deepest *élan* of the creative evolution (cf. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, pp. 256–58).

¹² A sense rejected by Levinas because of its affinity with participation in primitive religions and pagan myths. Cf. his “Lévy-Bruhl et la philosophie contemporaine” in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger*, 147 (1957), pp. 556–69.

with another, with exteriority? The other and exteriority do not necessarily mean tyranny and violence. *The exteriority of discourse is an exteriority without violence.* The absolute which supports justice is the absolute status of the interlocutor. His modality of being and of manifesting himself consist in turning his face to me, in being a face. That is why the absolute is a person. To isolate one being from the midst of others, and to be isolated with him in the equivocal secrecy of the between-us, does not ensure the radical exteriority of the absolute. Only the unimpeachable and severe witness inserting himself “between us,” and by his speech making public our private clandestinity, an exacting mediator between man and man, faces, and is you. This is not at all a theological thesis; yet God could not be God without first having been this interlocutor.

Here we find ourselves far from the royal road of traditional piety. For traditional piety experiences the wound inflicted on man as convertible into an outrage against God, and then as capable of being effaced in a sociality of love, where the ego, master of his intentions, is satisfied with a pardon. But the social wrong is something committed without my knowledge, against a multitude of third parties whom I will never face, whom I will never find in the face of God, and for whom God cannot answer. The intention cannot accompany the action to its last prolongations, which the ego nonetheless knows that it is responsible for.

Thus, the multiplicity in which the relationship with a third person is situated is not a contingent fact, a simple empirical multiplicity, the fact that a substance characterized as me is produced in the world in a number of examples, creating for the autonomous ego one practical problem among others. The relationship with a third party, responsibility that extends beyond the scope of the intention, characterizes essentially subjective existence which is capable of discourse. The ego is in relationship with a human totality. From here comes the notion of earthly morality in the strong sense; it does not consist in shutting life up in the here below and in the pure and simple contempt for any supernatural destiny. It does not limit the horizon, but moves in a horizon different from that of supernatural salvation, which love, detached from all those who are absent, prefigures. Earthly morality invites one into the difficult detour that leads to third parties that have remained outside of love. Justice alone satisfies its need for purity. In a sense this amounts to saying that dialogue is called upon to play a privileged role in the work of social justice. But it cannot resemble the intimate society, and it is not the emotion of love that constitutes it. The law has priority over charity. Man is also in this sense a political animal.

This conclusion is paradoxical; the certainty that the relationship with a third party resembles neither my own intimacy with myself nor the love of a neighbor compromises, we shall see, the very status of man as an irreplaceable singularity, which is, however, presupposed by every aspiration to innocence. Did we not begin by affirming the absolute singularity of man, to the point of denying that anyone has the right to answer for and to pardon for another? But if fault is no longer

something that can be measured by an examination of conscience, man qua inwardness loses all importance. Fault is determined on the basis of a universal law, and consists in the wrong caused rather than in the disrespect. We are then not what we are conscious of being, but are the role we are playing in a drama where we are no longer the actors, figures or instruments of an order that is foreign to the plane of our intimate society, an order which is perhaps governed by an intelligence, but one which in our consciousness is only revealed by its ruses. Then no one can find the law for his action in the depths of his heart. The impass of liberalism is in this exteriority of my consciousness to itself. The subject of the faults awaits the meaning of his being from the outside; he is no longer the man who confesses his sins, but the one who acquiesces to the accusations. The distrust of introspection and of self-analysis in our psychology is perhaps only the consequence of the crisis of love and religion; it follows from the discovery of the veritable social dimension.

The consciousness of oneself outside of oneself confers a primordial function on language, which links us with the outside. It also leads to the destruction of language. We can no longer speak. Not because we no longer have an interlocutor, but because we can no longer take his words seriously, and because his inwardness is purely epiphenomenal. We are not content with his revelations, which we take for superficial data, a deceptive appearance that does not know it is lying. No one is identical with himself. Beings do not have identity; faces are masks. Behind the faces which speak to us and to which we speak we look for the clockwork of a soul and its microscopic springs. Sociologists, we investigate social laws, as so many intersideral influences which the winks and smiles of the other obey; philologists and historians, we will deny even that anyone can be the author of his discourse. It is not only speech that psychoanalysis and history demolish in this way; in reality they end up with the destruction of the *I*, which identifies itself from within. The reflection of the *cogito* can no longer arise to ensure certainty about what I am, and can barely do so to ensure the certainty of my very existence. This existence, which is tributary of recognition by another, and insignificant without it, apprehends itself as a reality without reality; it becomes purely phenomenal. Psychoanalysis casts a basic suspicion on the most unimpeachable testimony of self-consciousness. That the clear and distinct consciousness of what was formerly called a psychological fact is now taken to be only the symbolism for a reality that is totally inaccessible to itself, and that it expresses a social reality or a historical influence totally distinct from its own intention, is what voids the very return of the *cogito*. So the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon can even be introduced into the domain of self-consciousness. The *cogito* then loses its value as a foundation. One can no longer reconstruct reality on the basis of elements which are taken to be independent of any point of view and undefeatable by consciousness, and would thus make philosophical knowledge possible.

I am as it were shut up in my own portrait. It is characteristic of contemporary polemics that it draws up the portrait of the adversary, rather than combat his

arguments. To philology (whose abuses Plato had denounced already in the *Phaedrus*) which before someone who speaks asks only “Who is he?” and “From what country does he come?”,¹³ there is now added the painter’s art which reduces the other’s speech and action to a mute and immobile image.¹⁴ When, in a movement of sincerity one rises up against an abuse or an injustice, one runs the risk of looking like the portrait of an incorrigible protestor. The recursive process is infinite: one should then have to draw the portrait of the portraitist and to undertake the psychoanalysis of the psychoanalyst. The real world is transformed into a poetic world, that is, into a world without beginning in which one thinks without knowing what one thinks.

To a person-to-person discourse, taken now to be impossible because it would always be determined by what conditions the interlocutors, there is then opposed a discourse that takes account of its conditions, is absolutely coherent, and supplies the condition for the conditions. It is a discourse without interlocutors, for the interlocutors themselves figure in it as “moments”. Linking them up to the universality of an impersonal reason, it would suppress the alterity of the interlocutor (which is irrational inasmuch as it is other) and the alterity of the I who speaks (who in his ipseity still distinguishes himself as other from the discourse he carries on). A reason cannot be other for a reason.

But such a discourse, expressing the coherence of concepts, presupposes that the existence of the interlocutors is summed up in concepts. Only at this price can a man become a “moment” of his own discourse. And such is the man reduced to his achievements, reflected in his works, and the one that has passed away, is dead, is reflected in it totally. The impersonal discourse is a necrological discourse. A man is reduced to his legacy and absorbed into the totality of the common patrimony. The power which when alive he exercised over his work (and not only through his work) – man in his essential cynicism¹⁵ – is wiped out. A man becomes, not, to be sure, a thing, but a dead soul. This is not reification; it is history. History judges posterity, those who are absent, with a judgment that can no longer change anything, the judgment of those who are not yet born on those who are dead. To seek for the ego as a singularity within a totality made up of the relationships between singularities which cannot be subsumed under a concept is to ask whether a living man does not have the power to judge the history in which he is engaged, that is, whether the thinker as an ego, over and beyond all that he does *with* what he possesses, creates and leaves, does not have the substance of a cynic.

¹³ *Phaedrus* 275bc.

¹⁴ *Phaedrus* 275d.

¹⁵ The Cynics did away with all works and all culture (such was Diogenes, living in a barrel), The Cynic thus gives witness of his individuality, which is more than the sum of his cultural achievements. When man is reduced to his works, the cynical essence of man disappears.

3. The Ego as a Singularity

As the manifestation of a reason, language awakens in me and in the other what is common to us. But in its expressive intention it presupposes our alterity and our duality. It is enacted between beings, between substances which do not enter into their remarks, but put them forth. The transcendence of the interlocutor and the access to the other by way of language make manifest that man is a singularity. This singularity is not that of individuals which are subsumed under a concept, or which articulate its moments. The ego is ineffable, above all because it speaks; it responds and is responsible. The other purely as interlocutor is not a content known and qualified, apprehendable on the basis of some general idea which governs it. He faces, referring only to himself. In speech between singular beings, the interindividual signification of beings and things, that is, universality, is first constituted.

To the ego as an entity there corresponds no concept. That is why the framework of the “experience” of the other could not be drawn out by a work of abstraction applied to oneself, which would yield the “concept” of the ego. The philosophers of *Einfühlung* at least knew that the “experience” of the other cannot be obtained by a simple “variation” of the self and the projection of one of those variants outside of oneself. They were looking for an irreducible way of access to the you, and when they located it in sympathy and love¹⁶ they were in the end stating that each encounter begins a new amorous adventure. Don Juan never repeated the same experience. The singularity of the ego or of the you are then not like the singularity of a sense datum. The particularity of the ego, its personality, does not sum up its individuation by space and time. Its individuation *here* and *now* first make it possible for space and time to take on significance, starting with the here and now. It both situates and is situated, without being reducible to the *knowing* of a situation. Its work of individuation coincides with its subjectivity as an individual. Ipseity consists in this coincidence. Knowing would already presuppose the ego. All knowing of the *here* is already a knowing for me who am here. Knowing is founded on ipseity; it does not constitute it. The self-reference in this prereflective knowing does indeed take form as a universal structure of the ego, but we will say, with Jean Wahl, that if an intention is common to all egos, the *intentum* of this intention is absolutely particular. To be sure, the ego knows itself as reflected by all the objective reality it has constituted, or in which it has collaborated; it thus knows itself on the basis of a conceptual reality. But if this conceptual reality exhausted his being, a living man would not be different from a dead man. Generalization is death; it inserts the ego into, and dissolves it in, the generality of its work. The irreplaceable singularity of the ego is due to its life.

¹⁶ Cf. Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970).

The totality in which the ego, detached from the amorous dialogue, finds itself engaged can then not be interpreted as a universal order in which the ipseity of beings is absorbed, consumed, or sublimated (almost in the sense physics gives this term) into their social position. Neither a simple addition of individuals belonging to the extension of a concept nor a configuration of moments constituting or realizing the comprehension of the concept man, the totality is not reducible to a kingdom of ends. For how could reasons constitute a kingdom? How would even this multiplicity be possible? How can one speak of their equality or of their inequality, where the word identity alone is appropriate? Inasmuch as the totality implies multiplicity, it is not instituted between reasons, but between substantial beings, capable of maintaining relationships. What can this relationship be, since no conceptual bond preexists this multiplicity? And what can injustice or justice mean when the individuals, like the different meanings of being in Aristotle,¹⁷ do not involve the unity of a concept, and when the standard of justice cannot be derived from a simple comparison of individuals? The totality rests on a relationship between individuals which is different from the respect for a reason; just what it is is what we shall have to bring out. The ontological status of the ego as a third party gives us a glimpse into its nature.

4. The Status of the Third Party, and Economy

Between the conception in which the ego reaches the other in pure respect (based on sympathy and love) but is detached from the third party, and that which converts us to a singularization of the concept man, where an individual in the extension of that concept is subject to the legislation of an impersonal reason, there is a third way to understand the totality as a totality of egos which are without conceptual unity but in relationship with each other.

It is requisite for this totality that a free being could have a hold on another free being. If the violation of one free being by another is injustice, the totality can be constituted only through injustice. But injustice could not occur in the society of love, where pardon annuls it. There is real, that is, unpardonable, injustice only with respect to a third party. The third party is the free being whom I can wrong by constraining his freedom. The totality is constituted through the other qua third party.

Yet injustice involves a metaphysical paradox: it can only aim at a free being, which as such does not lay itself open to violence. What meaning then can freedom have, such that the third party, injustice, and totality are possible?

Freedom presents itself, in the first analysis, in the shape of a will impervious to influence. In courage, by accepting death, the will finds its full independence. He

¹⁷ *Metaphysics* 1003a33 ff, τὸ δὲ λέγεται πολλαχῶς.

who has accepted death refuses an alien will to the very end – unless the other desires that very death. The acceptance of death then does not enable one to put forth definitive resistance to the murderous will of another. The absolute disagreement with an alien will does not exclude the fulfillment of his intentions. The refusal of the other, the will resolved to die, thereby breaking every relationship with the exterior, cannot prevent its work from being inscribed in that alien accounting, which the will defies – and recognizes – by its supreme courage. The will, even in the extreme case where it resolves on death, is thus inscribed in the designs of an alien will. Its result puts the will at the mercy of an alien will.

The will does not then hold on to all the meaning of its own willing. Though it be the free subject of this willing, it exists as the plaything of a fate which transcends it. Through its work it involves an unforeseeable signification which others give it when they put the work, detached from its author, into a new context. Fate does not precede that decision, but is posterior to it; fate is history. A will enters into history because *it exists in separating itself from itself*: in willing for itself, it finds that it has also willed for others. This alienation owes nothing to history; it institutes history, it is an ontological alienation. At the same time it is the first injustice. Because of this injustice, persons form, around works they quarrel over, a totality. To exist producing works from which the productive will absents itself constitutes the status of a being which, so to speak, does not keep its hands on all the meaning of its being. As a will productive of works, freedom, without being limited in its willing, enters into a history of which it is a plaything. The limitation of the will here is not within it (the will in man is as infinite as it is in God), does not lie in the willing of the will, but lies in its situation. In this situation in which a freedom, without in any way abdicating, nonetheless receives a meaning which remains alien to it, we recognize a created being. The multiplicity of egos is not an accident, but is the structure of creation. The possibility of injustice is the only possibility of limitation on freedom, and is the condition for a totality to take form.

The evident injustice of that history lies in the possibility of depriving the will of its work. In each of its products, without dying completely, without entering obligingly into the history which historians, that is, the survivors, recount, it is separated from its work and becomes unrecognizable by its contemporaries. Every work is in this sense abortive. In this a work differs from expression, in which the other personally presents himself; a work presents its author in the absence of the author. It does not only present him inasmuch as it is his effect, but inasmuch as it is his possession. One has to take account of the worker when one takes over the work; one has to take it or purchase it from him. Through steel or gold, things among things, I then have power over the freedom of the other, while recognizing that freedom which qua freedom excludes any passivity through which the other's power could be taken hold of. The will productive of works is a freedom that betrays itself. Through this betrayal society, the totality made up of freedoms both maintained in their singularity and engaged in a totality, is possible. The ego's

relationship with a totality is then essentially economic. “Earthly morality” is rightly suspicious of every relationship between beings which has not first been an economic relationship. The relationship between freedoms is in the last instance based on the ambiguity of the will, simultaneously being and having, a being which is in possession of itself and is exterior to its possession, but is caught up by it and betrays itself through it.

That means that the ontological structure of the third party takes shape as a body: both as the will’s “I can,” lived body, and its vulnerability, physiological body. The simultaneity of these two moments, the “I can” turning into a thing, constitutes the mode of existence of the third party. His existence is health and illness. It is concretely revealed in suffering, which is incapable of overcoming itself inwardly, and from within is bent toward external mediation. The physician’s practice, already from the time of the first meditations of the Greek sages, gives lie to the autarchy of the will. Before the physician the will divests itself of its “being for itself” in a strange acknowledgment of being a pure thing, and returns to the immediacy of nature. Injustice is not reducible to an offense against the will attacked in its dignity. The will is something one mistreats, violates, forces – to the point of making it forget its being for itself, making it feel the force that bends it as its own inclination. One can do anything with man. The will, by virtue of its essence exposed to violence, can be emancipated only by building a world in which it suppresses the occasions for betrayal.

But the violence of the sword lets the will it seeks to dominate escape. True violence conserves the freedom it coerces. Gold is its instrument; violence is corruption. Without yet having recourse to justice, the way of peacetime violence, exploitation or slow death is substituted for the passion of war.

The third party, apprehendable in his work, is both present and absent; his third person presence indicates exactly the simultaneity of this presence and this absence. He is delivered over to my power inasmuch as he is exterior to my grasp. He is accessible in injustice. And that is why injustice, which is both a recognition and a non-recognition, is possible, through gold which coerces and tempts, an instrument of guilt. The injustice by virtue of which the ego lives in a totality is always economic injustice.

5. Discourse and Ethics

But if the totality begins in injustice (which is not ignorant of the other’s freedom, but in economic transactions leads that freedom into betrayal), injustice is not ipso facto known as injustice. There exists in the very sphere of history a plane of innocent injustice, where evil is wrought in naivety. To hear justice cry out in the groaning of affliction – to hear the voice of conscience – it is not enough to be (rather, it is not a question of being) in relationship with a freedom, perceiving it

in the other, since we already recognize that freedom in its transactions. This freedom is already presented to me when I buy up, or exploit. For me to know my injustice, for me to catch sight of the possibility of justice, a new situation is required: someone has to call me to account. Justice does not result from the normal play of injustice. It comes from the outside, "through the door,"¹⁸ above the fray; it appears like a principle external to history. Even in the theories of justice which are forged in social conflicts, in which moral ideas seem to convey the needs of a society or of a class, appeal is nonetheless made to an ideal conscience, an ideal justice, in which an ultimate justification, and the right to elevate these quite relative needs to the status of an access to the absolute, is sought. As an expression of the objective relationships in society, these ideas must also satisfy a living consciousness which passes judgment on those objective relationships. The human world is a world in which one can judge history. It is not a necessarily rational world, but it is one where one can pass judgment. What is inhuman is to be judged without there being anyone that judges.

To affirm man as a power to judge history is to affirm rationalism. Rationalism begins by denouncing the merely poetic thought which thinks without knowing what it thinks, or thinks as one dreams. It begins by reflection on oneself, which situates poetic thought with respect to an absolute. But the reflection cannot stop, since the positing of the reflective subject is just as poetic as that of the thinker who thinks objects, since all thought is poetic, a pure *doing*, without any bond with the principle, without a beginning. Questioning the position of the thinker ushers in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is in its essence philosophical, the outcome of rationalism; it requires for reflection what reflection demanded for the thought that thinks naively. The nonphilosophical issue of psychoanalysis consists in a predilection for some fundamental, but elementary, fables – the libido, sadism, masochism, the Oedipus complex, repression of the origin, aggressivity – which, incomprehensibly, would alone be unequivocal, alone not translate (or mask or symbolize) a reality more profound than themselves, would be the terms of psychological intelligibility. That they have been collected from among the remnants of the most diverse civilizations and called myths adds nothing to their worth as clarifying ideas, and at most evinces a return to mythologies, astonishing when we recognize that forty centuries of monotheism had no other end in view than to liberate humanity from obsession with them. The petrifying effect of myths must all the same be distinguished from the assurance they are believed to give the understanding.

If self-knowledge rests on conditions, then no knowledge, even reflective or psychoanalytical knowledge, has a beginning. One could, to be sure, invoke the unconditional character of this formal truth itself, as in the classical refutation of

¹⁸ Cf. Aristotle's expression *θύραθεν*, used in connection with "agent intellect (*νοῦς ποιητικός*). *De Generatione Animalium* 736b28.

skepticism. But in reality that refutation derives all its force from the existence of language, that is, from the existence of an interlocutor whose presence is invoked by the words. To be sure, words are deceptive; they are the product of history, society and the unconscious; they dissimulate their lies from everyone and from the liar himself. And one will be irremediably deceived when in an expressed thought one does not look for the mental reservations, when we take what is said to us literally. One can find one's bearings in all this phantasmagoria, one can inaugurate the work of criticism only if one can begin with a fixed point. The fixed point cannot be some incontestable truth, a "certain" statement that would always be subject to psychoanalysis; it can only be the absolute status of an interlocutor, a being, and not of a truth about beings. An interlocutor is not affirmed like a truth, but believed. This faith or trust does not designate here a second source of cognition, but is presupposed by every theoretical statement. Faith is not the knowledge of a truth open to doubt or capable of being certain; it is something outside of these modalities, it is the face to face encounter with a hard and substantial interlocutor, who is the origin of himself, already dominating the forces which constitute him and sway him, a you, arising inevitably, solid and noumenal, behind the man known in that bit of absolutely decent skin which is the face, which closes over the nocturnal chaos and opens upon what it can take up and for which it can answer.

Language in its expressive function is addressed to, and invokes the other. It does not consist in invoking him as something represented and thought, but this is just why the distance between the same and the other, in which language occurs, is not reducible to a relation between concepts that limit one another, but describes transcendence, where the *other* does not weigh on the same, but only places it under an obligation, makes it responsible, that is, makes it speak. The relationship set up in language is not reducible to that which links thought with an object given to thought. Language cannot take in the other; we are now making use of the concept of the other, but the other is not invoked as a concept, but as a person. In speech we are not only thinking of the interlocutor, but speaking to him; the very concept we can have of him as an "interlocutor in general" is something we say to him. The one to whom I speak stands behind the concept I communicate to him. The absence of a common plane, transcendence, is characteristic of speech. The content communicated is, to be sure, common – or more exactly, it becomes common through language. The invocation is prior to the community. It is a relationship with a being which in a sense is not relative to me, or, if one likes, is in relationship with me only inasmuch as he exists entirely through relationship with himself. He is a being that is situated beyond every attribute, which would have as its effect to qualify him, that is, to reduce him to what he has in common with other beings, to make of him a concept. It is this presence before me of a self-identical being that we term the presence of a face. A face is the very identity of a being. There he manifests himself out of himself, and not on the basis of concepts. The sensible presence of this chaste bit of skin with brow, nose, eyes, and mouth is not a sign

making it possible to ascend toward the signified, nor is it a mask which dissimulates the signified. Here the sensible presence desensibilizes to let the one who only refers to himself, the identical, break through directly. As an interlocutor he posits himself in front of me, and an interlocutor alone can properly speaking posit himself in a position facing me, without this “facing” signifying hostility or friendship. The face as the desensibilization, the dematerialization of the sense datum completes the movement, still caught up in the figures of mythological monsters, by which the animal body or half-body let an evanescent expression break through, on the face of the human head they bore. The particularity of the other in language, far from representing his animality or constituting the remains of an animality, constitutes the total humanization of the other.

The interlocutor does not always face us. Pure language emerges out of a relationship in which the other plays the role of a third party. The immediate speech is a ruse. We are observing and spying on; the interlocutor is speaking and answering. But even so he has an irreducible status, whose distinctiveness the speech addressed to him recognizes. It treats the freedom of the other affectionately and diplomatically, and eloquence and propaganda threaten and flatter a freedom so as to make of it the accomplice of maneuvers that are to lead to its abdication. This speech is still a form of violence, if violence means ascendancy over a freedom and not over an inert being from which one’s freedom would remain disengaged – as in Plato’s soul in exile which remains alien to its body.¹⁹ The doctor who hears the patient’s confession catches sight of freedom reverting to existence as a thing, and speaks, to this disfigured face, about the body which appears in the face. The psychoanalyst reaches out for the person in the sickness, and gains access to the other as a third party; the interlocutor is the one that wins over by speaking, since the full confidence one is soliciting is a complete betrayal, and every word of the doctor is here ingenuity and ruse. The judge speaking to the accused is not yet speaking. The accused does indeed have the right to speak. But it is a speaking that precedes speaking; the accused speaks in order to first acquire the right to really speak. One hears him out, but one is also watching him speak. He is accused, that is, already put under a category. He is not an interlocutor in a position of reciprocity.

To rise above the totality and acquire consciousness of justice, one must get out of the ambiguous discourse of psychoanalysis which is inevitable as long as thought is a part of the system it is to take in. This inclusion itself resolves into relationships which constitute a system, so that the meaning of a truth does not lie in the intention posited by thought, but in the ontological event of which this truth itself is but an epiphenomenon. It is not through psychoanalysis, which appeals to myths, that I can dominate the totality of which I am a part, but through encountering a being that is not the system, a transcendent being. If no truth uttered could, without

¹⁹ Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 400c; *Phaedo* 70c ff.

dupery, obtain as a primary truth, the interlocutor as a being and the relationship with the interlocutor's being, that is, language, situates one above the totality, and makes one able to seek out, if not discover, the dupery involved in the truths put forth.

Transcendence is what faces us. A face breaks up the system. The ontology of being and truth may not ignore this face to face structure, that is, faith. The essential condition for propositional truth is not in the disclosure of a being, or of the being of beings, but the expression of an interlocutor to whom I *tell* both the being he is and the being of his being. One must find oneself in front of the identical. The interlocutor appears as though without a history, outside of systems. I can neither grant nor deny his claim; in expression he remains transcendent. How does he, who is free in this sense, affect me?

I recognize him; that is, I believe in him. But if this recognition were a submission to him, the submission would take all its worth away from my recognition; recognition by submission would annul my dignity, through which recognition has validity. The face which looks at me affirms me. But when face to face, I can no longer negate the other; the noumenal glory of the other alone makes the face to face situation possible. The face to face situation is thus an impossibility of negating a negation of negation. The doubled expression of this formula concretely signifies that "you shall not commit murder" is inscribed on a face and constitutes its very alterity. Speech is thus a relationship between freedoms which neither limit nor negate, but affirm, one another. They are transcendent with respect to each other. They are neither hostile nor friendly, for any intimacy, any affection would already alter the pure vis-à-vis position characteristic of an interlocutor. The term respect could be taken up again here, provided that it be emphasized that the reciprocity of this respect is not an indifferent relation, like a serene contemplation, and that it is not the outcome of, but the condition for, ethics. Ethics is language, that is, responsibility. Respect attaches the just man to his associates in justice before it attaches him to the man who demands justice. And in fact the face to face position characteristic of language admits of a more radical phenomenological analysis.

To show respect cannot mean to subject oneself; yet the other does command me. I am commanded, that is, recognized as someone capable of realizing a work. To show respect is to bow down not before the law, but before a being who commands a work from me. But for this command to not involve humiliation – which would take from me the very possibility of showing respect – the command I receive must also be a command to command him who commands me. It consists in commanding a being to command me. This reference from a command to a command is the fact of saying "we," of constituting a party. By reason of this reference of one command to another, "we" is not the plural of "I".

But respect described in this way is not the result of justice, since the one who is commanded is outside of justice and injustice. The one respected is not the one to whom, but the one with whom one renders justice. Respect is a relationship

between equals. Justice presupposes this original equality. Love by virtue of its essence is established between unequals, and lives from inequality. The interlocutor before whom reciprocity is inaugurated is not the empirical individual with his individual history, continuing a past, a family, small and great sufferings, asking for pity and feeling. As Saint-Exupéry says in *Night Flight*, all the slackness and femininity of the world filters in through friendly faces as soon as the relationship of mutual responsibility is suspended. We wanted to describe the man to man relationship. Justice does not constitute it; it is what makes justice possible. Justice is rendered to the totality.

We are a we, because, giving commands from identity to identity, we are disengaged from the totality and from history. But we are a we inasmuch as we command one another to a work for which we recognize one another. To disengage oneself while accomplishing a work is to set oneself up not against, but for the totality, that is, to be at its service. To serve the totality is to fight for justice. The totality is constituted by violence and corruption. A work consists in introducing equality into a world given over to the interplay and the deadly conflicts of freedoms. Justice can have no other object than economic equality. It does not come to birth out of the very play of injustice; it comes from the outside. But it is an illusion or hypocrisy to suppose that, originating outside of economic relations, it could be maintained outside of them in a kingdom of pure respect.

6. Money

The relations between the ego and the totality do not coincide with those which a study of formal logic would establish between the part and the whole or between the individual and its concept. The ego enters into a whole without deriving its identity from its place in that whole, without coinciding with its situation, its fortune, or its work, through which it does get incorporated into the universal order. Very different structures – some of which we have brought out in the course of this study – are then to be substituted for and not simply grafted on to those of a “formal ontology” in Husserl’s sense.²⁰

In economy, the element where a will can have a hold on another without destroying it as a will, there is brought about the totalization of absolutely singular beings, for which there are no concepts, and which by reason of their very singularity resist addition. In transactions there occurs an action of one freedom on another. Money, whose *metaphysical* significance has perhaps not yet been measured²¹ (despite the abundance of economic and sociological studies which have

²⁰ Cf. E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, §§7–8 and 10.

²¹ See, however, the very striking analysis Paul Claudel has made of money in *Le Figaro littéraire*, March 10, 1957. AUTHOR’S NOTE

been devoted to it), corrupts the will by the power it offers it, and is thus a middle term par excellence. At the same time it maintains individuals outside of the totality, since it disposes of them, and includes them in the totality, since in commerce and transactions man himself is bought and sold; money is always to some extent wages. As exchange value of a product it acts on the will which it flatters, and gets a hold on the person. *It is thus the abstract element in which is brought about the generalization of that which has no concept, the equating of that which has no quantity.* It is an ambiguous medium where persons are integrated into the order of commodities, yet where they still remain persons, since the order of commodities (which is not equivalent to the order of nature) does presuppose persons. Persons then remain inalienable even in the transactions in which they sell themselves. Even when he is simply an object of transaction a slave tacitly gives his assent to the masters who buy or sell him.

Money then does not purely and simply mark the reification of man. It is an element in which the personal is maintained while being quantified – this is what is proper to money, and constitutes, as it were, its dignity as a philosophical category. It is not a merely contingent form which the relationship between persons takes on. A universal power of acquisition, and not a thing one enjoys, it creates relationships which last beyond the satisfaction of needs through the exchange of products. It belongs to men who can let their needs and desires wait. What is possessed in money is not the object, but the possession of objects. A possession of possession, money presupposes men who have time at their disposal, who are present in a world which endures beyond momentary contacts, men who trust one another and form a society.

But the quantification of man, which is made possible by the ambiguity of money, points to a new justice. If the radical difference between men (which is not due to differences of character or social position, but to their personal identity, irreducible to concepts, to their very ipseity, as it is now called) was not surmounted by the quantitative equality of economy measurable by money, human violence could be repaired only through vengeance or pardon. Such reparation does not put an end to violence; evil engenders evil, and pardon extended infinitely encourages it. Such is the march of history. But justice interrupts that history. We have put emphasis on just this interruption of history, in which the *we* is constituted. Money allows us to envisage a justice of redemption to be substituted for the infernal or vicious circle of vengeance or pardon. We cannot attenuate the condemnation which from Amos II, 6 to the *Communist Manifesto* has fallen upon money, precisely because of its power to buy man. But the justice which must save us from economy, that is, from the human totality, cannot negate its superior form, where the quantification of man appears, the common measure between men, for which money, whatever be its empirical form, supplies the *category*. It is to be sure shocking to see in the quantification of man one of the essential conditions for justice. But can one conceive of a justice without quantity and without reparation?

CHAPTER 4

PHILOSOPHY AND THE IDEA OF INFINITY*

1. Autonomy and Heteronomy

Every philosophy seeks truth. Sciences too can be defined by this search, for from the philosophic *eros*, alive or dormant in them, they derive their noble passion. If this definition seems too general and rather empty, it will, however, permit us to distinguish two directions the philosophical spirit takes, and this will clarify its physiognomy. These directions interact in the idea of truth.

1. Truth implies experience. In the truth a thinker maintains a relationship with a reality distinct from him, other than him – “absolutely other,” according to the expression taken up again by Jankélévitch.¹ For experience deserves its name only if it transports us beyond what constitutes our nature. Genuine experience must even lead us beyond the nature that surrounds us, which is not jealous for the marvelous secrets it harbors, and, in complicity with men, submits to their reasons and inventions; in it men also feel themselves to be at home. Truth would thus designate the outcome of a movement that leaves a world that is intimate and familiar, even if we have not yet explored it completely, and goes toward the stranger, toward a *beyond*, as Plato puts it.² Truth would imply more than exteriority: transcendence. Philosophy would be concerned with the absolutely other; it would be heteronomy itself. Let us go yet further. Distance alone does not suffice to distinguish transcendence from exteriority. Truth, the daughter of experience, has very lofty pretensions; it opens upon the very dimension of the ideal. In this way philosophy means metaphysics, and metaphysics inquires about the divine.

2. But truth also means the free adherence to a proposition, the outcome of a free

* “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity” was published in French in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 62 (1957): pp. 241–53, and reprinted in Emmanuel Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 2e éd. Paris: Vrin, 1967.

The notes in this chapter have been added by Professor Adrian Peperzak, except where indicated.

¹ V. Jankélévitch, *Philosophie première. Introduction à une philosophie du “presque”* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954).

² *Phaedo* 61de. Both dying and philosophizing are a journey abroad (*ἐξεῖσθαι* literally, “out there”). Cf. also *Phaedo* 66bc and 117c (“a change of dwelling-place from here to yonder”); *Symposium* 211d–212a (A noble life presupposes that one looks “out there,” where “the beautiful itself” is to be seen); *Republic* 484c.

research. The freedom of the investigator, the thinker on whom no constraint weighs, is expressed in truth. What else is this freedom but the thinking being's refusal to be alienated in the adherence, the preserving of his nature, his identity, the feat of remaining the same despite the unknown lands into which thought seems to lead? Perceived in this way, philosophy would be engaged in reducing to the same all that is opposed to it as *other*.³ It would be moving toward *auto-nomy*, a stage in which nothing irreducible would limit thought any longer, in which, consequently, thought, non-limited, would be free. Philosophy would thus be tantamount to the conquest of being by man over the course of history.

Freedom, autonomy, the *reduction of the other to the same*, lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man over the course of history. This reduction does not represent some abstract schema; it is man's ego. The existence of an ego takes place as an identification of the diverse. So many events happen to it, so many years age it, and yet the ego remains the same! The ego, the oneself, the ipseity (as it is called in our time), does not remain invariable in the midst of change like a rock assailed by the waves (which is anything but invariable); the ego remains the same by making of disparate and diverse events a history – its history. And this is the original event of the identification of the same, prior to the identity of a rock, and a condition of that identity.

Autonomy or heteronomy? The choice of Western philosophy has most often been on the side of freedom and the same. Was not philosophy born, on Greek soil, to dethrone opinion, in which all tyrannies lurk and threaten?⁴ With opinion the most subtle and treacherous poison seeps into the soul, altering it in its depths, making of it an other. The soul "eaten up by the others," as M. Teste would say,⁵ does not feel its alteration, and is hence exposed to all violences. But this penetration and this prestige of opinion presuppose a mythical stage of being in which souls participate in one another, in the sense Levy-Bruhl has given to the term. Against the turbid and disturbing participation opinion presupposes, philosophy willed souls that are separate and in a sense impenetrable. The idea of the same, the idea of freedom, seemed to offer the most firm guarantee of such a separation.

Thus Western thought very often seemed to exclude the transcendent, encompass every other in the same, and proclaim the philosophical birthright of autonomy.

³ The set of concepts Same and Other is taken from Plato's *Sophist* (254b–256b), where they figure as the highest of the categories of being. Cf. also *Timaeus* 35ab and *Theaetetus* 185cd.

⁴ In Book X of the *Republic* Plato discusses the relationship between a life governed by opinion (*doxa*) and political, rhetorical, and other forms of violence or tyranny.

⁵ Monsieur Teste, Valéry's representation of Descartes, speaks of another kind of captivated soul when at the opera he whispered "On n'est beau, on n'est extraordinaire que pour les autres! Ils sont mangés par les autres!" (*Oeuvres*, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 20. "One is beautiful and extraordinary only for others! They are devoured by the others!")

2. Narcissism, or the Primacy of the Same

Autonomy, the philosophy which aims to ensure the freedom, or the identity, of beings, presupposes that freedom itself is sure of its right, is justified without recourse to anything further, is complacent in itself, like Narcissus. When, in the philosophical life that realizes this freedom, there arises a term foreign to the philosophical life, other – the land that supports us and disappoints our efforts, the sky that elevates us and ignores us, the forces of nature that aid us and kill us, things that encumber us or serve us, men who love us and enslave us – it becomes an obstacle; it has to be surmounted and integrated into this life. But truth is just this victory and this integration. In evidence the violence of the encounter with the non-I is deadened. The commerce with exterior truth as enacted in true cognition is thus not opposed to freedom, but coincides with it. The search for truth becomes the very respiration of a free being, exposed to exterior realities that shelter, but also threaten, its freedom. Thanks to truth these realities, whose plaything I am in danger of becoming, are understood by me.

The “I think,” thought in the first person, the soul conversing with itself,⁶ or, qua reminiscence, rediscovering the teachings it receives,⁷ thus promote freedom. Freedom will triumph when the soul’s monologue will have reached universality, will have encompassed the totality of being, encompassing even the animal individual which lodged this thought.⁸ Every experience of the world, of the elements and objects, lends itself to this dialectic of the soul conversing with itself, enters into it, belongs to it. The things will be ideas, and will be conquered, dominated, possessed in the course of an economic and political history in which this thought will be unfolded. It is doubtless for this reason that Descartes will say that the soul might be the origin of the ideas that relate to exterior things, and thus account for the real.⁹

unknown God, but in the already-known which has to be uncovered or freely invented in oneself, and in which everything unknown is comprised. It is fundamentally opposed to a God that reveals. Philosophy is atheism, or rather unreligion, negation of a God that reveals himself and puts truths into us. This is Socrates’s teaching, when he leaves to the master only the exercise of maieutics: every lesson introduced into the soul was already in it. The I’s identification, its marvelous autarchy, is the natural crucible of this transmutation of the other into

⁶ An identification of Descartes’s *Cogito* with Plato’s “dialogue of the soul with itself (*Sophist* 263e4 and 264a9), and of both with a spiritual narcissism.

⁷ Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 150a–151d, *Meno* 80d ff, *Pheado* 72e ff, *Phaedrus* 249bc.

⁸ Allusion to Aristotle’s definition of man as the “animal having logos” (*ζων λογικόν* or *ζων λόγον ἔχον*), *Politics* 1253a10, 1332 b4.

⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 36.

the same. Every philosophy is – to use Husserl's neologism – an egology.¹⁰ And when Descartes comes to discern an acquiescence of the will in even the most rational truth, he not only explains the possibility of error, but sets up reason as an ego and truth as dependent on a movement that is free, and thus sovereign and justified.¹¹

This identification requires mediation. Whence a second characteristic of the philosophy of the same: its recourse to neuters. To understand the non-I access must be found through an entity, an abstract essence which is and is not. In it is dissolved the other's *alterity*. The foreign being, instead of maintaining itself in the inexpugnable fortress of its singularity, instead of facing, becomes a theme and an object. It fits under a concept already, or dissolves into relations. It falls into the network of a priori ideas, which I bring to bear, so as to capture it. To know is to surprise in the individual confronted, in this wounding stone, this upward plunging pine, this roaring lion, that by which it is not this very individual, this foreigner, that by which it is already betrayed and by which it gives the free will, vibrant in all certainty, hold over it, is grasped and conceived, enters into a concept. Cognition consists in grasping the individual, which alone exists, not in its singularity which does not count, but in its generality, of which alone there is science.¹²

And here every power begins. The surrender of exterior things to human freedom through their generality does not only mean, in all innocence, their comprehension, but also their being taken in hand, their domestication, their possession. Only in possession does the I complete the identification of the diverse. To possess is, to be sure, to maintain the reality of this other one possessed, but to do so while suspending its independence. In a civilization which the philosophy of the same reflects, freedom is realized as a wealth. Reason, which reduces the other, is appropriation and power.

But if things do not resist the ruses of thought, and confirm the philosophy of the same, without ever putting into question the freedom of the I, is this also true of men? Are they given to me as the things are? Do they not put into question my freedom?

They can, to begin with, block it by opposing it with more than their force – their freedoms. They wage war. War is not a pure confrontation of forces; it can perhaps be defined as a relationship in which force does not alone enter into account, for the unforeseeable contingencies of freedom – skill, courage, and invention – count too. But in war the free will may fail without being put into question, without renouncing its rights and its revenge. Freedom is put into question by the other, and is revealed to be unjustified, only when it knows itself to be unjust. Its knowing

¹⁰ E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 255; *Erste Philosophie*, II (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), pp. 172–73, 176.

¹¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 55.

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 999a25–b5, and the traditional dictum *De individuis non est scientia*.

itself to be unjust is not something added on to spontaneous and free consciousness, which would be present to itself and know itself to be, *in addition*, guilty. A new situation is created; consciousness's presence to itself acquires a different modality; its positions collapse. To put it just in formal terms, the same does not find again its priority over the other, it does not rest peaceably on itself, is no longer the principle. We shall endeavor to make these formulas more clear. And if the same does not peaceably rest on itself, philosophy does not seem to be indissolubly bound up with the adventure that includes every other in the same.

We shall return to this shortly; let us first observe that this supremacy of the same over the other seems to be integrally maintained in the philosophy of Heidegger, the most renowned of our time. When Heidegger traces the way of access to each real singularity through Being, which is not a particular being nor a genus in which all the particulars would enter, but is rather the very act of being which the verb to be, and not the substantive, expresses¹³ (and which, with M. De Waelhens, we write with a capital "B"), he leads us to the singularity across a neuter which illuminates and commands thought, and renders intelligible.¹⁴ When he sees man possessed by freedom rather than possessing freedom, he puts over man a neuter term which illuminates freedom without putting it in question. And thus he is not destroying, but summing up a whole current of Western philosophy.

The Dasein Heidegger puts in place of the soul, consciousness, or the ego, retains the structure of the same. Independence – autarchy – came to the Platonic soul (and to all its counterfeit versions) from its homeland, the world of Ideas; according to the *Phaedo*,¹⁵ the soul is related to that world, and consequently can not encounter anything really foreign in it. Reason, the power to maintain oneself identical above the variations of becoming, formed the soul of this soul. Heidegger contests this dominant position for man, but leaves Dasein in the same, qua mortal. The possibility of being annihilated is in fact constitutive of Dasein, and thus maintains its ipseity. This nothingness is a death, is my death, my possibility (of impossibility),¹⁶ my power. No one can substitute himself for me to die. The supreme moment of resoluteness is solitary and personal.

To be sure, for Heidegger man's freedom depends on the light of Being, and thus does not seem to be a principle.¹⁷ But that was also the case in classical idealism,

¹³ Levinas also calls this "activity" the "transitivity" of being; being, which makes beings be, is not a substance but an activity of deployment and of bringing into the open. Cf. his remarks in Jean Wahl, *Esquisse pour une histoire de l'existentialisme* (Paris: Parche, 1949), pp. 95-96. Heidegger uses here the terms *Wesen*, *Walten*, and *Gewähren*.

¹⁴ Cf. Heidegger's program for a "destruction of the history of ontology" (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), § 6.

¹⁵ *Phaedo* 76de, 100b.

¹⁶ Heidegger understands man's *Sein zum Tode* as the "possibility of impossibility." (*Being and Time*, p. 307). Levinas comments on this expression in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), pp. 85-87.

¹⁷ Cf. *Being and Time* § 62, on *Entschlossenheit* (resoluteness).

where free will was considered the lowest form of freedom, and true freedom obeyed universal reason. The Heideggerian freedom is obedient, but obedience makes it arise and does not put it into question, does not reveal its injustice. Being, equivalent to the independence and extraneousness of realities, is equivalent to phosphorescence, light.¹⁸ It converts into intelligibility. The “mystery” essential to this “dark light”¹⁹ is a modality of this conversion. Independence ends in radiation. *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s first and principal work, perhaps always maintained but one thesis: Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being; Being already invokes subjectivity. But Being is *not* a being. It is a neuter which orders thought and beings, but which hardens the will instead of making it ashamed. The consciousness of his finitude does not come to man from the idea of infinity, that is, is not revealed as an imperfection,²⁰ does not refer to the Good,²¹ does not know itself to be wicked. Heideggerian philosophy precisely marks the apogee of a thought in which the finite does not refer to the infinite²² (prolonging certain tendencies of Kantian philosophy: the separation between the understanding and reason, diverse themes of transcendental dialectics), in which every deficiency is but weakness and every fault committed against oneself – the outcome of a long tradition of pride, heroism, domination, and cruelty.

Heideggerian ontology subordinates the relation with the other to the relation with the neuter, Being, and it thus continues to exalt the will to power, whose legitimacy the other alone can unsettle, troubling good conscience. When Heidegger calls attention to the forgetting of Being, veiled by the diverse realities it illuminates, a forgetting for which the philosophy developed from Socrates on would be guilty,²³ when he deplores the orientation of the intellect toward technology, he maintains a regime of power more inhuman than mechanism (and which perhaps does not have the same source as it);²⁴ it is not sure that National Socialism arises from the mechanist reification of men, and that it does not rest on peasant enrootedness and a feudal adoration of subjugated men for the masters and lords who command them). This is an existence which takes itself to be natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its *site*, orient all signification – a pagan *existing*. Being directs it building and cultivating, in the midst of a familiar landscape, on a maternal earth.

¹⁸ Heidegger speaks of “*die Lichtung des Seins*” (the Clearing of Being) in the “Letter on Humanism,” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 205–6, 210–11, 216–17, 229, 237, 239.

¹⁹ The “dark light” (*l’obscur clarté*) is from Corneille’s *Le Cid*. The “mystery” refers to Heidegger’s *Geheimnis (The Question Concerning Technology)*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), p. 110.

²⁰ In opposition to Descartes, for whom we only become aware of our finitude because first we have the a priori idea of infinity in our consciousness. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 43–44, 49.

²¹ Plato, *Republic* 50de; cf. also 509b, 577b and 518d.

²² Cf. *infra*, pp. NOTE OF THE AUTHOR.

²³ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §§ 1, 6, and 68.

²⁴ The following refers to the later Heidegger of *Holzwege*, whom Levinas attacked in “Heidegger, Gagarine et nous,” in *Difficile Liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963), p. 255–59.

Anonymous, neuter, it directs it, ethically indifferent, as a heroic freedom, foreign to all guilt with regard to the other.

Indeed this earth-maternity determines the whole Western civilization of property, exploitation, political tyranny, and war. Heidegger does not discuss the pretechnological power of possession effected in the enrootedness of perception (which no one has described so brilliantly as he), in which the most abstract geometrical space is in the last analysis embedded, but which cannot find any place in the whole infinity of mathematical extension. The Heideggerian analyses of the world which in *Being and Time* were based on gear or fabricated things are in this philosophy borne by the vision of the lofty landscapes of nature, an impersonal fecundity, matrix of particular beings, inexhaustible matter of things.

Heidegger does not only sum up a whole evolution of Western philosophy. He exalts it by showing in the most pathetic way its anti-religious essence become a religion in reverse. The lucid sobriety of those who call themselves friends of truth and enemies of opinion would then have a mysterious prolongation! In Heidegger atheism is a paganism, the presocratic texts anti-Scriptures. Heidegger shows in what intoxication the lucid sobriety of philosophers is steeped.²⁵

To conclude, the well-known theses of Heideggerian philosophy – the preeminence of Being over beings, of ontology over metaphysics – end up affirming a tradition in which the same dominates the other, in which freedom, even the freedom that is identical with reason, precedes justice. Does not justice consist in putting the obligation with regard to the other before obligations to oneself, in putting the other before the same?

3. The Idea of Infinity

By reversing the terms we believe we are following a tradition at least as ancient, that which does not read right in might and does not reduce *every other* to the same. Against the Heideggerians and neo-Hegelians for whom philosophy begins with atheism, we have to say that the tradition of the other is not necessarily religious, that it is philosophical. Plato stands in this tradition when he situates the good above Being, and, in the *Phaedrus*, defines true discourse as a discourse with gods.²⁶ But what we find most distinctive is the Cartesian analysis of the idea of infinity, although we shall retain only the *formal* design of the structure it outlines.²⁷

In Descartes the I that thinks maintains a relationship with the infinite. This relationship is not that which connects a container to a content, since the I cannot

²⁵ As did Parmenides, Heraclitus and Plato. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 501d2, 536a5, 537d8; *Symposium* 218e7.

²⁶ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 517b9 and 518d; *Phaedrus* 273e–274a.

²⁷ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 43–46.

contain the infinite, nor that which binds a content to a container, since the I is separated from the infinite. The relationship which is thus described negatively is the idea of infinity in us.

We have of course also ideas of things; the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its ideatum surpasses its idea. In it the distance between idea and ideatum is not equivalent to the distance that separates a mental act from its object in other representations. The abyss that separates a mental act from its object is not deep enough for Descartes not to say that the soul can account for the ideas of finite things by itself.²⁸ The intentionality that animates the idea of infinity is not comparable with any other; it aims at what it cannot embrace and is in this sense the infinite. To take the converse of the formulas we used above, we can say that the alterity of the infinite is not cancelled, is not extinguished in the thought that thinks it. In thinking infinity the I from the first *thinks more than it thinks*. Infinity does not enter into the *idea* of infinity, is not grasped; this idea is not a concept. The infinite is the radically, absolutely, other. The transcendence of infinity with respect to the ego that is separated from it and thinks it constitutes the first mark of its infinitude.

The idea of infinity is then not the only one that teaches what we are ignorant of. It has been *put* into us. It is not a reminiscence. It is experience in the sole radical sense of the term: a relationship with the exterior, with the other, without this exteriority being able to be integrated into the same. The thinker who has the idea of infinity is *more than himself*, and this inflating, this surplus, does not come from within, as in the celebrated *project* of modern philosophers, in which the subject surpasses himself by creating.²⁹

How can such a structure be still philosophical? What is the relationship which, while remaining one of *the more in the less*, is not transformed into the relationship in which, according to the mystics, the butterfly drawn by the fire is consumed in the fire? How can separate beings be maintained, and not sink into participation, against which the philosophy of the same will have the immortal merit to have protested?

4. The Idea of Infinity and the Face of Another

Experience, the idea of infinity, occurs in the relationship with the other. The idea of infinity is the social relationship.

This relationship consists in approaching an absolutely exterior being. The infinity of this being, which one can therefore not contain, guarantees and

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 41.

²⁹ Cf. Heidegger's analyses of man as a project (*Entwurf*) (*Being and Time*, pp. 184–88, 263–66, 370–75), and Sartre's explanation of *projet* and *pro-jeter* in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 650–53.

constitutes this exteriority. It is not equivalent to the distance between a subject and an object. An object, we know, is integrated into the identity of the same; the I makes of it its theme, and then its property, its booty, its prey or its victim. The exteriority of the infinite being is manifested in the absolute resistance which by its apparition, its epiphany, it opposes to all my powers. Its epiphany is not simply the apparition of a form in the light, sensible or intelligible, but already this *no* cast to powers; its logos is: "You shall not kill."

To be sure, the other is exposed to all my powers, succumbs to all my ruses, all my crimes. Or he resists me with all his force and all the unpredictable resources of his own freedom. I measure myself against him. But he can also – and here is where he presents me his face – oppose himself to me beyond all measure, with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankness of his gaze. The solipsist disquietude of consciousness, seeing itself, in all its adventures, a captive of itself, comes to an end here: true exteriority is in this gaze which forbids me my conquest. Not that conquest is beyond my too weak powers, but I am no longer able to have power³⁰: the structure of my freedom is, we shall see further, completely reversed. Here is established a relationship not with a very great resistance, but with the absolutely other, with the resistance of what has no resistance, with ethical resistance. It opens the very dimension of infinity, of what puts a stop to the irresistible imperialism of the same and the I. We call a *face* the epiphany of what can thus present itself directly, and therefore also exteriorly, to an I.

A face is not like a plastic form, which is always already deserted, betrayed, by the being it reveals, such as marble from which the gods it manifests already absent themselves. It differs from an animal's head in which a being, in its brutish dumbness, is not yet in touch with itself. In a face the expressed attends its expression, expresses its very expression, always remains master of the meaning it delivers. A "pure act" in its own way, it resists identification, does not enter into the already known, brings aid to itself, as Plato puts it,³¹ speaks. The epiphany of a face is wholly language.

Ethical resistance is the presence of infinity. If the resistance to murder, inscribed on a face, were not ethical, but real, we would have access to a reality that is very weak or very strong. It perhaps would block our will. The will would be judged unreasonable and arbitrary. But we would not have access to an exterior being, to what one absolutely can neither take in nor possess, where our freedom renounces its imperialism proper to the ego, where it is found to be not only arbitrary, but unjust. But then the other is not simply another freedom; to give me knowledge of

³⁰ "Je ne peux plus pouvoir". Man is an "I can" (*je peux*), Merleau-Ponty wrote, after Husserl (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, II (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), pp. 257ff) and Heidegger (*Seinkönnen*).

³¹ *Phaedrus* 274b–277a.

injustice, his gaze must come to me from a dimension of the ideal. The other must be closer to God than I. This is certainly not a philosopher's invention, but the first given of moral consciousness, which could be defined as the consciousness of the privilege the other has relative to me. Justice well ordered begins with the other.³²

5. The Idea of Infinity is a Desire

The ethical relationship is not grafted on to an antecedent relationship of cognition; it is a foundation and not a superstructure. To distinguish it from cognition is not to reduce it to a subjective sentiment. The idea of infinity, in which being overflows the idea, in which the other overflows the same, breaks with the inward play of the soul and alone deserves the name experience, a relationship with the exterior. It is then more *cognitive* than cognition itself, and all objectivity must participate in it.

Malebranche's vision in God (cf. the Second *Metaphysical Discourse*) expresses both this reference of all cognition to the idea of infinity and the fact that the idea of infinity is not like the cognition that refers to it. For one cannot maintain that this idea itself is a thematization or an objectification without reducing it to the presence of the other in the same, a presence with which it in fact contrasts. In Descartes, a certain ambiguity concerning this point remains, since the cogito which rests on God elsewhere founds the existence of God: the priority of the infinite is subordinated to the free adhesion of the will, which initially is master of itself.³³

We separate ourselves from the letter of Cartesianism in affirming that the movement of the soul that is more cognitive than cognition could have a structure different from contemplation. Infinity is not the object of a contemplation, that is, is not proportionate to the thought that thinks it. The idea of infinity is a thought which at every moment thinks more than it thinks. A thought that thinks more than it thinks is a desire. Desire "measures" the infinity of the infinite.

The term we have chosen to mark the propulsion, the inflation, of this going beyond is opposed to the affectivity of love and the indigence of need. Outside of the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches and the senses one allays, exists the other, absolutely other, desired beyond these satisfactions, when the body knows no gesture to slake the desire, where it is not possible to invent any new caress.³⁴ This desire is unquenchable, not because it answers to an infinite hunger, but because it does not call for food. This desire without satisfaction hence takes cognizance of the alterity of the other. It situates it in the dimension of height and of the ideal, which it opens up in being.

³² A reference to the dictum *charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même*.

³³ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Third and Fourth Meditations.

³⁴ Cf. the "Preface" to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), where the philosophical eros is characterized as a desire for infinity.

The desires one can satisfy resemble this desire only intermittently, in the deceptions of satisfaction or in the increases of emptiness which mark their voluptuousness. They wrongly pass for the essence of desire. The true desire is that which the desired does not satisfy, but hollows out. It is goodness. It does not refer to a lost fatherland or plenitude; it is not homesickness, is not nostalgia. It is the lack in a being which *is* completely, and lacks nothing. Can the Platonic myth of love, son of abundance and of poverty, be interpreted as bearing witness to the indigence of a wealth in desire, the insufficiency of what is self-sufficient?³⁵ Has not Plato, in the *Symposium*,³⁶ with the myth of an androgenous being, affirmed the non-nostalgic nature of desire, the plenitude and joy of the being who experiences it?

6. The Idea of Infinity and Conscience

How does a face escape the discretionary power of the will which deals with evidence? Is not knowing a face *acquiring* a consciousness of it, and is not to acquire consciousness to adhere *freely*? Does not the idea of infinity, qua *idea*, inevitably refer back to the schema of the same encompassing the other? – Unless the idea of infinity means the collapse of the good conscience of the same. For everything comes to pass as though the presence of a face, the idea of infinity in the I, were the putting of my freedom into question.

That the free will is arbitrary, and that one must leave this elementary stage, is an old certainty of philosophers. But for all of them the arbitrariness refers to a rational foundation, a justification of freedom by itself. The rational foundation of freedom is still preeminence of the same.

Moreover, the necessity of justifying the arbitrary is due only to the failure suffered by an arbitrary power. *The very spontaneity of freedom is not put into question* – such seems to be the dominant tradition of Western philosophy. Only the limitation of freedom would be tragic or scandalous. Freedom poses a problem only because it has not chosen itself. The failure of my spontaneity is said to awaken reason and theory; a pain is said to be the mother of wisdom. Failure would lead me to put on brakes on my violence and introduce order into human relations, for everything is permitted but the impossible. In particular, modern political theories since Hobbes deduce the social order from the legitimacy, the incontestable right, of freedom.

The other's face is the revelation not of the arbitrariness of the will, but its injustice. Consciousness of my injustice is produced when I incline myself not before facts, but before the other. In his face the other appears to me not as an

³⁵ Plato, *Symposium* 203b.

³⁶ Ibid., 189d–193d and 205d–206a.

obstacle, nor as a menace I evaluate, but as what measures me. For me to feel myself to be unjust I must measure myself against infinity. One must have the idea of infinity, which, as Descartes knows, is also the idea of the perfect, to know my own imperfection. The infinite does not stop me like a force blocking my force; it puts into question the naive right of my powers, my glorious spontaneity as a living being, a “force on the move.”

This way of measuring oneself against the perfection of the infinite is not a theoretical consideration in its turn, in which freedom would spontaneously take up its rights again. It is a *shame* freedom has of itself, discovering itself to be murderous and usurpatory in its very exercise. A second-century exegete, more concerned with what he had to do than of what he had to hope for, did not understand why the Bible begins with the account of creation instead of putting us from the first before the first commandments of Exodus. Only with great difficulty did he come to concede that the account of creation was all the same necessary for the life of the just man: for if the earth had not been given to man but simply taken by him, he would have possessed it only as an outlaw. Spontaneous and naive possession cannot be justified by virtue of its own spontaneity.

Existence is not condemned to freedom, but judged and invested as a freedom. Freedom could not present itself all naked. This investiture of freedom constitutes moral life itself, which is through and through a heteronomy.

The will that is judged, in the meeting with the other, does not assume the judgment it welcomes. That would still be a return of the same deciding of the other in the final analysis – heteronomy absorbed in autonomy. The structure of the free will becoming *goodness* is not like the glorious and self-sufficient spontaneity of the I and of happiness, which would be the ultimate movement of being; it is, as it were, its converse. The life of freedom discovering itself to be unjust, the life of freedom in heteronomy, consists in an infinite movement of freedom putting itself ever more into question. This is how the very depth of inwardness is hollowed out. The augmentation of exigency I have in regard to myself aggravates the judgment that is borne on me, that is, my responsibility. And the aggravation of my responsibility increases these exigencies. In this movement my freedom does not have the last word; I never find my solitude again – or, one might say, moral consciousness is essentially unsatisfied, or again, is always a desire.

The unsatisfiedness of conscience is not simply a suffering of delicate and scrupulous souls, but is the very contraction, the hollow, the withdrawal into itself, and the systole of consciousness as such. Ethical consciousness itself is not invoked in this exposition as a “particularly recommendable” variety of consciousness, but as the concrete form of a movement more fundamental than freedom, the idea of infinity. It is the concrete form of what precedes freedom, but does not lead us back to violence, the confusion of what is separated, necessity, or fatality.

Here above all is the situation in which one is not alone. But if this situation does not yield proof of the existence of the other, this is because proof already

presupposes the movement and adherence of a free will, a certainty. Thus the situation in which the free will is invested precedes proof. For every certainty is the work of a solitary freedom. As a welcome of the real into my a priori ideas, an adhesion of my free will, the last gesture of cognition is freedom. The face to face situation in which this freedom is put into question as unjust, in which it finds it has a master and a judge, is realized prior to certainty, but also prior to uncertainty.

This situation is an experience in the strongest sense of the term: a contact with a reality that does not fit into any a priori idea, which overflows all of them – and it is just for this reason that we have been able to speak of infinity. No movement of freedom could appropriate a face to itself or seem to “constitute” it. The face has already been there when it was anticipated or constituted; it collaborated in that work, it spoke. A face is pure experience, conceptless experience. The conception according to which the data of our senses are put together in the ego ends, before the other, with the de-ception, the dispossession which characterizes all our attempts to encompass this real. But the purely negative incomprehension of the other, which depends on our bad will, must be distinguished from the essential incomprehension of the infinite, which has a positive side, is conscience and desire.

The unsatisfiedness of conscience, the de-ception before the other, coincides with desire – this is one of the essential points of this exposition. The desire for infinity does not have the sentimental complacency of love, but the rigor of moral exigency. And the rigor of moral exigency is not bluntly imposed, but is a desire, due to the attraction and infinite height of being itself, for the benefit of which goodness is exercised. God commands only through the men for whom one must act.

Consciousness, the presence of self to self, passes for the ultimate theme of reflection. Conscience, a variation on this theme, a species of consciousness, is taken to add to it the concern for values and norms. We have raised several questions concerning this: can the self present itself to itself with so much natural complacency? Can it appear, shamelessly, in its own eyes? Is narcissism possible?³⁷ Is not moral conscience the critique of and the principle of the presence of self to self? Then if the essence of philosophy consists in going back from all certainties toward a principle, if it lives from critique, the face of the other would be the starting point of philosophy. This is a thesis of heteronomy which breaks with a very venerable tradition. But, on the other hand, the situation in which one is not alone is not reducible to the fortunate meeting of fraternal souls that greet one another and converse. This situation is the moral conscience, the exposedness of my freedom to the judgment of the other. It is a disalignment which has authorized us to catch sight of the dimension of height and the ideal in the gaze of him to whom justice is due.

³⁷ We have dealt with the different themes relevant to this matter in three articles published in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*: “L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?” (janvier-mars, 1951), “Liberté et Commandement” (juillet-septembre, 1953), and “Le Moi et la totalité,” (octobre-décembre, 1954). NOTE OF THE AUTHOR The last two articles are translated in this volume, cf. supra, pp. 15-45.

CHAPTER 5

PHENOMENON AND ENIGMA*

In short, we still do not know if, when someone rings the doorbell, there is someone there or not...

Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*

Rational Speech and Disturbance

As rational speech, philosophy is taken to move from evidence to evidence, directed to what is seen, to what shows itself, thus directed to the present. The term *present* suggests both the idea of a privileged position in the temporal series and the idea of manifestation. The idea of being connects them. As a presence, being excludes the non-being that marks the past and the future, but assembles their residues and their germs, which, in structures, are contemporary.¹ Being is a manifestation in which the uncertain memory and the aleatory anticipation are moored; being is a presence to the gaze and to speech, an appearing, a phenomenon.

As a speech directed upon the present, philosophy is an understanding of being, or an ontology, or a phenomenology. In the order of its speech it encompasses and situates even what seemed first to contain this speech or overflow it, but which, when present, that is, discovered, fits into this logos, is ordered in it, even making what is discernible of the past or of the future in the present enter into it. Being and speech have the same time, are contemporary. To utter a speech that would not be anchored in the present would be to go beyond reason. Beyond what is discernible in the present only meaningless speech would hold forth.

And yet human thought has known concepts or has, as though mad, operated with notions in which the distinction between presence and absence was not as clear-

* “Phenomenon and Enigma” was published in French in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 62 (1957): pp. 241–53, and reprinted in Emmanuel Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 2e éd. Paris: Vrin, 1967.

The notes in this chapter have been added by Professor Adrian Peperzak, except where indicated.

¹ Here and in the following pages Levinas alludes to de Saussure’s distinction between a diachronic study of language and other systems of cultural expression, and a synchronic study. The latter makes a cross-section across time in order to expose a structure within which the elements are simultaneous. A diachronic study follows down the transformation of structural elements in the course of time.

cut as the idea of being or the idea of a becoming assembled and tied about the present would have demanded. Such are the Platonic notions of the One and the Good.² Such is the notion of God, which a thought called faith succeeds in getting expressed and introduces into philosophical discourse. Is it not folly to ascribe plenitude of being to God who is always absent from perception, and is not any more manifest in the moral conduct of the world, subject to violence, where peace is established only provisionally and at the price of blood tribute paid to some Minotaur, the price of compromises and politics – where, consequently, the divine “presence” remains an uncertain memory or an indeterminate expectation? To endure the contradiction between the existence included in the essence of God and the scandalous absence of this God is to suffer an initiation trial into religious life which separates philosophers from believers. That is, unless the obstinate absence of God were one of those paradoxes that call to the highways.

The impossibility of manifesting itself in an experience can be due not to the finite or sensible essence of this experience, but to the structure of all thought, which is correlation. Once come into a correlation, the divinity of God dissipates, like the clouds that served to describe his presence. All that could have attested to his holiness, that is, to his transcendence, in the light of experience would immediately belie its own witness already by its very presence and intelligibility, by its chain of significations, which constitute the world. To appear, to seem, is forthwith to resemble terms of an already familiar order, to compromise oneself with them, to be assimilated to them. Does not the invisibility of God belong to another play, to an approach which does not polarize into a subject-object correlation but is deployed as a drama with several personages?

But we have anticipated our conclusions. Let us fix the point of departure: the non-manifestation, the invisibility which language sets forth. This refusal to exhibit itself does not necessarily contain a complacency for hidden abodes. The extravagance or hyperbole which language can express by the superlative of the supreme being retains the trace of a beyond-being where day and night do not divide the time that can make them coexist in the dusk of evening, the trace of a beyond borne by a time different from that in which the overflowings of the present flow back to this present across memory and hope. Could faith be described then as a glimpse into a time whose moments are no longer related to the present as their term or their source? This would produce a diachrony which maddens³ the subject, but channels transcendence. Is transcendence a thought that ventures beyond being, or an approach⁴ beyond thought which speech ventures to utter, and whose trace and modality it retains?

² On the Good, cf. Plato, *Republic* 505a, 507a3, 508e, 509b, 577b; on the One cf. Plato, *Parmenides* 135ff, and Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 1 and VI, g.

³ Michel Foucault's *L'histoire de la folie* (Paris: Plon, 1961) allows us to use such terms without simply referring to a disordered reason committing errors. AUTHOR'S NOTE

⁴ This approach is made in feeling, whose fundamental tonality is desire in the sense we have given this term in *Totality and Infinity*. Desire, distinguished from tendency and from need, does not belong

But is not to glimpse into a time whose moments do not refer to the present to connect everything together again in the present of that glimpse? Already correlation or structure returns: transcendence is synchronized with speech and reenters the indestructible order of being in its undephasable simultaneity, that is, into a totality which gives it meaning. Is there nothing in the world that could refuse this primordial order of contemporaneousness, without immediately ceasing to signify? Is a truly diachronic transcendence nothing more than something to delude gratuitous imagination, opinion, and positive religions?

Everything depends on the possibility of vibrating with a meaning that is not synchronized with the speech that captures it and cannot be fitted into its order; everything depends on the possibility of a signification that would signify in an irreducible disturbance. If a formal description of such a disturbance could be attempted, it would have us speak of a time, a plot and norms that are not reducible to the understanding of being, which is allegedly the alpha and the omega of philosophy.

The Call to Order

How could such a disturbance occur?

If the other is presented to the same, the copresence of the other and the same in a phenomenon forthwith constitutes an order. The discordance that may be produced within this order proposes itself as an invitation to the search for a new order in which this first discord would be resolved: the discordance becomes a problem. The science of yesterday, before the new facts of today, thus makes its way toward the science of tomorrow.

Bergson has taught us that disorder, like nothingness, is a relative idea.⁵ For there

to activity, but constitutes the intentionality of the affective order. One can ask if the remarkable and demystifying criticisms Michel Henry draws up against the intentionality of affectivity, which, despite Scheler's and Heidegger's analyses, would remain of intellectual origin (cf. *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) §§63–65) succeed in driving every movement of transcendence from feeling. It has to be said that this transcendence consists in going beyond being, which here means that the aim aims at what refuses the correlation which every aim as such established, and which consequently is nowise represented, not even conceptually. The primordial feeling, precisely in its ambiguity, is this desire for infinity, the relationship with the Absolute which does not become correlative with it, and consequently in a sense leaves the subject in immanence. Is not this the immanence which Jean Wahl one day called “the greatest transcendence..., that which consists in transcending transcendence, that is, relapsing into immanence” (*Existence humaine et transcendance* (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1944), p. 38. AUTHOR'S NOTE

⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch seeks, however, to penetrate into order in the *glimpse*, even if the regularity of phenomena are to invade this breakthrough, as the waves of the Red Sea invaded the passage which had, for one night, broken through them. All his recent work, and in particular *Philosophie première. Introduction à une philosophie du “presque”* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), speaks of this with inimitable precision and subtlety. Our own project owes a great deal to his work. AUTHOR'S NOTE

to be an absolute disturbance, must there erupt into the same an absolute alterity, that of the other? Someone unknown to me rang my doorbell and interrupted my work. I dissipated a few of his illusions. But he brought me into his affairs and his difficulties, troubling my good conscience. The disturbance, the clash of two orders, ends in a conciliation, in the constitution of a new order which, more vast, closer to the total, and in this sense ultimate or original, order, shines through this conflict.

The other can also not appear without renouncing his radical alterity, without entering into an order. The breaks in the order reenter the order whose weave lasts unendingly, a weave these breaks manifest, and which is a totality. The unwonted is understood. The apparent interference of the other in the same has been settled beforehand. The disturbance, the clash of two orders, then does not deserve our attention. That is, unless one is attached to abstractions. And who would admit to such bias? The disturbance was a precursor of a more concrete totality, a world, a history. That strident ringing of the bell is reabsorbed into significations; the break in my universe was a new signification that came to it. Everything is understood, justified, pardoned. And what of the surprise of that face behind the door? That surprise will be denied. Attention will be directed to the order that annuls the disturbance, the history in which men, their distress and their despairs, their wars and their sacrifices, the horrible and the sublime, are summed up. Like Spinoza, one will contest the possibility of an error that would not be borne by a partial truth and be on its way toward a whole truth. An uninterrupted discourse will be exalted which death alone could stop, if the immortal intersubjectivity did not ensure it against death itself (is it indeed immortal? – one can raise this question, formerly taken to be absurd⁶). Everything that is real would thus be meaningful and every action would arise in the real as the conclusion of a reasoning, in an advance without short-cuts; a short circuit would, it seems, produce only the night of dreams.

Proximity, Expression, and Enigma

But is the disturbance produced by this abrupt coming completely reduced in the light of the new order, which, in its triumphant dawning, would absorb the unwonted visitation, as history effaces the trace of blood and tears? Across the unbreakable chain of significations, standing out against the historical conjuncture, was there not an expression, a face facing and interpellating, coming from the

Bergson's analysis of the idea of order is to be found in *Creative Evolution* trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1937), pp. 238–43; his analysis of the idea of nothingness is given in the same work, pp. 298–322.

⁶ Jean Hyppolite, *Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France*. Cf. also Jacques Derrida, *Introduction à l'Origine de la géométrie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962). AUTHOR'S NOTE

depths, cutting the threads of the context? Did not a neighbor approach?⁷

How did the neighbor tear himself up from the context? How could he approach and face without being forthwith petrified into a signification silhouetted against the context? Where could proximity and uprightness in a universe of mediations come from? Whence comes expression, *saying*, in this universe of significations said, of structures – nature and history – visible to everyone in their display as phenomena? Would expression and proximity contain a reference to a dimension of depth?

One would be right to distrust this formula if it had to mean that phenomena *indicate* an order of “things in themselves” of which they would be signs, or which they would hide like a screen. For indications and relations reestablish a conjuncture, a simultaneity, between the indicating and the indicated terms, and abolish depth. A relationship that would not create simultaneity between its terms, but would hollow out a depth from which expression approaches would have to refer to an irreversible, immemorial, unrepresentable past.

But how refer to an irreversible past, that is, a past which this very reference would not bring back, like memory which retrieves the past, like signs which recapture the signified? What would be needed would be an indication that would reveal the withdrawal of the indicated, instead of a reference that rejoins it. Such is a trace, in its emptiness and desolation. Its desolation is not made of evocations but of forgettings, forgettings in process, putting aside the past. The forgettings are surprised before this “forgettingness” could reverse into a bond, reconnect this absolute past to the present, and become evocative. What is this original trace, this primordial desolation? It is the nakedness of a face that faces, expressing itself, interrupting order. If the interruption is not taken up by the context interrupted, to receive a meaning from it, this is because it was already ab-solute. The context was given up before beginning, the breaking of contact took place before engagement: a face is decomposed and naked. In this defeatism,⁸ this dereliction, this timidity that does not dare to dare, this solicitation that does not have the effrontery to solicit and is non-audacity, this beggar’s solicitation, expression no longer participates in the order from which it tears itself, but thus faces and confronts in a face, approaches and disturbs absolutely.

But a trace would then simply be a sign of a remoteness. A trace can, to be sure, become a sign. But in a face before signifying as a sign it is the very emptiness of an irrecoverable absence. The gaping open of emptiness is not only the sign of an absence. A mark traced on sand is not a part of a path, but the very emptiness of

⁷ Formerly we refused this term, which seemed to us to suggest community by neighboring. Now we retain in it the abruptness of the disturbance, which characterizes a neighbor inasmuch as he is the first one to come along. Cf. *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, juillet-septembre, 1962, pp. 107–108 (Séance du 17 janvier, 1962). AUTHOR'S NOTE

The text Levinas refers to is entitled “Transcendance et Hauteur.”

⁸ “Défaïtisme” (defeatism) continues the end of the prior sentence: “... le visage est défait (decomposed, undone) et nu (naked).”

a passage. And what has withdrawn is not evoked, does not return to presence, not even to an indicated presence.

Disturbance is a movement that does not propose any stable order in conflict or in accord with a given order; it is movement that already carries away the signification it brought: disturbance disturbs order without troubling it seriously. It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. It insinuates itself, withdraws before entering. It remains only for him who would like to take it up. Otherwise, it has already restored the order it troubled – Someone rang, and there is no one at the door: did anyone ring? Language is the possibility of an enigmatic equivocation for better and for worse, which men abuse. One diplomat makes an exorbitant proposition to another diplomat, but this proposition is put in terms such that, if one likes, nothing has been said. The audacity withdraws and is extinguished in the very words that bear and inflame it. Such is the duplicity of oracles: extravagances are lodged in words that guarantee wisdom. A lover makes an advance, but the provocative or seductive gesture has, if one likes, not interrupted the decency of the conversation and attitudes; it withdraws as lightly as it had slipped in. A God was revealed on a mountain or in a burning bush, or was attested to in Scriptures. And what if it were a storm! And what if the Scriptures came to us from dreamers! Dismiss the illusory call from our minds! The insinuation itself invites us to do so. It is up to us, or, more exactly, it is up to *me* to retain or to repel this God without boldness, exiled for allied with the conquered, hunted down and hence absolute, thus disarticulating the very moment in which he is presented and proclaimed, un-representable. This way the other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his incognito, disdaining recourse to a wink-of-the-eye of understanding or complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself, we call enigma – going back to the etymology of this Greek term,⁹ and contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a phenomenon.

A New Modality

What is essential here is the way a meaning that is beyond meaning is inserted in the meaning that remains in an order, the way it advances while retreating. An enigma is not a simple ambiguity in which two significations have equal chances and the same light. In an enigma the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in its apparition. The God who spoke said nothing, passed incognito, everything in the light of phenomena gives lie to him, refutes, represses, persecutes him. The Kierkegaardian God is revealed only to be persecuted and unrecognized, reveals himself only in the measure that he is hunted – such that subjectivity, despairing in the solitude in which this absolute humility leaves it, becomes the very locus of

⁹ Αἴνυμα means an obscure or equivocal word, a riddle.

truth. The Kierkegaardian God is not simply the bearer of certain attributes of humility; he is a way of truth which this time is not determined by a phenomenon, by the present and contemporaneousness, and is not measured by certainty. This truth is irreducible to phenomena, and is hence essential in a world which can no longer believe that the books about God attest to transcendence as a phenomenon and to the Ab-solute as an apparition. And without the good reasons atheism brings forth, there would have been no enigma. Apart from the salvation drama whose play in existence Kierkegaard, a Christian thinker, fixed and described, his properly philosophical work seems to us to lie in the formal idea of a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth, a meaning paling in a meaning, a meaning thus already past and driven out, breaking up the *undephasable simultaneity* of phenomena. The God "remaining with the contrite and humble" (Isaiah LVII,15), on the margin, a "persecuted truth," is not only a religious "consolation," but the original form of transcendence. He is a node of a plot separate from the adventure of being which occurs in phenomena and in immanence, a new modality which is expressed by that "if one likes" and that "perhaps," which one must not reduce to the possibility, reality, and necessity of formal logic, to which skepticism itself refers.¹⁰

Disturbance is then not the breakup of a category too narrow for the order, which this breakup would then let shine forth in the setting of a broader category. Nor is it the shock of a provisional incomprehension which will soon *become* understanding. It is not as something irrational or absurd that disturbance disturbs. For the irrational presents itself to consciousness and lights up only within an intelligibility in which it ends by being situated and defined. No one is irrational knowing that he is.

The disturbance that is not the surprise of the absurd is possible only as the entry into a given order of another order which does not accommodate itself with the first. Thus we exclude from disturbance the simple parallelism of two orders that would be in a relationship of sign to signified, of appearance to thing in itself, and between which, as we have said, the relationship would reestablish the simultaneity of one single order. But it is also not a question of the meeting of two series of

¹⁰ Jeanne Delhomme's *La pensée interrogative* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954) renews the problem of modality, and, further, that of dogmatism and criticism, by refusing to the categorical judgment, and even to the certainty of the *Cogito*, the right to measure modality. Certainty itself must be measured by interrogation, which is a beginning of consciousness as such. What one calls the "first light" is from the first, and vertiginously, an "I wonder" or "I ask myself" ["je me demande"], and not an "I understand being." The "I-myself" of the asking would be the first reflection. On many points, our own endeavor to grasp the trace as an emptiness that is not reducible to nothingness (which is contemporaneous with being!) nor to the sign of an absent plenitude recuperable by re-presentation rejoins Mme. Delhomme's interrogation, despite the wholly different orientation of our efforts. AUTHOR'S NOTE

Cf. Also Levinas's article on this book, "Pénélope ou la pensée modale" in *Noms propres* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976), pp. 69-77.

significations that each, with equal rights, lay claim to the same phenomenon, as when a revolution is ascribed both to economic and to political causality, or a work of art both to the biography of the artist and to his philosophy, or when, in the ambiguity of metaphors, a literal meaning is inseparable from the figurative meaning and neither vanishes nor is absorbed in the meaning that nourishes it, but the two meanings glimmer in the same dawn, both turned to the light. In both these cases the different orders are simultaneous, or have a point of contact and synchronism. The tearing up of one order from another would already be a reciprocal participation. *The difference between contents is not strong enough to break the continuous form, the unbreakable plot, in which this difference is still regulated.*

For there to be a possibility of disturbance, a fissile present is required, “destructuring” itself in its very punctuality. The alterity that disturbs order cannot be reduced to the difference visible to the gaze that compares and therefore synchronizes the same and the other. *Alterity occurs as a divergency and a past* which no memory could resurrect as a present. And yet disturbance is possible only through an intervention. A stranger is then needed, one who has come, to be sure, but left *before* having come, absolute in his manifestation. “At the same time” would not be enough for the breakup of order. In order that the tearing up from order not be ipso facto a participation in order, this tearing up, this abstraction, must by a supreme anachronism,¹¹ precede its entry into order; the past of the other must never have been present.

This anachronism is less paradoxical than it seems. The temporal continuity of consciousness is *overwhelmed* whenever it is a “consciousness” of the other, and “against all expectation,” counter to all attention and anticipation, the “sensational” *turns back* the sensation that brings it. The – voluptuous – *acumen*, while still rising, has already fallen.¹² Self-consciousness is kept breathless with tension or relaxation, in the before or the after. In the *meanwhile* the event expected turns into the past without being lived through, without being equaled, in any present. Something takes place between the dusk in which the most ecstatic intentionality, which, however, never aims far enough, is lost (or is recollected) and the dawn in which consciousness returns to itself, but already too late for the event which is moving away. The great “experiences” of our life have properly speaking never been lived. Are not religions said to come to us from a past which was never a pure now? Their grandeur is due to this exorbitance exceeding the capacity of phenomena, of the present and of memory. To the voice that calls from the burning bush, Moses answers, “Here I am,” but does not dare to lift up his eyes. The glorious theophany which makes so much humility possible will be missed because

¹¹ Neither diachrony nor synchrony, but anachrony.

¹² Cf. Levinas’s descriptions of the erotic in *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), pp. 256 ff.

of the very humility which lowers the eyes.¹³ Later, on the rock of Horeb, the prophet ventures to know, but glory is refused to the boldness that seeks it. As transcendence, a pure passage, it shows itself as past.¹⁴ It is a trace.

The enigma does not come from afar to obscure a phenomenal manifestation, as though this manifestation – proportionate to cognition, that is, rational – were interrupted by mysterious islands of the irrational in which the double flowers of faith grow. The enigma extends as far as the phenomenon that bears the trace of the *saying* which has already withdrawn from the *said*. All the moments of historical time are fissile; the enchainment of an account is exposed to interruption. This is nowise an anthropological particularity, since language does not come to double up phenomena, so that men could point them out to one another. The significations of nature are but the result of a transfer of meaning from the anthropological to the natural. The human face is the face of the world itself, and the individual of the human race, like all things, arises already within the humanity of the world. This humanity is not anonymous, but is the humanity aimed at in him or her who, when his or her face shines, is just him or her one had been waiting for. Human sexuality is perhaps but this expectation of an unknown, but known, face. Significations which link up cover over the traces of the *saying* that left them, as the perfect crime artist inserts the traces of his violence in the natural folds of order. Phenomena open to disturbance, a disturbance letting itself be brought back to order: such is the ambiguity of an enigma. A manifestation turns into an expression, a skin left desolate by an irreversible departure which immediately denies it, reverted to the state of a ridge of sand on the earth, driving out even the memory of this departure. But the earth's crust remains permeable to expression, and space, the “pure form of the sensibility” and the “object of a geometry,”¹⁵ gapes open as a void in which the irreversible is not re-presented. Expression, saying, is not added on to significations that are “visible” in the light of phenomena, to modify them or confuse them and introduce into them “poetic,” “literary,” “verbal” enigmas; the significations said offer a hold to the *saying* which “disturbs” them, like writings awaiting an interpretation. But herein is the in principle irreversible antecedence of the word with respect to being, the irretrievable delay of the *said* after the *saying*. Of this antecedence, the significations which, meanwhile, suffice to themselves, bear a trace, which they forthwith contest and efface.

Subjectivity and “Illeity”

All speaking is an enigma. It is, to be sure, established in and moves in an order

¹³ Cf. Treatise *Berakhot* 7a, a passage referring to Exodus III, 6.

¹⁴ Exodus 33, 18–23.

¹⁵ Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1964), A 22–26; B 37–42.

of significations common to the interlocutors, in the midst of triumphant, that is, primary truths, in a particular language that bears a system of known truths which the speaking, however commonplace it is, does stir up and lead on to new significations. But behind this renewal, which constitutes cultural life, the saying, that is, the face, is the discretion of an unheard-of proposition, an insinuation, immediately reduced to nothing, breaking up like the “bubbles of the earth,” which Banquo speaks of at the beginning of *Macbeth*. Yet what can an attentive ear hear, listening at the doorway of language, which by the significations of which it is made closes on its own apertures? It is perhaps reasonable to respect the decency of this closed door. This door thus both open and closed is the extraordinary duplicity of an enigma. But the enigma concerns so particularly subjectivity, which alone can retain its insinuation, this insinuation is so quickly belied when one seeks to communicate it, that this exclusivity takes on the sense of an assignation first raising up such a being as a subjectivity. Summoned to appear, called to an inalienable responsibility – whereas the disclosure of Being occurs open to universality – subjectivity is enigma’s partner, partner of the transcendence that disturbs being.

How does it happen that there is subjectivity in being? Why is the silence of a breath heldback produced in the bustling of the totality? In order to tear itself from the ontological weight must not the subjectivity have to have received some most private convocation to appear from beyond being and the rational enchainment of its significations? This message is untranslateable into objective language, undefendable by coherent speech, null compared with the public order of the disclosed and triumphant significations of nature and history. It nonetheless summons with precision and urgency, because it first hollows out the dimension of inwardness. What good is inwardness, the extreme privacy of the singular ego, if it has to reflect beings or the being of beings, whose dwelling is in the light, which is of itself reason, and whose repetition in the psyche or the subjectivity would be a luxury in the economy of being? Must luxury double up the light? A quite different plot takes form in the I.

Phenomena, apparition in the full light, the relationship with being, ensure immanence as a totality and philosophy as atheism. The enigma, the intervention of a meaning which disturbs phenomena but is quite ready to withdraw like an undesirable stranger, unless one harkens to those footsteps that depart, is transcendence itself, the proximity of the other as other.

The other is other than being. Being excludes all alterity. It can leave nothing outside and cannot remain outside, cannot let itself be ignored. The being of beings is the light in which all things are in relationship. Its very night is a mute and concerted hammering out of all things, the obscure labor of the totality, an uninterrupted thrust of generation, growth, and corruption. But the other distinguishes himself absolutely, by absolving himself, moving off, passing, passing beyond being, to yield his place to being. Passing beyond being: this is the supreme goodness that would belie itself if it proclaimed itself! It is, to be sure, possible to

ask anew if this departure, this humility of being ab-solute, this divinity, does or does not exist. And nothing can stop this triumphant question. For how transparent is the shadow that troubles the clarity of coherent speech! How light is the voice of the “subtle silence”,¹⁶ that covers its victorious noise, how irresistible the authority of the call to order! But how empty is the space that the word that knows how to speak as though nothing had been said leaves to being.

An enigma is beyond not finite cognition, but all cognition. Cognition rests on apparition, on phenomena, which the being of beings unfolds, putting all things together by light, ordering order. Taken in the light, inevitably contemporaneous, things are present even in their most secret hiding places, as though being were a game of blind-man’s bluff where a blindfold over your eyes does not prevent presence from calling to you from all sides. But what in an enigma has signifyingness does not take refuge in a sphere that is present in its own way and awaits a concept capable of finding and grasping it there. The signifyingness of an enigma comes from an irreversible, irrecuperable past which it has *perhaps* not left since it has already been absent from the very terms in which it was signaled (“perhaps” is the modality of an enigma, irreducible to the modalities of being and certainty). We hear this way to signify – which does not consist in being unveiled nor in being veiled, absolutely foreign to the hide-and-seek characteristic of cognition, this way of leaving the alternatives of being – under the third person personal pronoun, under the word *He [I]*. The enigma comes to us from Illeity. The enigma is the way of the Ab-solute, foreign to cognition, not because it would not shine with a light disproportionately strong for the subject’s weak sight, but because it is already too old for the game of cognition, because it does not lend itself to the contemporaneousness that constitutes the force of the time tied in the present, because it imposes a completely different version of time. While being designates a community, without any possible dissidence, of the totality of fate and the undephasable contemporaneousness of cognition or comprehension (even historical¹⁷) to which the time tied in the present lends itself, in the trace of *illeity*, in the enigma, the synchronism falls out of tune, the totality is transcended in another time. This extravagant movement of going beyond being or transcendence toward an immemorial antiquity we call the idea of infinity. The infinite is an inassimilable alterity, a difference and ab-solute past with respect to everything that is shown, signaled, symbolized, announced, remembered, and thereby “contemporized” with him who understands. It is absolution, anachoretism – unto what abode? Its abode is in the refusal to dare, in Goodness, which excludes precisely all complacency in oneself and in one’s definition, is not petrified in an

¹⁶ I Kings, 19, 12.

¹⁷ “The philosophy of history and the history of philosophy aim beyond the individual and the event, which, insofar as they commingle identity with duration, dissociate temporality and historicity for the profit of a sort of intemporal time... The time that is recovered is not the time past, but the time that is surpassed.” H. Gouhier, *L’histoire et sa philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1952). AUTHOR’S NOTE

image, never tempts. The infinite is a withdrawal like a farewell which is signified not by opening oneself to the gaze to inundate it with light, but in being extinguished in the incognito in the face that faces. For this, as we have said, there must be someone who is no longer agglutinated in being, who, at his own risk, responds to the enigma and grasps the allusion. Such is the subjectivity, alone, unique, secret, unique, secret, which Kierkegaard caught sight of.

Ethics

This assignation – categorical in its straightforwardness, but already discrete, as though no one assigned and no one checked – summons to moral responsibility. Morality is the enigma's way.

How is a response made?

To the idea of the infinite only an extravagant response is possible. There has to be a “thought” that understands more than it understands, more than its capacity, of which it cannot be contemporary, a “thought” which, in this sense, could go beyond its death. To understand more than one understands, to think more than one thinks, to think of what withdraws from thought, is to desire, with a desire that, unlike need, is renewed and becomes ardent the more it is nourished with the desirable. To go beyond one's death is to sacrifice oneself. The response to the enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the known and the unknown, without calculation, for going on to infinity.

If what is desirable to desire is infinite, it can not be given as an end.¹⁸ The infinite's impossibility to be an end for the desire it arouses preserves it from contemporaneity, precisely by reason of its infinitude. The way in which desire goes to infinity is thus not the correlation characteristic of cognition. Even if it, with a different intentionality, should become an axiology or a praxis, the movement would still go from a subject to an object, and imitate correlation. Desire, or the response to an enigma, or morality, is a plot with three personages: the I approaches the infinite by going generously toward the you, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of illeity, presents himself out of a depth of the past, faces, and approaches me. I approach the infinite insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me; I forget myself only in breaking the undephasable simultaneity of representation, in existing beyond my death. I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself. Sacrifice is the norm and the criterion of the approach. And the truth of transcendence consists in the concording of speech with acts.

¹⁸ The French *fin* means 1) end, 2) goal, and 3) is associated with *fini* – finite.

Beyond Being

The unwonted plot which solicits the I and comes to a head beyond cognition and disclosure in enigma is ethics. The relationship with the infinite is not a cognition but an approach, a neighboring with what signifies itself without revealing itself, what departs but not to dissimulate itself. As infinite, it cannot lend itself to the present in which this play of clarity and abscondity is enacted. The relationship with the infinite then no longer has the structure of an intentional correlation. The supreme anachronism of a *past* that was never a *now*, and the approach of the infinite through sacrifice – is the enigma's word. A face can appear as a face, as a proximity interrupting the series, only if it enigmatically comes from the infinite and its immemorial past. And the infinite, to solicit desire, a thought thinking more than it thinks, cannot be incarnated in a desirable, cannot, qua infinite, be shut up in an end. It solicits across a face, the term of my generosity and my sacrifice. A you is inserted between the I and the absolute He. Correlation is broken.

It is then vain to posit an absolute you. The absolute withdraws from the illuminated site, the “clearing”¹⁹ of the present, in which being is unveiled and in which speech about speech still claims, and perhaps legitimately, to be a speech about being. This speech will take pleasure in showing that order remains ever intact. But the absolute which withdraws has disturbed it: the illuminated site of being is but the passage of God. It is not a tomb in which his form would be sketched out, for the site of the same, deserted by the absolutely other, could never contain the infinity of alterity. He who has passed beyond has never been a presence. He preceded all presence and exceeded every contemporaneity in a time which is not a human duration, nor a falsified projection, nor an extrapolation of duration, is not a disintegration and disappearance of finite beings, but the original antecedence of God relative to a world which cannot accommodate him, the immemorial past which has never presented itself, which cannot be said with the categories of being and structure, but is the One, which every philosophy would like to express, beyond being.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. Heidegger's use of the term *Lichtung* (clearing) in “Letter on Humanism” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 205–6, 210–11, 219, 237, 239.

²⁰ “Beyond being” (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) is an expression of Plato's, *Republic* 509b (cf. also 517bg and 518d), where it characterizes the Good. Plotinus uses the same expression with regard to the Other in *Enneads* V, 1, 8 and V, 6, title.

CHAPTER 6

MEANING AND SENSE*

The reality given to receptivity and the meaning it can take on seem distinguishable. For it seems as though experience first gave contents – forms, solidity, roughness, color, sound, savor, odor, heat, heaviness, etc. – and then all these contents were animated with meta-phors, receiving an overloading through which they are borne *beyond* the given.¹

This *metaphor* can be taken to be due to a deficiency of perception, or to its excellence, according as the *beyond* involved in a metaphor leads to other contents which were simply absent from the limited field of the perception, or is transcendent with respect to the whole order of contents or of the given.²

This rectangular and solid opacity would become a book only inasmuch as it bears my thought toward other data still, or already, absent – toward the author that writes, the readers that read, the shelves that store, etc. All these terms are announced, without being given, in the rectangular and solid opacity that forces itself on my sight and hands. Those absent contents confer a meaning on the given. But this recourse to absence would indicate that perception failed in its mission, which is to render present, to represent. Perception, due to its finitude, would have failed in its vocation, and would have made up for this *lack* by signifying what it could not represent. The act of signifying would be poorer than the act of perceiving. By right reality should possess a signification from the first. Reality and intelligibility should coincide. The identity of things should bear the identity of their meaning. For God, capable of an unlimited perception, there would be no meaning distinct from the reality perceived; understanding would be equivalent to perceiving.

*“Meaning and Sense” was published in French as “La Signification et le Sens” in *Humanisme de l’Autre Homme*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972, pp. 17-63. The notes in this chapter have been added by Professor Adrian Peperzak, except where indicated.

¹ Play on the word “meta-phor” – literally, what carries away over something.

² A meta-phor, which gives meaning to a reality, can be explained in two ways: 1) by a fault in perception; this is discussed in the third through sixth paragraphs of this chapter; or 2) by the excellence of perception – this is discussed in the seventh through twelfth paragraphs. The first way is followed from Plato to Husserl; the second has its greatest defender in Heidegger.

Intellectualism – whether it be rationalist or empiricist, idealist or realist – is bound up with this conception. For Plato, for Hume, and even for contemporary logical positivists, meaning is reducible to contents given to consciousness. Intuition, in the straightforwardness of a consciousness that welcomes data, remains the source of all meaning, whether these data be ideas, relations or sensible qualities. The meanings conveyed by language have to be justified in a reflection on the consciousness that aims at them. Every metaphor that language makes possible has to be reduced to the data, which language is suspected of abusively going beyond. The figurative meaning has to be justified by the literal meaning supplied in intuition.

In *Epicurus' Garden* Anatole France reduces the proposition “The spirit listest where it will” to its elementary meaning. He deflates the inflated metaphors which, unnoticed by us, would be at play in this proposition. He moves from the false prestige of language to the atoms of experience. For him, they are the atoms of Democritus and Epicurus. He wishes to go back to the dreary downpour of the atoms that pass through space and strike our senses, and to the flash produced by their agglomeration.

What is simplistic in this empiricism can be easily compensated for, without losing the essential of this intuitivist or intellectualist conception of meaning. Husserl who, in one aspect of his work, marks the end of this notion of meaning, does continue intellectualism (these two directions in his thought make for one of the – perhaps fertile – ambiguities of his philosophy): he accounts for meanings by a return to the given. The categorial intuition,³ a notion with which he breaks with sensualist empiricism, in fact prolongs the intuitionist conception of meaning. Relations and essences are also given. Intuition remains the source of all intelligibility. Sense is given in the very straightforwardness⁴ that characterizes the relationship between noesis and noema. Is not Husserl's transcendental philosophy a sort of positivism which locates every meaning in the transcendental inventory it aims to draw up? The hyletic data and the “meaning ascriptions” are minutely inventoried as though one were dealing with a financial dossier. Even what remains unrealized is somehow given, given in a blank, in an open “signifying” intention, and is warrented like “unpaid bills” in the noema that corresponds to this noesis. Every absence has as its *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* the given. The expression of meanings serves only to fix or to communicate meanings justified in intuition. Expression plays no role in the constitution or in the understanding of these meanings.

³ Cf. E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay (New York: Humanities, 1970), §§ 45 and 46; and Levinas's commentary in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. André Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 80–82, and in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), pp. 26–29.

⁴ We are translating “signification” by “meaning”; “sens” by “sense”. In French “sens” designates both “meaning” and “direction”; this duality is felt throughout this essay. Hence the relationship with “droiture” – “straightforwardness” of a conscious movement. But “droiture” also conveys a sense of “uprightness.” TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

But a metaphor – the reference to absence – can also be taken as an excellence that belongs to an order quite different from pure receptivity.⁵ The absence to which the metaphor leads would then not be another given, still to come or already past. The meaning would not be our consolation for a perception that was disappointed, but would first *make perception possible*. Pure receptivity, in the sense of a pure sensible without any meaning, would be only a myth or an abstraction. Sonorous contents “without any meaning” like vowels have a “latent birth” in meanings – this is the philosophical teaching already contained in Rimbaud’s sonnet.⁶ There is no given already possessing identity; no given could enter thought simply through a shock against the wall of receptivity. To be given to consciousness, to flicker for it, would require that the given first be placed in an illuminated horizon – like a word, which gets the gift of being understood from the context to which it refers. The meaning would be the very illumination of this horizon. But this horizon does not result from an addition of absent data, since each datum would already need a horizon so as to be able to be defined and given. This notion of horizon or *world*, conceived after the model of a context and ultimately after the model of a language and a culture – with everything that is historically adventitious and “already happened” involved – will be the locus in which meaning would then be located.

Already words are seen to not have isolable meanings, such as figure in dictionaries, and which one might reduce to some sort of contents or givens. They could not be congealed into a literal meaning. In fact there would be no literal meaning. Words do not refer to contents which they would designate, but first, laterally, to other words. Despite the mistrust he shows for written language (and even, in the seventh letter, for all language)⁷ Plato in the *Cratylus* teaches that even the names given to the gods – the proper names attached, conventionally, as signs, to individual beings – refer, through their etymology, to other words which are not proper names.⁸ In addition, language refers to the positions of the one that listens and the one that speaks, that is, to the contingency of their history. To try to inventory up all the contexts of language and of the positions in which interlocutors can find themselves would be a demented undertaking. Each word-meaning is at the confluence of innumerable sematic rivers.

Like language, experience too no longer appears to be made up of isolated elements, somehow lodged in a Euclidean space in which they could be exposed, each on its

⁵ Pure receptivity is a concept found in Kant and French idealists such as Alain. The second possible explanation for meta-phors, which Levinas here begins to consider, is linked to Husserl’s analysis of “horizons” and “world”, and the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

⁶ Rimbaud, “Voyelles”:

*A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O blue: voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes.*

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue. Vowels,
one day I will tell your hidden births.

⁷ *Phaedrus* 275b–277a; *Seventh Letter* 341b–344d; *Phaedrus* 278b.

⁸ *Cratylus* 396c–397d, 400d–408c.

own, directly visible, and each signify by itself. They signify on the basis of the “world” and of the position of the one that looks at them. We will come back to the essential role that this position plays in language and in experience, and to the alleged contingency of position, in the theory we are now examining.

One would be wrong to take the meanings which custom attaches to words that serve to express our immediate and sensible experiences to be primary. Baudelaire’s “correspondences”⁹ show that sensible data overflow, though their meanings, the elements in which we take them to be contained. Mikel Dufrenne, in his fine book *The Concept of the A Priori*,¹⁰ was able to show that, for example, the experience of spring and infancy remain authentic and autochthonous over and beyond the seasons and human ages. When another contemporary philosopher¹¹ speaks of “dusk” or “dawn philosophies,” the meaning of the adjectives used does not necessarily refer back to our meteorological experiences. It is indeed more probable that our experiences of morning and evening draw from the meaning that being as a whole has for us, a meaning which the jubilation of mornings and the mystery of twilight participate in. Then it would be more authentic to speak of a morning philosophy than of a morning briskness! But meanings are not limited to any special region of objects, are not the privilege of any content. For they arise precisely in the reference of one to another – and to anticipate already what we want to say – in the *assembling of the whole of Being* about him who speaks or perceives, and who also forms a part of the assembled Being. In a study of Homeric comparisons, M. Snell (as quoted by Karl Löwith¹²) points out that when in the *Iliad* the resistance to an attack by an enemy phalanx is compared to the resistance of a rock to the waves that assail it, it is not necessarily a matter of extending to the rock, through anthropomorphism, a human behavior, but of interpreting human resistance petromorphically. Resistance is neither a human privilege, nor a rock’s, just as radiance does not characterize a day of the month of May more authentically than the face of a woman. The meaning precedes the data and illuminates them.

Here lies the essential justification and great force of Heidegger’s etymologies, which, starting with the impoverished and flat meaning of a term apparently designating a content of external or psychological experience, lead toward a global situation in which a totality of experiences is assembled and illuminated. The given is presented from the first *qua* this or that, that is, as a meaning. Experience is a reading, the understanding of meaning an exegesis, a hermeneutics, and not an intuition. *This taken qua that* – meaning is not a modification that affects a content

⁹ The fifth poem, “Correspondences,” of Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*.

¹⁰ Cf. Levinas’s article “A priori et subjectivité, à propos de *La Notion de l’à priori* de M. Mikel Dufrenne” in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1967), pp. 179–86.

¹¹ According to information supplied by M. Levinas, the reference here is to a lecture by M. Henri Birault.

¹² Cf. K. Löwith, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen, Zur Kritik der geschichtlichen Existenz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), p. 222, who refers here to B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*, 1955, pp. 258 ff.

existing outside of all language. Everything remains in a language or in a world, for the structure of the world resembles the order of language, with possibilities no dictionary can arrest. In the *this qua that*, neither the *this* nor the *that* are first given outside of discourse. In the example we started with, this rectangular and solid opacity does not later take on the meaning of being a book, but is already signifying in its allegedly sensible elements. It contrasts with the light, with the daylight, refers to the sun that rose or the lamp that was lit, refers to my eyes also, as the solidity refers to my hand, not only as to organs which apprehend it *in* a subject, and would thereby be somehow opposed to the apprehended object, but also as to beings that are *alongside of* this opacity, *in the midst of* a world common to this opacity, this solidity, these eyes, this hand, and myself as a body. There never was a moment meaning came to birth out of a meaningless being, outside of a historical position where language is spoken. And that is doubtless what was meant when we were taught that language is the home of being.¹³

Whence, in a movement radically opposed to that which amused Anatole France, the idea of the priority of the “figurative meaning,” which would not result from the pure and simple presence of an object placed before thought. The objects would become meaningful on the basis of language, and not language on the basis of objects given to thought, objects which words functioning as simple signs would then designate.

2. Meaning, Totality, and Cultural Gesture

Philosophers now accord language a founding role; it would mark the very notion of culture. Its essence consists in making being as a whole shine forth, beyond the *given*. The given would take on a meaning from this totality.

But the totality that illuminates would not be the total of an addition made by a God fixed in his eternity. The totalization of the totality is not to be taken to resemble a mathematical operation. It would be a creative and unforeseeable assembling or arranging,¹⁴ very like Bergsonian intuition in its newness and in what it owes to history. It is through this reference of the illuminating totality to the creative gesture of subjectivity that we can characterize what is original in the new notion of meaning, irreducible to the integration of contents intuitively given, irreducible also to the Hegelian totality which is constituted objectively. Meaning, as an illuminating totality necessary to perception itself, is a free and creative arrangement: the eye that sees is *essentially* in a body which is also hand and

¹³ A play on Heidegger's dictum that language is the house of Being. *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 63.

¹⁴ This description of *das Seiende im Ganzen* as an illuminating totality and a creative assembling or arranging refers to Heidegger's *Lichtung*, *Sammlung* and *Geschick*.

phonetic organ, a creative activity in gestures and language.¹⁵ The “position of the one that is looking” does not introduce a relativity into the allegedly absolute order of the totality that would be projected on an absolute retina. *Of itself* a look would be relative to a position. Sight would be *by essence* attached to a body, would belong to an eye. *By essence* and not only *in fact*. The eye would not be the more or less perfected instrument in which the ideal enterprise of vision, capturing, without shadows or deformations, the reflection of being would be realized empirically in the human species. Both the fact that the totality overflows the sensible given and the fact that vision is incarnated would belong to the essence of sight. Its original and ultimate function would not consist in reflecting being as in a mirror. The receptivity of vision should not be interpreted as an aptitude to receive impressions. A philosophy such as that of Merleau-Ponty, who guides the present analysis, was able to be astonished by the marvel of a sight essentially attached to an eye.¹⁶ In such a philosophy the body would be conceived as inseparable from the creative activity, and transcendence as inseparable from the corporeal movement.

Let us go further into these notions, which are fundamental. The whole of being has to be produced in order to illuminate the given. It has to be produced before a being can be reflected in thought as an object. For nothing can be reflected in a thought before the footlights are turned on and a curtain raised on the side of being. The function of him who has to be there to “welcome the reflection” is at the mercy of this illumination. But this illumination is a process of assembling of being. Who will operate this assembling? It turns out that the subject who is there before being to “welcome the reflection” is also on the side of being, to operate the assembling. This ubiquity is incarnation itself, the marvel of the human body.

We can admire the reversal of the gnoseological schema affected here: the work of cognition now begins on the side of the object or from behind the object, in the backstage of being. A being must first be illuminated and take on a meaning by reference to this assembling, in order that a subject could welcome it. But it is the incarnate subject which, in assembling being, will raise the curtain. The spectator is an actor. Sight is not reducible to the welcoming of a spectacle; it at the same time operates in the midst of the spectacle it welcomes.

These operations to be sure in one way evoke the syntheses of the understanding which, for transcendental philosophy,¹⁷ make experience possible. And this comparison is the more legitimate in that Kant strictly distinguished the syntheses

¹⁵ In this and in what follows Levinas is concerned not only with Heidegger but also with Merleau-Ponty. According to information supplied by Levinas, this study was written after studying Merleau-Ponty's *Signs* (trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

¹⁶ “Eye and Mind,” trans. Carleton Dallery in James M. Edie, ed., *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

¹⁷ The transcendental philosophy of Kant and his successors also seeks the conditions of possibility which precede our knowledge of experience. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* on the difference between *Erfahrung* and *Anschauung*, B 202 ff and 218 ff.

of the understanding from intuition, as though, in the domain that concerns us here, he was refusing to identify the understanding one can have of a meaning with a vision of any sort of given, be it of some superior or sublime rank. But the transcendental operations of the understanding do not correspond to the birth of meanings in the concrete horizons of perception. It is to these horizons that Merleau-Ponty has drawn attention.¹⁸

The assembling of being which illuminates objects and makes them meaningful is not just an accumulation of objects. It amounts to the production of those non-natural beings of a new type which are cultural objects – paintings, poems, melodies – but also to the affects of any linguistic or manual gesture of the most ordinary activity, which are creative in their evocation of former cultural creations. These cultural “objects” assemble into totalities the dispersion or accumulation of beings; they shine forth and illuminate, they express or illuminate an epoch, as we were indeed accustomed to say. To collect into a whole, that is, to express, that is, to make meaning possible is the function of the “object – the work or cultural gesture.” And in this way there is set up a new function of *expression*, which hitherto was taken either to serve as a means of communication, or to transform the world in view of our needs. The newness of this function is also due to the original ontological plane in which it is situated. As means of communication or as a mark of our practical projects, expression wholly devolved from a thought antecedent to it; expression was taken to move from the inward to the exterior. In its new function, taken on the level of a cultural “object,” expression is no longer guided by an antecedent thought. The subject ventures forth by effective speaking or manual gestures into the density of the preexistent language and cultural world (which is familiar to it, but not through cognition, is foreign to it, but not through ignorance). Qua incarnate, this word and this gesture belong to language and a cultural world already and from the start; otherwise they could not stir up and rearrange and reveal them to the “inner forum” of thought, which the venture of the cultural gesture had always already overflowed. The cultural action does not express a preexisting thought, but Being, to which, as incarnate, it belongs already. *Meaning cannot be inventoried in the inwardness of a thought.* Thought itself is inserted in culture through the verbal gesture of the body which precedes it and goes beyond it. The objective culture to which, through the verbal creation, it adds something new, illuminates and guides it.

It is then clear that the language through which meaning is produced in being is a language spoken by incarnate minds. The incarnation of thought is not an accident that would have occurred to it and would have complicated its task by diverting the straightforward movement with which it aims at an object. The body is the fact that thought is immersed in the world that it thinks and, consequently, expresses this

¹⁸ Cf. *Signs*, pp. 92–97.

world while it thinks it. The corporeal gesture is not a nervous discharge, but a celebration of the world, a poetry. The body is a feeling felt; that is, according to Merleau-Ponty, what is so wondrous about it.¹⁹ Qua felt, it is still on this side, on the side of the subject, but qua feeling it is already on the other side, on the side of the objects; a thought that is no longer paralytic, it is a movement that is no longer blind, but creative of cultural objects. It unites the subjectivity of perceiving (an intentionality aiming at an object) and the objectivity of expressing (an operation in the perceived world which creates cultural beings – language, poems, paintings, symphonies, dances – illuminating horizons). The cultural creation is not added on to receptivity, but is its other side from the start. We are not the subject of the world and a part of the world from two different points of view; in expression we are subject and part at once. To perceive is both to receive and to express, by a sort of prolepsis. We know through gestures how to imitate the visible and to coincide *kinesthetically* with the gesture *seen*: in perception *our* body is also the “delegate” of *being*.

It is visible that throughout this conception expression defines culture; culture is art, and art or the celebration of being constitutes the original essence of incarnation. Language qua expression is, above all, the creative language of poetry. Art is then not a blissful wandering of man who sets out to make something beautiful. Culture and artistic creation are part of the ontological order itself. They are ontological par excellence: they make the understanding of being possible. It is then not by chance that the exaltation of culture and cultures, the exaltation of the artistic aspect of culture, guides contemporary spiritual life; that, over and beyond the specialized labor of scientific research, the museums and the theaters, as in former times the temples, make communion with being possible, and that poetry passes for prayer. The artistic expression would assemble being into a meaning and thus provide the original light that scientific cognition itself would borrow from. Artistic expression would thus be an essential event that would be produced in being by artists and philosophers. It is then not surprising that Merleau-Ponty's thought seemed to evolve toward that of Heidegger.²⁰ Cultural meaning is taken to occupy an exceptional place between the objective and the subjective – the cultural activity disclosing being; the one that works this disclosure, the subject, invested by being as its servant and guardian. Here we rejoin the schemas of the last writings of Heidegger, but also the idée fixe of the whole of contemporary thought – the overcoming of the subject-object structures. But perhaps at the source of all these philosophies, we find the Hegelian vision of a subjectivity that comprehends itself as an inevitable moment of the becoming by which being leaves its darkness, the vision of a subject aroused by the logic of being.

¹⁹ Cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 90–97.

²⁰ As is evident in the posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

The symbolism of the meaning bound to language – and to the culture assimilated to language – can then nowise be taken to be a defective intuition, a makeshift of an experience separated from the plenitude of being, which would therefore be reduced to signs. A symbol is not the abridgement of a real presence that would preexist it; it would give more than any receptivity for the world could ever receive. The signified would surpass the given not because it would surpass our ways to capture it²¹ – and we without any intellectual intuition – but because the signified is of another order than the given, even though it be taken as the prey of a divine intuition. To *receive the given* would no longer be the original way to relate to being.

3. The Antiplatonism of the Contemporary Philosophy of Meaning

The totality of being in which being shines forth as meaning is not an entity fixed for eternity, but requires the arranging and assembling, the cultural act of man. Being as a whole – meaning – shines forth in the works of poets and artists. But it shines forth in diverse ways in the diverse artists of the same cultures, and is diversely expressed in the diverse cultures. This diversity of expression is not, for Merleau-Ponty, a betrayal of being, but is responsible for the glitter of the inexhaustible richness of its event. Each cultural work traverses the whole of being, yet leaves it intact. And in Heidegger being is revealed out of the hiddenness and mystery of the unsaid which the poets and philosophers bring to speech, without ever saying everything. All the expressions which Being received and receives in history would be true, for truth would be inseparable from its historical expression, and, without its expression, thought does not think anything. Whether it be of Hegelian, Bergsonian, or phenomenological origin, the contemporary philosophy of meaning is thus opposed to Plato at an essential point: the intelligible is not conceivable outside of the becoming which suggests it.²² There does not exist any *meaning in itself* which a thought would have been able to reach by jumping over the deforming or faithful, but sensory, reflections which lead to it. One has to traverse history²³ or relive duration²⁴ or start from concrete perception and the language established in it, in order to arrive at the intelligible.²⁵ All the

²¹ As the first explication (first six paragraphs) formulates, following Kant. (On intellectual intuition, cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 35n, 88, 90, 169, 268, 270ff.

²² According to Plato, the intelligible (τὸν νοῦν, the true reality which can only be reached through thought) is indeed present in the sensible world, which is characterized by change and becoming; it is in fact only to be discovered via sensible reality, which however, thought must rise over. The ideas are not submerged in sensibility, but remain intrinsically independent of it. The contemporary movements of thought which Levinas discusses here contest this intrinsic transcendence of the ideas with their explanation of incarnation. The truth itself has become historical.

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*.

²⁴ According to Bergson, beginning with *Time and Free Will*.

²⁵ Summary of Merleau-Ponty's standpoint. Cf. *Signs*, pp. 84-113.

picturesqueness of history, all cultures, are no longer obstacles separating us from the essential and the intelligible, but ways that give us access to it. Even more! They are the only ways, the only possible ones, irreplaceable, and consequently implicated in the intelligible itself.

In the light of contemporary philosophy, and by contrast with it, we understand better what the separateness of the intelligible world means in Plato, over and beyond the mythical sense ascribed to the realism of the Ideas: for Plato the world of meanings precedes language and culture, which express it; it is indifferent to the system of signs that one can invent to make this world present to thought. It thus dominates the historical cultures. For Plato there exists a privileged culture which approaches it and which is capable of understanding the provisional and as it were infantile character of historical cultures; there exists a culture that would consist in depreciating the purely historical cultures, and in as it were colonizing the world, beginning with the land²⁶ in which this revolutionary culture arose – this philosophy which goes beyond cultures. There exists a culture that would consist in redoing the world in function of the intemporal order of the Ideas, as the Platonic Republic which sweeps away the allusions in the alluvium of history, that Republic from which the poets of the *μίμησις* are driven. For the language of these poets does not function to lead toward meanings preexisting their expression and eternal; it is not a pure narration of these ideas – διπλῆ διήγησις ἀνευ μιμήσεως (*Republic*, 394b). It seeks to imitate the direct discourses of innumerable cultures and of the innumerable manifestations in which each unfolds. These poets thus allow themselves to be drawn into the becoming of the particularities, peculiarities and oddities, from which the expressed thoughts would not be separable for the poets of the *μίμησις* (as for many moderns), and of which one cannot draw up a simple account. The loss or forgetting or abolition of these particularities – these idiocies – would make humanity lose inappreciable treasures of meanings, irrecoverable without the taking up of all these cultural forms, that is, without imitating them.

For contemporary philosophy, meaning is not only correlative with thought, and thought is not only correlative with a language that would make of meaning a διπλῆ διήγησις. To this intellectualist structure of *correlation* between intellect and intelligible, which maintains the separation of the planes – is superposed a *nearness* and a *side-by-sidedness*, a *belongingness* which unites the intellect and the intelligible on the one plane of the world, forming that “fundamental historicity” which Merleau-Ponty speaks of. The love of truth which in Plato would place pure thought in front of meaning is thus shown to be an incestuous trouble, because of this consanguinity of the intellect and the intelligible, embroiled in the network of language, born in the expression from which thought is not separable. The

²⁶ Greece. Cf. E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 277–79. Concerning colonialism, see *infra*, pp. 100–102.

antiplatonism of contemporary philosophy consists in this subordination of the intellect to expression: the face-to-face position of soul and idea is interpreted as a limit abstraction of a coming into contact in a common world; the intellect aiming at the intelligible would itself rest on the being which this aim only claims to illuminate. No philosophical movement better than contemporary phenomenology has brought out the transcendental function of the whole concrete density of our corporeal, technical, social and political existence, but it has also thereby brought out the interference of the transcendental relationship²⁷ and the physical, technical, and cultural relations which constitute the world in the “fundamental historicity” – in this new form of the *mixed*.²⁸

We alluded above to the kinship between Bergson and phenomenology. Bergson’s antiplatonism does not only lie in his general revalorization of becoming²⁹; it is like the phenomenological antiplatonism in that it is also found in Bergson’s conception of understanding.³⁰ When Bergson refuses to separate the choice which the free being would have to make from the whole past of this being, when he refuses to admit that a problem which requires a decision could be formulated in abstract and intellectual terms about which just any rational being would be competent to adjudge, he situates the intelligible in the prolongation of the whole concrete existence of the individual. The meaning of the decision to be taken can be intelligible only for him who would have lived through the whole past which leads to this decision. The meaning cannot be understood directly in a fulguration which illuminates and dissipates the night in which it arises³¹ and which it leads to its denouement. The whole density of history is necessary for it.

For phenomenologists as for Bergsonians, a meaning cannot be separated from the access leading to it. *The access is part of the meaning itself*. The scaffolding is never taken down; the ladder is never pulled up.³² Whereas the Platonic soul, liberated from the concrete conditions of its corporeal and historical existence, can

²⁷ By transcendental relation is meant here the relationship with the “ideal,” the true reality, which one can reach only by means of a movement that rises over and beyond immediate experience.

²⁸ Cf. Plato, *Philebus* 25b–27c – concerning the third sort of being, which is “mixed together” from infinity and finitude. One should perhaps also think of Plato’s analysis in the *Republic* of *thumos*, which shares in rationality (*λογιστικόν*) as well as in the lower faculty of desire (*ἐπιθυμητικόν*). See also Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 52: “And I see that I am, as it were, a mean between God and nothingness, ...”

²⁹ As this is to be found in *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1937).

³⁰ Cf. *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) and *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margareth Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919).

³¹ An allusion to the sudden sight of the beautiful or of the One. Cf. Plato. *Symposium* 210e–212a; Plotinus, *Ennead* VI 9,4 and 7–10.

³² Cf. “Signature,” in *Difficile liberté* (Paris: A. Michel, 1963), pp. 323–27.

reach the heights of the empyrean to contemplate the Ideas,³³ whereas a slave, provided that he “understands Greek” which enables him to enter into relationship with the master,³⁴ reaches the same truths as the master, our contemporaries require that God himself, if he wishes to be a physicist, have spent his time in the laboratory, go through the weighings and measurings, the sensible perception and even the infinite series of aspects in which a perceived object is revealed.

The most recent, boldest and most influential ethnography maintains the multiple cultures on the same plane.³⁵ The political work of decolonization is thus attached to an ontology – to a thought of being, interpreted in its multiple and multivocal cultural meaning. And this multivocality of meaning of being – this essential disorientation³⁶ – is perhaps the modern expression of atheism.

4. The “Economic” Meaning

In fact to the multiplicity of meanings which come to reality from culture and cultures is opposed the fixed, privileged meaning which the world acquires in function of man’s needs. Needs raise the simply given things to the rank of values. Admirably straightforward and impatient in their aim, needs give themselves the multiple possibilities of meaning only so as to choose the unique way of satisfaction. Man thus confers a unique meaning to being, not by celebrating it, but by working it. In technical and scientific culture, the equivocation in being, as the equivocation in meaning, would be overcome. Then, instead of being content with the play of cultural meanings, one would, out of a concern for truth, have to extract the words from the metaphors by creating a scientific or algorithmic terminology, insert the real, scintillating with a thousand lights for perception, into the perspective of human needs and the action which the real effects or undergoes. One would have to reduce perception to the science which the possible transformation of the world justifies, man to the complexes exhibited by psychoanalysis, society to its economic structures. Everywhere one would have to find the sense beneath the meaning, beneath the metaphor, the sublimation, the literature. There would then be “serious,” real meanings, put in scientific terms, oriented by needs and, in general, by economy. Economy alone would be really oriented and signifying. It alone would know the secret of a proper meaning prior to the figurative meaning. The cultural

³³ “Empyreum” is not a term used in Plato, but in another Greek tradition; it was taken up by Medieval theology and by Dante. It refers to the highest or furthest removed heaven, realm of fire. Levinas uses the term here to remind the reader of Plato’s myths about the abode of the blessed. See *Gorgias* 523a–527d; *Phaedo* 107c–115d; *Republic* 614c ff; *Phaedrus* 246d ff.

³⁴ *Meno* 82b.

³⁵ Levinas refers here to the similarity between Claude Lévi-Strauss (who dedicated his book *The Savage Mind* to Merleau-Ponty) and Merleau-Ponty (see his “From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss” in *Signs*, pp. 114–24).

³⁶ See section 5.

meaning, detached from this economic – technological and scientific – sense would have but the value of a symptom, the worth of an ornament suited to the needs of a game, an abusive and deceptive meaning, exterior to truth. No doubt is possible about the profoundly rationalist aspiration of this materialism, its fidelity to the unity of sense which the multiplicity of cultural meanings would itself presuppose.

Yet the great merit of Bergson and of phenomemology will have been to have shown the metaphorical character of this identification of reality with *Wirklichkeit*. The technical designation of the universe is itself a modality of culture: the reduction of the real to an “object in general,” the interpretation of being as though it were destined for the laboratory and the factory. The scientific and technical vision which is imposed on needs modifies them, levels them and creates them more than is aroused by their original straightforwardness and univocity. For in fact no human need exists in the univocal state of an animal need. Every human need is from the first already interpreted culturally. Only need taken at the level of underdeveloped humanity can give this false impression of univocity. Moreover, it is not certain that the scientific and technical signification of the world could “dissolve” the multiplicity of cultural meanings. We might in fact doubt that when we observe the threats that national particularisms³⁷ represent for the unity of the new international society put under the sign of modern scientific and industrial development, and of the regrouping of humanity around the univocal imperatives of materialism. It is as though these particularisms themselves corresponded to needs. And this to be sure takes from them the character of being simple superstructures. Finally, the forms in which this search for the unique sense of being on the basis of needs is manifested are acts aiming at the realization of a society. They are borne by a spirit of sacrifice and altruism, which no longer proceeds from these needs (unless we play on the word “need”). The needs which allegedly orient being receive their sense from an intuition which no longer proceeds from these needs. This was already the capital teaching of Plato’s *Republic*: the State which is founded on the needs of men can neither subsist nor even arise without the philosophers who have mastered their needs and contemplate the Ideas and the Good.³⁸

5. The Unique Sense³⁹

The impossibility of seating the univocal meaning of being on materialism (although the search for that univocal meaning is greatly to the honor of materialism) does

³⁷ Cf. Levinas’s observations on the conflict between China and the U.S.S.R. in “Le débat russe-chinois et la dialectique” in *Difficile liberté*, pp. 225–27.

³⁸ The central part of the *Republic* (471c–541b) is devoted to this.

³⁹ “Sens unique” in French carries the meaning both of “the only meaning” and “one-way direction” – as in the traffic code. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

not itself compromise this ideal of unity, which constitutes the force of truth and the hope for an understanding among men. The cultural and aesthetic notion of meaning could not draw it from itself, nor do without it.

We are indeed told that cultural meanings do not betray being by their pluralism, but only through it rise to the measure and *essence*⁴⁰ of being, that is, to its *way* of being. Being *is* not in such a way as to congeal into a Parmenidean sphere,⁴¹ identical to itself, nor into a completed and fixed creation. The totality of being envisioned from cultures could nowise be a panoramic view. There could not be a totality in being, but only totalities. There is nothing that could encompass all of them. They would not be open to any judgment that would claim to be the final judgment. We are told: being *is* historically; it requires men and their cultural becoming in order to assemble. We are told: the unity of being at any moment would only consist in the fact that men understand one another, in the penetrability of cultures by one another. This penetrability could not come about through the mediation of a common tongue that would, independently of the cultures, convey the proper and ideal articulations of the meanings, and thus in fact make these particular tongues useless. In this whole conception, the penetration takes place – according to Merleau-Ponty's expression – laterally. For there does exist the possibility of a Frenchman learning Chinese and passing from one culture into another, without the intermediary of an esperanto that would falsify both tongues which it mediated. Yet what has not been taken into consideration in this case is that an *orientation* which leads the Frenchman to take up learning Chinese instead of declaring it to be barbarian (that is, bereft of the real virtues of language), to prefer speech to war, is needed. One reasons as though the equivalence of cultures, the discovery of their profusion and the recognition of their richness were not themselves the effects of an orientation and of an unequivocal sense in which humanity stands. One reasons as though the multiplicity of cultures from the beginning sunk its roots in the era of decolonization, as though incomprehension, war, and conquest did not derive just as naturally from the contiguity of multiple expressions of being – the numerous assemblages or arrangements which it takes on in the diverse civilizations. One reasons as though peaceful coexistence did not presuppose that in being there is delineated an orientation which gives it a unique sense. Must we not then distinguish the meanings, in their cultural pluralism, from the sense, orientation and unity of being – a primordial event in which all the other steps of thought and the whole historical life of being is situated? Do the cultural meanings arise as random wholes in the dispersion of the given? Do they not take on meaning in a dialogue maintained with that which signifies *of itself* – with the other? These original meanings would command the assemblings of being; it would not be these random

⁴⁰ In the active or “transitive” sense of the word, as Heidegger takes it. Cf. also Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, pp. 14–22, 67–83.

⁴¹ *Parmenides*, fragment VIII, 43–44.

assemblings that would already, and outside of all dialogue, constitute meanings. Do not meanings require a unique sense from which they derive their very signifyingness?

The world, as soon as one moves on from the humble daily tasks, and language, as soon as one moves on from commonplace talk, have lost the *univocity* which had authorized us to ask of them the criteria of the meaningful. Absurdity consists not in non-sense, but in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense that orients them. What is lacking is the sense of the meanings, the Rome to which all the roads lead, the symphony in which all the meanings can sing, the canticle of canticles.⁴² The absurdity lies in multiplicity in pure indifference. The cultural meanings put forth as the ultimate are the break-up of a unity. It is not simply a matter of fixing the conditions in which the facts of our experience or the signs of our language arouse in us the feeling of understanding, or appear to proceed from a rational intention, or convey a structured order. It is, over and beyond these logical and psychological problems, a question of the true meaning.

This loss of unity has been proclaimed – and consecrated through a contrary movement – by the celebrated paradox, become a commonplace, of the death of God.⁴³ The crisis of sense is thus experienced by our contemporaries as a crisis of monotheism. There was a time when a god intervened in human history by force, sovereign to be sure, invisible to the eye without being provable by reason – supernatural, consequently, or transcendental; but his intervention occurred in a system of reciprocities and exchanges. The system was sketched out starting with a man preoccupied with himself. The god transcending the world remained united to the world through the unity of an economy.⁴⁴ His effects would end up among the effects of all the other forces, get shuffled in with them and form *miracles*. God was a god of miracles, even in an age when no one expects miracles any more, a force in the world, magical despite all his morality, for morality was inverted into magic, acquired magical virtues; such was a god to whom one presents oneself as a beggar. The status of his transcendence, despite the immanence of his revelation – a transcendence new with respect to the unbridgeable transcendence of the Aristotelian god⁴⁵ – the status of this transcendence of the super-natural was never set forth. The interventions of the supernatural god could to a certain extent be allowed for or even inflected, like the effects of other wills and other forces which preside over events. When history gives lie to this economy, this did not refute the supernatural providence any more than the deviations of the stars refuted the

⁴² Allusion to the *Song of Songs* of Solomon.

⁴³ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §343.

⁴⁴ Here (compare *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), Section III) economy (from *oīkos* home) refers to the ego who cares about itself and turns the world into a home within which it can enjoy itself.

⁴⁵ Cf. Aristotle's *Physics* 267b 6–9; *Metaphysics* 1072a 18–1073a 13, 1074b15–1075a 11, cf. 1064a 37.

Ptolemaic astronomy. It even confirms it, at the cost of some new theological epicycles.⁴⁶

This religion which the person required for himself, rather than feeling himself required by this religion, and this god entered into the circuit of economy (a religion and a god, however, which did not exhaust the message of the Scriptures) have lost much of their influence over men. And with them the sense of a world perfectly and very simply ordained to this god is also lost. We do not think that the meaningful could do without God., nor that the idea of being or of the being of entities could be substituted for him, so as to bring meanings to the unity of sense without which there is no sense.

But we cannot describe sense starting with this still economic idea of God; it is the analysis of sense that must give out the notion of God which sense harbors. Sense is impossible on the basis of an ego which exists, as Heidegger puts it, in such a way that “he is in his very existence in question as to his existence.”⁴⁷

6. Sense and Work

The reflection on cultural meaning leads to a pluralism which lacks a one-way sense. For a moment economy and technology seemed to delineate such a sense. But if cultural meanings can be interpreted as superstructures of economy, economy in turn derives its forms from culture. The ambivalence of meanings bears witness to a disorientation. Let us note first that this ambiguity seems to respond to a certain philosophical mind which is satisfied with a non-polarized ether. Does not sense as orientation indicate a leap, an outside-of-oneself toward the *other than oneself*, whereas philosophy means to reabsorb every Other into the Same and neutralize alterity? A distrust of every unconsidered move, a lucidity of old age which absorbs the imprudences of youth, action in advance recuperated in the knowledge which guides it – this is perhaps the very definition of philosophy.

Even if life precedes philosophy, even if contemporary philosophy, which means to be anti-intellectualist, insists on this priority of existence with respect to essence,⁴⁸ of life with respect to intellect, even if, in Heidegger, “gratitude” to being and “obedience”,⁴⁹ are substituted for contemplation, contemporary philosophy is

⁴⁶ An epicycle is a circle which, according to the Ptolemaic astronomy, is described by a star, whose midpoint again turns in a circle around the earth.

⁴⁷ *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 32.

⁴⁸ Compare J.-P. Sartre’s “Existence precedes essence.” *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Bernard Frechman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), p. 15.

⁴⁹ *Danken*, to thank – *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp.145–47. *Hören-Gehör*, to hear, to listen is related to *Gehorsamkeit*, obedience. *What Is Called Thinking?*, p.119; “Letter on Humanism,” trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 241; *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1971), p. 91.

complacent in the multiplicity of cultural meanings – and in the infinite play of art, being is relieved of its alterity. Philosophy is produced as a form in which the refusal of engagement in the other, the waiting⁵⁰ preferred to action, indifference with regard to others, the universal allergy of the early infancy of philosophers is manifest. Philosophy's itinerary remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island⁵¹ – a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the other.

But must we renounce knowing and meanings in order to find sense? Must there be a blind orientation in order that cultural meanings take on a one-way sense, and in order that being find again a unity of meaning? Does not a blind orientation represent the instinctual rather than human order, in which the person betrays his vocation of being a person in getting absorbed in the law which situates and orients him? Is it not then possible to conceive of an orientation, a sense, in being which would unite univocity and freedom? This at any rate is the goal of the analysis which we have undertaken.

First we must fix with precision the conditions for such an orientation. It can be posited only as a movement going outside of the identical, toward an other which is absolutely other. It begins in an identical, a same, an ego; it is not a “sense of history” which dominates the ego, for the irresistible orientation of history makes meaningless the very fact of the movement, since the Other would be already inscribed in the Same, the end in the beginning. An orientation which goes *freely* from the Same to the Other is a work.

But then a work must be conceived not as an apparent agitation of a stock which afterwards remains identical to itself, like an energy which in all its transformations remains equal to itself.⁵² Nor must it be conceived as a technology which through the celebrated negativity⁵³ reduces a foreign world into a world whose alterity is converted into my idea. Both conceptions continue to affirm being as self-identical and reduce its fundamental event to thought, which is – and this is the indelible lesson of idealism – thought of itself, thought of thought.⁵⁴ An attitude, initially an attitude taken up toward the other, becomes, in Eric Weil's terminology,⁵⁵ a totality or a category. *A work conceived radically is a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same.* A work thought through all the

⁵⁰ Allusion to Heidegger's *Warten*, cf. *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 67–69, 71–76.

⁵¹ Cf. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 102; “La trace de l'autre” in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, p. 191 and “Judaïsme et altruisme” in *De l'identité juive à la communauté* (Paris: Congrès Juif Mondial, 1963), p. 12.

⁵² H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*.

⁵³ The Same/Self “integrates” (*aufhebt*) the Other via the denial or destruction of his absolute otherness.

⁵⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074b34. Also G.W.F. Hegel's *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, which ends with a quotation from Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1072b 18–30.

⁵⁵ Eric Weil, *Logique de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1950), pp. 70–86.

way requires a radical generosity of the movement which in the Same goes toward the Other. It consequently requires an *ingratitude* of the other; gratitude would be the *return* of the movement to its origin.

But a work differs from a game where there is pure expenditure. It is not undertaken in pure loss. It is more serious than an identity surrounded with nothingness. A work is neither a pure acquisition of merits nor a pure nihilism. For, like the seeker after merits, the nihilist agent immediately takes himself as his term and his goal, beneath the apparent gratuity of his action. A work is then a relationship with the other, who is reached without showing itself touched. It takes form outside of the morose savoring of failures and consolations, which for Nietzsche defines religion.

But a departure with no return, which, however, does not go forth into the void, would also lose its absolute *orientation* if it sought recompense in the immediacy of its triumph, if it awaited the triumph of its cause impatiently. The one-way movement would be reversed and become a reciprocity. Confronting its beginning and its end, the agent would reabsorb the work in calculations of deficits and compensations, in bookkeeping operations. It would be subordinated to thought. As an orientation toward the other, as sense, a work is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering into the Promised Land.⁵⁶

The future for which such an action acts must from the first be posited as indifferent to my death. A work which is different from play and from computations, is being-for-beyond-my-death.⁵⁷ Patience does not consist in the agent betraying his generosity by giving himself the time of a personal immortality. To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is to envisage this triumph in a *time without me*, to aim at this world below without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time, in an eschatology without hope for oneself, or in a liberation from my time.

To be *for* a time that would be without me, *for* a time after my time, over and beyond the celebrated "being for death," is not an ordinary thought which is extrapolating from my own duration; it is the passage to the time of the other. Should what makes such a passage possible be called *eternity*? In any case the possibility of sacrifice which goes to the limit of this passage discovers the non-inoffensive nature of this extrapolation: to be for death in order to be for that which is after me.

A work as an absolute orientation of the Same unto the Other is then like a radical youth of the generous impulse. We could fix its concept with a Greek term "liturgy," which in its primary meaning designates the exercise of a function which

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 3:23–28; 32:48–52.

⁵⁷ "*L'être pour-au-delà-de-ma-mort*," in opposition to Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode, être-pour-la-mort* (being toward death, cf. *Being and Time* §§46 ff.).

is not only totally gratuitous, but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss.⁵⁸ For the moment all meaning drawn from any positive religion has to be removed from this term, even if in a certain way the idea of God should show its trace at the end of our analysis. On the other hand, a work without remuneration, whose result is not allowed for in the time of the agent, and is assured only for patience, a work that is effected in the complete domination of and surpassing of my time, liturgy is not to be ranked alongside of “works” and ethics. It is ethics itself.

The relationship which we have apparently just constructed, is not simply constructed. The total gratuity of action – a gratuity different from play – moves our age even if the individuals may be not up to its height – and indicates the free character of the orientation. Our age is not defined by the triumph of technology for the sake of technology, as it is not defined by art for the sake of art, and as it is not defined by nihilism. It is an action for a world to come, a going beyond one’s epoch – a going beyond oneself which requires the epiphany of the other – such is the fundamental thesis which underlies these pages. In the Bourassol prison and the Pourtalet Fort Léon Blum was, in December, 1941, finishing a book.⁵⁹ He wrote: “We are working in the present, not for the present. How many times in meetings with the people have I repeated and commented on Nietzsche’s words: Let the future and the things most remote be the rule of all the present days!” The philosophy with which Léon Blum justifies this strange force of working, without working for the present, is not here the essential; the force of his confidence is incommensurate with the force of his philosophy. 1941! – a hole in history – a year in which all the visible gods had abandoned us, in which god was really dead or gone back into his non-revealedness. A man in prison continues to believe in a nonrevealed future and invites men to work in the present for the most remote things, for which the present is an irrecusable negation. There is a vulgarity and a baseness in an action that is conceived only for the immediate, that is, in the last analysis, for our life. And there is a very great nobility in the energy liberated from the hold of the present. To act for far-off things at the moment in which Hitlerism triumphed, in the deaf hours of this night without hours – independently of every evaluation of the “forces in presence” – is, no doubt, the summit of nobility.

7. Sense and Ethics

Sense as the liturgical orientation of a work does not arise from need. Needs opens upon a world that is *for me*; it returns to itself. Even a sublime need, such as the

⁵⁸ λειτουργία, from λείτος, of the people, and ἔργειν, to work) = service to the people, or in the general interest.

⁵⁹ According to an oral communication from Levinas, this work is called *A l'échelle humaine*.

need for salvation, is still a nostalgia, a longing to go back. A need is return itself, the anxiety of the I for itself, egoism, the original form of identification. It is the assimilating of the world in view of self-coincidence, in view of happiness.

In the “Canticle of the Columns” Valéry speaks of a “faultless desire.”⁶⁰ He is doubtless referring to Plato who, in his analysis of pure pleasures, discovered an aspiration that is conditioned by no prior lack.⁶¹ We are taking up this term desire; to a subject turned to itself, which, according to the Stoic formula is characterized by σορμή the tendency to persist in its being, or for which, according to Heidegger’s formula, “there is in its existence question as to this very existence,” a subject thus defined by care for itself, which in happiness realizes its *for itself*, we are opposing the desire for the other which proceeds from a being already gratified and in this sense independent, which does not desire for itself. It is the need of him who no longer has needs. It is recognizable in the need for an other who is another [Autrui], who is neither my enemy (as he is in Hobbes and Hegel) nor my “complement,” as he still is in Plato’s Republic, which is set up because something is lacking in the subsistence of each individual.⁶² The desire for the other, sociality, is born in a being that lacks nothing, or, more exactly, it is born over and beyond all that can be lacking or that can satisfy him. In desire the I is borne toward the other in such a way as to compromise the sovereign self-identification of the I, for which need is but nostalgia, and which the consciousness of need anticipates. The movement toward the other, instead of completing me and contenting me, implicates me in a conjuncture which in a way did not concern me and should leave me indifferent – what was I looking for here? Whence came this shock when I passed, indifferent, under another’s gaze? The relationship with the other puts me into question, empties me of myself and empties me without end, showing me ever new resources. I did not know I was so rich, but I no longer have the right to keep anything for myself. Is the desire for the other an appetite or a generosity? The desirable does not gratify my desire but hollows it out, and as it were nourishes me with new hungers. Desire is revealed to be goodness. There is a scene in Dostoievski’s *Crime and Punishment* where Sonya Marmaladova looks upon Raskolnikof in his despair, and Dostoievski speaks of “insatiable compassion.” He does not say “inexhaustible compassion.” It is as though the compassion that goes from Sonya to Raskolnikof were a hunger which the presence of Raskolnikof nourishes beyond any saturation, increasing this hunger to infinity.

The desire for the other, which we live in the most ordinary social experience, is the fundamental movement, a pure transport, an absolute orientation, sense. In all

⁶⁰ Que portez-vous si haut
Egales radieuses?

– Au désir sans défaut

⁶¹ Vos grâces studieuses! (*Oeuvres I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 116.)
Philebus 50e ff and *Republic* 584b ff.

⁶² *Republic* 369c–372c.

its analyses of language contemporary philosophy insists, and indeed rightly, on its hermeneutical structure and on the cultural effort of the incarnate being that expresses itself. Has a third dimension not been forgotten: the direction toward the other who is not only the collaborator and the neighbor of our cultural work of expression or the client of our artistic production, but the interlocutor – he to whom expression expresses, for whom celebration celebrates, both term of an orientation and primary signification? In other words, expression, before being a celebration of being, is a relationship with him to whom I express the expression, and whose presence is already required for my cultural gesture of expression to be produced. The other who faces me is not included in the totality of being expressed. He arises behind every assembling of being as he to whom I express what I express. I find myself again facing another. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is *sense* primordially, for he gives sense to expression itself, for it is only by him that a phenomenon as a meaning is, of itself, introduced into being.

The analysis of desire, which it was important for us to first distinguish from need, and which delineates a sense in being, will be made clearer by the analysis of the alterity toward which desire is borne.

The manifestation of the other is, to be sure, produced from the first conformably with the way every meaning is produced. Another is present in a cultural whole and is illuminated by this whole, as a text by its context. The manifestation of the whole ensures his presence; it is illuminated by the light of the world. The understanding of the other is thus a hermeneutics and an exegesis. The other is given in the concreteness of the totality in which he is immanent, and which, according to Merleau-Ponty's remarkable analyses, which we have drawn upon freely in the first section of this essay, is expressed and disclosed by our own cultural initiative, by corporeal, linguistic or artistic gestures.

But the epiphany of the other involves a signifyingness of its own independent of this meaning received from the world. The other comes to us not only out of the context, but also without mediation; he signifies by himself. The cultural meaning which is revealed – and reveals – as it were *horizontally*, which is revealed from the historical world to which it belongs, and which, according to the phenomenological expression, reveals the horizons of this world – this mundane meaning is disturbed and jostled by another presence that is abstract (or, more exactly, absolute⁶³) and not integrated into the world. This presence consists in coming toward us, in *making an entry*. This can be put in this way: the *phenomenon* which the apparition of the other is is also a *face* – or, again (to indicate the entry, at every moment new, into the immanence and essential historicity of the phenomenon): the epiphany of a face is a *visitation*. Whereas a phenomenon is already, in whatever respect, an image, a captive manifestation of its plastic and mute form, the epiphany of a face is alive.

⁶³ Here Plato's philosophy of the “separated” idea-realm and of the Good, which is *καθ' αὐτό*, returns.

Its life consists in undoing the form in which every *entity*, when it enters into immanence, that is, when it is exposed as a theme, is already dissimulated.

The other who manifests himself in a face as it were breaks through his own plastic essence, like a being who opens the window on which its own visage was already taking form. His presence consists in *divesting* himself of the form which does already manifest him. His manifestation is a surplus over the inevitable paralysis of manifestation. This is what the formula “the face speaks” expresses. The manifestation of a face is the first discourse. Speaking is before anything else this way of coming from behind one’s appearance, behind one’s form, an openness in the openness.

The visitation of a face is thus not the disclosure of a world. In the concreteness of the world a face is abstract or naked. It is denuded of its own image. Through the nudity of a face nudity in itself is first possible in the world.⁶⁴

The nudity of a face is a bareness without any cultural ornament, an absolution,⁶⁵ a detachment from its form in the midst of the production of its form. A face *enters* into our world from an absolutely foreign sphere, that is, precisely from an absolute, that which in fact is the very name for ultimate strangeness. The signifyingness of a face in its abstractness is in the literal sense of the term extraordinary, outside of every order, every world. How is such a production possible? How can the coming of the other, the visitation of a face, the absolute not be – in any way – converted into a revelation, not even a symbolism or a suggestion? How is a face not simply a *true representation*⁶⁶ in which the other renounces his alterity? To answer, we will have to study the exceptional signifyingness of a trace and the personal “order” in which such a signifyingness is possible.

Let us for the moment attend to the sense which the abstractness or nudity of a face which breaks into this order of the world involves, and the overwhelming of consciousness which corresponds to this “abstractness”. Stripped of its very form, a face is paralyzed in its nudity. It is a distress. The nudity of a face is a denuding, and already a supplication in the straightforwardness that aims at me. But this supplication is an exigency; in it humility is joined with height. The ethical dimension of visitation is thereby indicated. A *true representation* remains a possibility of appearance; the world which strikes against thought can do nothing against free thought – which is able to refuse inwardly, to take refuge in itself, to remain precisely a *free thought* before the true, to return to itself, to reflect on itself and take itself to be the origin of what it receives, to master what precedes it through memory. While free thought thus *remains the Same*, a face imposes itself upon me

⁶⁴ Cf. *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 256–66.

⁶⁵ Absolution here has the active sense of a concrete abstraction which makes the face absolute and strips it of its phenomenality. At the same time, the absolute stranger is heard in it.

⁶⁶ Western thinking is a *representational* thinking. Cf. Heidegger’s critique of *Vorstellung* (*Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, no trans. given (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 120ff) and that of Levinas in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, pp. 23–26.

without my being able to be deaf to its call or to forget it, that is, without my being able to stop holding myself responsible for its distress. Consciousness loses its first place.

The presence of a face thus signifies an irrecusable order, a command, which puts a stop to the availability of consciousness. Consciousness is called into question by a face. Being called into question is not the same as becoming aware of this being called into question. The “absolutely other” is not reflected in consciousness. It resists it to the extent that even its resistance is not convertible into a content of consciousness. Visitation consists in overwhelming the very egoism of the I which supports this conversion. A face confounds the intentionality that aims at it.

What is at stake here is the calling of consciousness into question, and not a consciousness of a calling into question. The I loses its sovereign self-coincidence, its identification, in which consciousness returns triumphantly to itself to rest on itself. Before the exigency of the other the I is expelled from this rest, and is not the already glorious consciousness of this exile. Any complacency would destroy the straightforwardness of the ethical movement.

But the calling into question of this wild and naive freedom for itself, sure of its refuge in itself, is not reducible to a negative movement. The calling into question of oneself is in fact the welcome of the absolutely other. The epiphany of the absolutely other is a face, in which the other calls on me and signifies an order to me through his nudity, his denuding. His presence is a summons to answer. The I does not only become aware of this necessity to answer, as though it were an obligation or a duty about which it would have to come to a decision; it is in its very position wholly a responsibility or a diacony, as it is put in Isaiah, chapter 53.

To be an I means then not to be able to escape responsibility, as though the whole edifice of creation rested on my shoulders.⁶⁷ But the responsibility that empties the I of its imperialism and its egoism, even the egoism of salvation, does not transform it into a moment of the universal order; it confirms the uniqueness of the I. The uniqueness of the I is the fact that no one can answer for me.

To discover such an orientation in the I is to identify the I with morality. The I before the other is infinitely responsible. The other who provokes this ethical movement in consciousness and puts out of order the good conscience of the Same coinciding with itself involves a surplus for which intentionality is not adequate. This is what desire is: to burn with another fire than need, which saturation extinguishes, to think beyond what one thinks. Because of this unassimilable surplus, because of this *beyond*, we have called the relationship which links the I

⁶⁷ Cf. “Pièces d’identité” in *Difficile liberté*, pp. 73–77. “A Jew is accountable and responsible for the whole edifice of creation. Something engages man even more than the salvation of his soul. The acts, utterances, thoughts of a Jew have the formidable privilege of destroying or restoring worlds. Jewish identity is thus not a gentle presence unto itself, but patience and fatigue and the numbness of a responsibility, a stiff neck which bears up the universe.” Further, Levinas speaks of “his exceptional destiny, of a man supporting the universe.” (p. 75)

with the other the idea of infinity.⁶⁸

The idea of infinity is a desire. It paradoxically consists in thinking more than what is thought and maintaining what is thought in this very excess relative to thought – in entering into a relationship with the ungraspable while guaranteeing its status of being ungraspable. Infinity is not a correlate of the idea of infinity, as though this idea were an intentionality that is *fulfilled* in its “object”.⁶⁹ The wonder of infinity in the finite is an overwhelming of intentionality, an overwhelming of that appetite for light which is in intentionality; unlike the saturation in which intentionality subsides, infinity confounds its idea. The I in relationship with the infinite is an impossibility of stopping its forward march, the impossibility of deserting its post (in Plato’s words in the *Phaedo*⁷⁰); it is, literally, not to have time to turn back. It is to be not able to escape responsibility, to not have a hiding place of inwardness where one comes back into oneself, to march forward without concern for oneself. There is an increase of exigencies on oneself: the more I face my responsibilities the more I am responsible. The putting into question of consciousness and its entry into a conjuncture of relations which contrast with disclosure is a power made of “impotencies.”

Thus in the relationship with a face, in the ethical relationship, there is delineated the straightforwardness of an orientation, or sense. The *consciousness* of philosophers is essentially reflective. Or, at least, consciousness is grasped by philosophers in its moment of return which is taken for its very birth. Already in its spontaneous and prereflexive movements they take it to cast a glance back at its origin and measure the path crossed. That is where its initial essence would lie: it is a critique, a self-mastery, an analysis and decomposition of every meaning that overflows the self. Responsibility is to be sure neither blind, nor amnesiac; but across all the movements of thought in which it extends it is borne by an extreme urgency, or more exactly, coincides with it. What has just been described as a “lack of time to turn around” is not the accident of a clumsy or unhappy consciousness, “overtaken by events” or that “has trouble keeping up,” but the utter rigor of an attitude without reflection, a primordial straightforwardness, a *sense* in being. “Where does this resistance of the unreflected to reflection come from?” Merleau-Ponty asked at Royaumont in April, 1957, in connection with problems that the Husserlian theory of phenomenological reduction poses.⁷¹ Our analysis of *sense* perhaps responds to this fundamental question, which Merleau-Ponty refused to resolve by simple recourse to the finitude of the subject, incapable of total

⁶⁸ Cf. “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity,” supra, pp. 47-59.

⁶⁹ The “fulfilling” of an intentionality refers to Husserl’s conception of “empty” and “filled” intentions; cf. Levinas’s commentary in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, pp. 65 ff.

⁷⁰ *Phaedo* 62b.

⁷¹ At the third Colloque Philosophique de Royaumont, devoted to Husserl’s philosophy, published under the title *Husserl* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1959). The quoted words from Merleau-Ponty are to be found on p. 158.

reflection. “To turn to the truth with one’s whole soul”⁷² – the Platonic recommendation is not limited to a pedagogy of good sense, preaching effort and sincerity. Does it not aim at the ultimate reticence, the most sly of all, that of a soul which, before the Good, persists in reflecting on itself, and thus arresting the movement unto the other? Is not the force of this “resistance of the unreflected to reflection” the will itself, prior and posterior to, alpha and omega of, every representation? And is not the will thus at bottom humility rather than will to power? Humility is not to be confused with an equivocal negation of oneself, already proud of its virtue, which, in reflection, it immediately recognizes in itself. This humility is that of him who does not “have time” to make a return upon himself and undertakes nothing to “negate” the oneself, save the very abnegation of the rectilinear movement of a work which goes infinitely to the other.

To affirm such an orientation and such a sense, to posit a consciousness without reflection beneath and above all the reflections, in short to surprise at the bottom of the ego an unequivocal sincerity and a servant’s humility which no transcendental method could corrupt or absorb is to ensure the necessary conditions for a “beyond the given” which dawns in every meaning, for the *meta*-phor which animates it. For this is the marvel of language, whose “verbal origin” philosophical analysis will continue to denounce, without destroying the evident intention that penetrates it. Whatever be its psychological, social, or philological history, the *beyond* which a metaphor produces has a sense that transcends this history; the power to conjure up illusions which language has must be recognized, but lucidity does not abolish the beyond of these illusions. It is, to be sure, the role of reflection to reduce meanings to their subjective, subconscious, social, or verbal, sources, to draw up a transcendental inventory of them. But the method, though legitimate to destroy many false reputations, already prejudgets an essential result: it forbids in advance any transcendental aim in meaning. Before the research, every *other* is already converted by it into the *same*, but in its purifying work reflection will nonetheless itself use these notions, if only the notion of a *beyond* with respect to which immanence is situated – which without the sincerity and straightforwardness of the “consciousness without return” would have no meaning. Nothing of what is sublime does without psychological, social, or verbal sources, save sublimation itself.

This consciousness “without reflection” is not the spontaneous, simply pre-reflexive and naive consciousness; it is not precritical. To discover the orientation and the one-way sense in the moral relationship is precisely to posit the ego as already put into question by the other it desires, and, consequently, as criticized in the very straightforwardness of its movement. That is why the putting into question of consciousness is not initially a consciousness of the putting into question. The first is the condition for the second. How would spontaneous thought turn back,

⁷² *Phaedo* 65a–67b.

if the other, the exterior, did not put it into question? And how, in a concern for total critique entrusted to reflection, would the new naivety of reflection that removes the first naivety itself be removed? The ego erodes its dogmatic naivety before the other who asks of it more than it can do spontaneously.

The “term” of such a movement both critical and spontaneous – which is not, properly speaking, a term, for it is not an end, but the principle soliciting a work without recompense, a liturgy – is no longer called being. Here perhaps we can catch sight of the necessity for a philosophical meditation to resort to notions such as that of infinity or God.

8. Before Culture

We will say, to conclude, that before culture and aesthetics, meaning is situated in the ethical, presupposed by all culture and all meaning. Morality does not belong to culture: it enables one to judge it; it discovers the dimension of height. Height ordains being.

Height introduces a sense into being. It is already lived across the experience of the human body. It leads human societies to raise up altars. It is not because men, through their bodies, have an experience of the vertical that the human is placed under the sign of height; because being is ordained to height the human body is placed in a space in which the high and the low are distinguished and the sky is discovered – that sky which for Prince André, in Tolstoi, without any word of the text evoking colors, is all height.

It is most important to insist on the antecedence of sense to cultural signs. To attach every meaning to culture, to not distinguish between meaning and cultural expression, between meaning and the art that prolongs cultural expression, is to recognize that all the cultural personalities equally realize the spirit. Then no meaning can be detached from these innumerable cultures, to allow one to bear a judgment on these cultures. Universality could only be, according to Merleau-Ponty’s expression, lateral. This universality would consist in being able to penetrate one culture from another, as one learns a language on the basis on one’s mother tongue. The idea of a universal grammar and an algorithmic language built on the framework of this grammar would have to be given up. No direct or privileged contact with the world of Ideas is possible. Such a conception of universality would express the radical opposition, so characteristic of our epoch, to the expansion of culture by colonization. To cultivate and to colonize should be completely separated. We would be at the antipodes of what Léon Brunschvicg⁷³ (and Plato, hostile to the poets of the *μῆμησις*) taught us; the progress of Western consciousness would no longer consist in purifying thought of the alluvium of

⁷³ Especially in *Les âges de l’intelligence* (oral communication from the author).

cultures and the particularisms of language, which far from signifying the intelligible would perpetuate the infantile. It is not that Léon Brunschvicg could have taught us anything but generosity, but for him this generosity and the dignity of the Western world was a matter of liberating truth of its cultural presuppositions, so as, with Plato, to proceed toward meanings themselves, thus separated from becoming. The danger of such a conception is clear; the emancipations of minds can be a pretext for exploitation and violence. Philosophy had to denounce the equivocation, show meanings dawning at the horizon of cultures, and show the very excellence of Western culture to be culturally and historically conditioned. Philosophy thus had to rejoin contemporary ethnology. It is then that Platonism is overcome! But it is overcome in the name of the generosity of Western thought itself, which, catching sight of the *abstract* man in men, proclaimed the absolute value of the person, and then encompassed in the respect it bears it the cultures in which these persons stand or in which they express themselves. Platonism is overcome with the very means which the universal thought issued from Plato supplied. It is overcome by this so much disparaged Western civilization, which was able to understand the particular cultures, which never understood themselves.

The saraband of innumerable and equivalent cultures, each justifying itself in its own context, creates a world which is, to be sure, de-occidentalized, but also disoriented. To catch sight, in meaning, of a situation that precedes culture, to envision language out of the revelation of the other (which is at the same time the birth of morality) in the gaze of man aiming at a man precisely as abstract man, disengaged from all culture, in the nakedness of his face, is to return to Platonism in a new way. It is also to find oneself able to judge civilizations on the basis of ethics.⁷⁴ Meaning, the intelligible, consists in a being showing itself in its nonhistorical simplicity, in its absolutely unqualifiable and irreducible nakedness, existing "prior to" history and culture. Platonism, as an affirmation of the human independently of culture and history, is found again in Husserl, in the obstinacy with which he postulated the phenomenological reduction and the constitution (at least *de jure*) of the cultural world in the transcendental and intuitive consciousness. We are not obliged to follow him down the way he took to rejoin this Platonism, and we think we have found the straightforwardness of meaning by another method. That the intelligible manifestation is produced in the straightforwardness of morality and work measures the limits of the historical understanding of the world, and marks a return to Greek wisdom, even though mediated by all the development of contemporary philosophy.

Neither things, nor the perceived world, nor the scientific world enable us to rejoin the norms of the absolute. As cultural works, they are steeped in history. But the norms of morality are not embarked in history and culture. They are not even

⁷⁴ Cf. *Difficile liberté*, pp. 31–35, 39–41, 182–84; "The Ego and the Totality," supra, pp. 25–45.

islands that emerge from it – for they make all meaning, even cultural meaning, possible, and make it possible to judge cultures.

9. The Trace

The notion of sense developed on the basis of the epiphany of a face, which has enabled us to affirm sense “prior to history,” poses a problem to which, in closing, we would like to outline a response.

Is not the *beyond* from which a face comes, and which fixes consciousness in its straightforwardness or uprightness, an idea understood and disclosed in its turn?

If the extraordinary experience of entry and visitation retains its signifyingness, it is because the *beyond* is not a simple background from which a face solicits us, is not “another world”⁷⁵ behind the world. The *beyond* is precisely beyond the “world,” that is, beyond every disclosure, like the One of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*,⁷⁶ transcending all cognition, be it symbolic or signified. The one is “neither similar nor dissimilar, neither identical nor non-identical,” Plato says, thus excluding it from every even indirect revelation. A symbol still brings the symbolized back to the world in which it appears. What then can be this relationship with an absence radically withdrawn from disclosure and dissimulation? And what is this absence that makes visitation possible, but which is not reducible to concealment,⁷⁷ since this absence involves a signifyingness, a signifyingness in which, however, the other is not convertible into the same?

A face is abstract. This abstractness is not, to be sure, like the brute sensile datum of the empiricists. Nor is it an instantaneous cross-section of the world in which time would “cross” eternity. An instant belongs to the world. It is an incision made in time that does not bleed. But the abstractness of a face is a visitation and a coming. It *disturbs* immanence without settling into the horizons of the world. Its abstraction is not obtained by a logical process starting from the substance of beings and going from the particular to the general. On the contrary, it goes toward those beings, but does not compromise itself with them, withdraws from them, ab-solves itself. Its wonder is due to the *elsewhere* from which it comes and into which it already withdraws. This coming from *elsewhere* is not a *symbolic reference* to that *elsewhere* as to a term. A face presents itself in its nudity; it is not a form concealing, but thereby indicating, a ground, a phenomenon that hides, but thereby betrays, a thing itself. Otherwise, a face would be one with a mask, but a mask presupposes a face. If signifying were equivalent to indicating, a face would be insignificant. And

⁷⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1:3, “On the Afterworldly.”

⁷⁶ Plato, *Parmenides* 137e–142a.

⁷⁷ “Abscondit ”, cf. M. Heidegger, “Being itself withdraws into its truth. It harbors itself safely within its truth and conceals in such harboring.” *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 110.

Sartre will say that the other is a pure hole in the world⁷⁸ – a most noteworthy insight, but he stops his analysis too soon. The other proceeds from the absolutely absent. His relationship with the absolutely absent from which he comes *does not indicate, does not reveal* this absent; and yet the absent has a meaning in a face. This signifyingness is not a way for the absent to be given in a blank in the presence of a face – which would again bring us back to a mode of disclosure. The relationship which goes from a face to the absent is outside every revelation and dissimulation, a third way excluded by these contradictions. How is this third way possible? But are we not still seeking that from which a face proceeds as though it were a sphere, a place, a world? Have we been attentive enough to the interdiction against seeking the *beyond* as a world behind our world? The order of being would still seem to be presupposed, an order which contains no other status but that of the revealed and of the dissimulated. In being, a transcendence revealed is inverted into an immanence, the extra-ordinary is inserted into an order, the Other is absorbed into the Same. In the presence of the other do we not respond to an “order” in which signifyingness remains an irremissible disturbance, an utterly bygone past? Such is the signifyingness of a trace. The beyond from which a face comes signifies as a trace. A face is in the trace of the utterly bygone, utterly past absent, withdrawn into what Paul Valéry calls “the deep yore, never long ago enough,”⁷⁹ which cannot be discovered in the self by any introspection. For a face is the unique openness in which the signifyingness of the trans-cendent does not nullify the transcendence and make it enter into an immanent order; here on the contrary transcendence refuses immanence precisely as the ever *bygone* transcendence of the transcendent. In a trace the relationship between the signified and the signification is not a correlation, but *unrectitude* itself. The allegedly immediate and indirect relationship between a sign and the signified belongs to the order of *correlation*, and is thus still a rectitude, and a disclosure which neutralizes trans-cendence. The signifyingness of a trace places us in a “lateral” relationship, unconvertible into rectitude (something inconceivable in the order of disclosure and being), answering to an irreversible past. No memory could follow the traces of this past. It is an immemorial past – and this also is perhaps eternity, whose signifyingness obstinately throws one back to the past. Eternity is the very irreversibility of time, the source and refuge of the past.

But if the signifyingness of a trace is not immediately transformed into the straightforwardness which still marks signs, which reveal the signified absent and bring it into immanence, it is because a trace signifies beyond being. The personal “order” to which a face obliges us is beyond being. *Beyond being is a third person* which is not definable by the oneself, by ipseity. It is the possibility of that third

⁷⁸ J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 344.

⁷⁹ “C'est un profond jadis. Jadis jamais assez.” *Oeuvres I*, p. 118.

direction of radical *unrectitude* which escapes the bipolar play of immanence and transcendence proper to being, where immanence always wins against transcendence. Through a trace the irreversible past takes on the profile of a "He." The *beyond* from which a face comes is in the third person. The pronoun "He" expresses its unexpressible irreversibility, already escaping every relation as well as every dissimulation, and in this sense absolutely unencompassable or absolute, a transcendence in an absolute past. The *illeity*⁸⁰ of the third person is the condition for the irreversibility.⁸¹

This third person who in a face has already withdrawn from every relation and every dissimulation, who has passed, this *illeity*, is not a "less than being" by comparison with the world in which a face enters; it is the whole enormity, the whole inordinateness, the whole infinity of the absolutely other, which eludes treatment by ontology.⁸² The supreme presence of a face is inseparable from this supreme and irreversible absence which founds the eminence of visitation.

If the signifyingness of a trace consists in signifying without making appear, if it establishes a relationship with illeity, a relationship which is personal and ethical, is an obligation and does not disclose, and if, consequently, a trace does not belong to phenomenology, to the comprehension of the appearing and the dissimulating, we can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts.

A trace is not a sign like any other. But it also plays the role of a sign; it can be taken for a sign. A detective examines, as revealing signs, everything in the area where a crime took place which betokens the voluntary or involuntary work of the criminal; a hunter follows the traces of the game, which reflect the activity and movement of the animal the hunter is after; a historian discovers ancient civilizations which form the horizon of our world on the basis of the vestiges left by their existence. Everything is arranged in an order, in a world, where each thing reveals another or is revealed in function of another. But when a trace is thus taken as a sign, it is exceptional with respect to other signs in that it signifies outside of every intention of signaling and outside of every project of which it would be the aim. When in transactions one "pays by check" so that there will be a trace of the payment, the trace is inscribed in the very order of the world. But a real trace disturbs the order of the world. It occurs by overprinting. Its original signifyingness is sketched out in, for example, the fingerprints left by someone who wanted to wipe away his traces and carry out a perfect crime. He who left traces in wiping out his traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left. He disturbed the

⁸⁰ From *ille*, that one, *jene* (cf. *jenseits*). Cf. "Le nom de Dieu d'après quelques textes talmudiques" in *L'analisi del linguaggio teologico*, *Il nome di Dio* (Roma: Archivio di Filosofia, 1969), pp. 155–67, especially p. 166. See also "Phenomenon and Enigma," *supra*., pp.

⁸¹ See M. Roger Laporte's remarkable work *La Veille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) which also contains the "notion" of *He*. AUTHOR'S NOTE

⁸² Cf. "L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?" in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 56 (1951), pp. 88–98, reprinted in H. Birault et al., *Phénoménologie-Existence* (Paris: A. Colin, 1953), pp. 193–203.

order in an irreparable way. He has passed absolutely. To be qua *leaving a trace* is to pass, to depart, to absolve oneself.

But in this sense every sign is a trace. In addition to what the sign signifies, it is the past of him who delivered the sign. The signifyingness of a trace doubles up this signifyingness proper to a sign emitted in view of communication. A sign stands in this trace. This signifyingness lies in, for example, the writing and the style of a letter, in all that brings it about that during the emission of a message, which we capture on the basis of the letter's language and its sincerity, someone passes, purely and simply. This trace can be taken in its turn as a sign. A graphologist, an expert in writing styles, or a psychoanalyst could interpret a trace's singular signifyingness, and seek in it the sealed and unconscious, but real, intentions of him who delivered the message. But then what remains specifically a trace in the writing and style of the letter does not signal any of these intentions, any of these qualities, reveals and hides nothing. In a trace has passed a past absolutely bygone. In a trace its irreversible lapse is sealed. Disclosure, which reinstates the world and leads back to the world, and is proper to a sign or a signification, is done away with in traces.

But then is not a trace the weight of being itself outside of its acts and its language, weighing not through its presence, which fits it into the world, but by its very irreversibility, its ab-soluteness? A trace would seem to be the very indelibility of being, its omnipotence before all negativity, its immensity incapable of being self-enclosed, somehow too great for discretion, interiority, or a self. And it was indeed important for us to say that a trace does not effect a relationship with what would be less than being, but obliges with regard to the infinite, the absolutely other. But this superiority of the superlative, this height, this constant elevation to power, this exaggeration or this infinite overbidding – and, let us say the word, this divinity – are not deducible from the being of beings nor its revelation, even if it is contemporary with a concealment, nor with “concrete duration.”⁸³ These signify something on the basis of a past which, in a trace, is neither indicated nor signaled, but yet disturbs order, while coinciding neither with revelation nor with dissimulation. A trace is the insertion of space in time, the point at which the world inclines toward a past and a time. This time is a withdrawal of the other and, consequently, nowise a degradation of duration, which, in memory, is still complete. Superiority does not reside in a presence in the world, but in an irreversible transcendence. It is not a modulation of the being of entities. As *He* and third person it is somehow outside the distinction between being and entities. Only a being that transcends the world, an ab-solute being, can leave a trace. A trace is a presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, of what is always past. Plotinus conceived the procession from the One as compromising neither the immutability nor the ab-solute separation of the One. It is in this situation, at first purely dialectical and quasi-verbal (and which is also true of Intelligence and the

⁸³ Cf. H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*.

Soul, which remain with their principle in their higher parts, and are inclined only through their lower parts, a structure which still belongs to iconography), that the exceptional signifyingness of a trace delineates in the world. “... [M]uch more then does the unit, The One, remain intact in the principle which is before all beings; especially since the entities produced in its likeness, while it thus remains intact, owe their existence to no other, but to its own all-sufficient power. [...] [I]n the realm of Being, the trace of The One establishes reality: existence is a trace of The One(*Enneads*, 5:5)

That which preserves the specific signifyingness of a trace in each trace of an empirical passage, over and above the sign it can become, is possible only through its situation in the trace of this transcendence. This position in a trace, which we have called *illeity*, does not begin in things, which by themselves do not leave traces, but produce effects, that is, remain in the world. When a stone has scratched another stone, the scratch can, to be sure, be taken as a trace, but in fact without the man who held the stone this scratch is but an effect. It is as little a trace as the forest fire is a trace of the lightning. A cause and an effect, even separated by time, belong to the same world. Everything in things is exposed, even what is unknown in them. The traces that mark them are part of this plenitude of presence; their history is without a past. A trace qua trace does not simply lead to the past, but is the very passing toward a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time – the past of the other, in which eternity takes form, an absolute past which unites all times.

The absoluteness of the presence of the other, which has justified our interpreting the exceptional uprightness of thou-saying as an epiphany of him, is not the simple presence in which in the last analysis things are also present. Their presence belongs to the present of *my life*. Everything that constitutes my life with its past and its future is assembled in the present in which things come to me. But it is in the trace of the other that a face shines: what is presented there is absolving itself from my life and visits me as already ab-solute. Someone has already passed. His trace does not *signify* his past, as it does not *signify* his labor or his enjoyment in the world; it *is* a disturbance imprinting itself (we are tempted to say *engraving* itself) with an irrecusable gravity.

The *illeity* of this *He* is not the *it* of things which are at our disposal, and to which Buber and Gabriel Marcel rightly prefer the *Thou* to describe a human encounter. The movement of an encounter is not something added to an immobile face; it is in the face itself. A face is of itself a visitation and a transcendence. But a face, wholly open, can at the same time be in itself because it is in the trace of *illeity*. *Illeity* is the origin of the alterity of being in which the *in itself* of objectivity participates, while also betraying it.

The God who passed⁸⁴is not the model of which the face would be an image. To

⁸⁴ Exodus 33:18–23; Moses was allowed to see only God’s back.

be in the image of God⁸⁵ does not mean to be an icon of God, but to find oneself in his trace. The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence, which is in the personal “order” itself. He shows himself only by his trace, as is said in Exodus 33. To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity. It is through this illeity, situated beyond the calculations and reciprocities of economy and of the world, that being has a sense. A sense which is not a finality.

For there is no end, no term. The desire of the absolutely other will not, like need, be extinguished in a happiness.

⁸⁵ Genesis 1:27.

CHAPTER 7

LANGUAGE AND PROXIMITY*

1. Ideality and Signification

Events which are staggered out according to time and reach consciousness in a series of acts and states also ordered according to time acquire, across this multiplicity, a unity of meaning in narration. Signs which signify by their place in a system and by their divergency from other signs (and the words of historically constituted languages do present this formal aspect) are able to confer an identity of meaning to the temporal dispersion of events and thoughts, to synchronize them in the undephasable simultaneity of a story.

Linguistic signs, which constitute a systematic unity, are able to identify a theme through the manifold ways of fabulation. Synopsis results from the unity of a theme which is identified in the narration. More exactly, it occurs as the upsurge of a theme, and the reducibility to a theme of every non-thematized, non-theoretical and even “still ineffable” manifestation. Being is manifested with a theme. Perhaps from this comes intellectualism’s ever-renascent power, and the pretension to absoluteness of speech, which is capable of embracing everything, relating everything, thematizing everything, even its own failures, even its own relativity. Words then do not issue from an intention limited to the vain action of substituting signs for things and signs for signs. On the contrary, the establishing and utilizing of verbal signs is borne by a narrating and thematizing intentionality, which ends up at beings.

Thus language can be interpreted as the manifestation of truth, as the way being takes to show itself. Logos as speech is entirely one with logos as rationality. The communication which language ensures appears as a subsidiary function, so much so that, as a pure and simple circulation of messages, it could be compared with the circulation of women and of merchandise in a society. Communication is simply derivative of the logos which animates or bears thought. It is made possible by the break which the logos consummates with the particularisms of the thinker and of

* “Language and Proximity” was published in French in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 2e éd., pp. 217–36.

Notes not marked “Author’s Note” are by the translator.

experience, a break which links up with universality. The necessities proper to communication can, to be sure, have an effect on the rigorously logical work of language by constraining it to speak to a more and more broad universality; but communication itself thus is subjected to the ends of truth.

Narrative – and, consequently, verbal, linguistic – intentionality is essential to thought, inasmuch as thought is thematization and identification. For the identification of the given in experience is a pure claim. It is not a vision or a sublimated experience. It does not consist in perceiving *this* or *that*, but in “understanding,” in “alleging” (in enacting a movement which the German term “*meinen*” conveys exactly) this *as* that and that *as* that, in “understanding” this *as* that, without in any way prejudging the contents. This “*as*” does not separate the thinker from “being in the original,” as does Husserl’s “signitive” intention, which, compared with the full vision of its object, “intends” emptily. The understanding of this *as* that does not understand the object, but its meaning. Being has neither to fulfill nor to disappoint meaning. The meaning, neither given nor non-given, is understood. But a being is manifest as a being on the basis of its meaning.

The intentionality of consciousness, a notion so multivocal in Husserl, designates indeed the world’s immediate presence to consciousness, a presence which is outlined by its very being. This outline of the original does not have to leave an imprint of its presence in a sensibility called subjective in order to manifest itself, or have to be recreated or reconstituted by any creative activity on the basis of its copy in consciousness. But this presence is not simply the weight of the world on the subject, or an impact on the sensibility, a simple trauma still conveyed by images, outlines, lived qualities or sensations, by contents filling consciousness, whose fulfillment will again have to be interpreted as a weight or an impact, and so on without end. To be present to consciousness is not reducible to presence in a receptacle nor to the unfolding of *this* or *that* before the gaze. Presence to consciousness is the fact that *this* which takes form in experience is already alleged or understood or identified, hence thought *as* this or *as* that and as present, that is, precisely thought. In Husserl’s phenomenology the notion of intuition is set forth as the fact that objects are meant, “*gemeint*,” *as* present in the original, in “flesh and bone.” And the authority of intuition rests on this *as*, on this meaning behind which one can not reasonably seek anything further. If one wished to push the questioning and the investigation further, one still would have to begin with a given, which would have authority only because it would be understood *as* given. The authority of intuition – “the principles of principles”¹ – is due to the meaning that animates it, and not to the primary “content” (which is called the “representative”

¹ E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), §24.

in the *Logical Investigations*²) which intuition contains in its lived moment – although we must admit that Husserl bases the privilege of intuition on it in *Investigations V* and *VI*, so much so that he is preoccupied with finding a “representative” in categorical intuition.

The fact of being a simple openness upon being, or a subject-object correlation, is not all there is to the definition of intentionality; the mystery of consciousness is not summed up in that “every consciousness is conscious *of* something.” Intentionality is thought and understanding, claim, the *naming* of the identical, the proclaiming of something as something. The formula “something as something” is Heideggerian;³ it certainly does not mean to designate subsumption, classification or definition as the essence of thought – unless we make a distinction between a classification that arranges individuals in species and the classification that *understands* the identity of individuals and of species, and *maintains* that identity above experiences, thereby rendering experience possible. This is the primary *Meinen* which proclaims meaning while sovereignly postponing it. This understanding as... is the origin of consciousness qua consciousness. Every problem of the true and the false presupposes this *understanding* of meaning. Without it there would be no consciousness of something. It is a priori.

At this level the a priori involved in knowing is not equivalent to a somehow “divined” knowing which would be added to a knowing learned through experience. Temporal anticipation or logical antecedence do not constitute the a priority of the a priori, but an indifference with regard to experience which amounts not to a more subtle experience, but to maintaining a relationship which can be called neither experience nor gratuitous presumption. The setting forth of meaning – which experience cannot equal, even if it can invite it to recommence – must first name beings, proclaim them as this or that. In this setting forth all experience and all ulterior affirmation will take place. The a priority of the a priori is a *kerygma* which is neither a form of imagination nor a form of perception.

Through it the ideal takes on meaning. The ideal is neither a refined sensible nor a being; it is as it were set up by virtue of the kerygmatic word. The identity of a term consists in its very ideality. The mode of exhibition, inhering in their mode of being, of individuals which experience unfolds does not consist in their standing in the profile they outline, but in always promising to be *other* and other, yet always identifiable. It thus consists in them showing themselves across a continuity of aspects and profiles, across a multiplicity of phenomena, and then in being identified in the dispersion of the indiscernible instants of *appearing*. Everything, is, one might say, imaged in experience, except the identity of individuals, which holds sway over the instants of the images. This identity is possible only as *claimed*.

² E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 741–42.

³ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 189–92.

I claim the identical in these impressions, and I mean to ensure the maintenance of this claim. But identity is not the pure and simple *correlative* of this understanding, on which the act can somehow rest, as in the case of impression, in which receptivity is absorbed. Identity is never accomplished in the identification that proclaims it. This centrifugal “activity” (the subject taken as a center) is not simply the reverse of that which goes from the sensible perceived to the subject, where the correlation remains similar in both cases and justifies the notion of “categorial intuition.” The *proclamatory* character of identification destroys the analogy. And it shows how the kerygma, which is sovereign through the word that establishes and consecrates beyond the given, will play in historical tongues and their system of signs.

Experiences thus presupposes thoughts which, sovereignly, understand, that is, proclaim the identity of the multiple. This “understanding as the same,” this “taking to be the same” does not have to be justified before any instance. Indiscernible aspects enter into experience, however passive and prepredicative it may be, by virtue of an initial claim, an initial “understanding as.” Husserl has shown that resemblance refers to identity and not identity to resemblance. All this does not mean that thought – the act of “taking as” – is subjective, arbitrarily fabricating products which are superimposed on being. It rather means that the exhibition that being involves is not only produced in the order of the sensibility, but that it proceeds from the *understanding*, the faculty of a priori understanding this as this or as that. We thus understand that Husserl’s philosophy which restores its rights to being, against every possible confusion between thought and objects, also takes thought to confer ideal meaning onto being. Without this ideal meaning being could not show itself. Conferring meaning to being is not weaker, nor stronger, than creating being. But it is from the first a function of saying which, far from falsifying being, lets it shine forth in truth. Consciousness confers meaning, not by hypostasizing the *immanent given*, but in taking the given, whether immanent or transcendent, “as this” or “as that.” To become conscious of is to “take as...”

To take as..., to posit as..., to identify in the multiple, is proper to thought, as distinguished from simple sensibility.⁴ Thought is thus discernible in experience inasmuch as the experienced is thematic, that is, identical, and inasmuch as the identical is possible only as something “maintained as identical” and posited as such, understood in advance as such. To be taken as..., to be understood or claimed or maintained as this or as that, is for what appears to have signification. But what appears cannot appear outside of signification. The *appearing* of a phenomenon is inseparable from its *signifying*, which refers to the *proclamatory*, kerygmatic intention of thought. Every phenomenon is a discourse or a fragment of a discourse.

Because judgment is the explicit development of the “proclaiming as this or as

⁴ At least from sensibility as the empiricist tradition understood it: a presence of contents in consciousness, which is consciousness of them because it contains them. Consciousness understood as a simple plenitude of contents would incontestably be blind or lethargic. AUTHOR’S NOTE

that,” because a statement is a judgment, judgment is privileged over all the formal conjunctures among which the mathematization of logic situates it. Even when thought wishes to be a formal inscription, statements or judgments remain the metalanguage which unlocks the signification of the formalization itself and of its conventions. Judgment is found in the heart of thought as the very structure of statement, of setting forth. Thought is judgment because saying is predication. This is not because language would be miraculously adapted for judgment, which would be the original thought, but because judgment develops the meaning of language. Language is not meaningful because it would come out of some play of meaningless signs; it is meaningful because it is a kerygmatic proclamation which identifies this as that.

Inasmuch as it is identified, an individual object is therefore also ideal, “meant” by thought across the flux of innumerable, that is, unnameable, appearances. The intention that claims the identical to be there is an allegation that names. Names name terms by claiming them to be identical, and hence already to be, to some extent, numerically identical. To be numerically identical, one in a multiplicity, is not a chance aspect of something that appears in a profusion of indiscernibles; it is a signification ascribed or meant, it is a work of understanding which is deployed as a proclamation in the dimension of language in which thought takes place. It is not a question here of once again opposing the spontaneity of understanding to the receptivity of sensibility. In a cognition understood (experience and receptivity), in order for the numerical identity, the identification of this as that, to become meaningful (for identity never belongs from the first to the given profusion of the indiscernible, which is chaotic), what counts is spontaneity structured as an enunciation, a predication, language, alleging the ideal – and thus precisely communicable or universal. What counts are these moments thought by this word that names, in this thinking utterance.

Thought can therefore reach the individual only through the detour of the universal. For philosophy as a discourse, the universal precedes the individual; it is, in all senses of the term, *a priori*.

2. “Passive Synthesis”

One may indeed wonder whether, behind discourse, there does not lie hidden a philosophical thought distinct from discourse and refractory to its prestiges and pretensions, and whether there it does not aim at the singular which discourse cannot express without idealizing. Yet thought differs from spontaneous feeling, in which feeling and felt are one in assuagement; thought is the minimal divergence between feeling and felt (this, perhaps, is the definition of awakening or of the very flow of time). The original appearing coincides with this divergency or this awakening, such that what shows itself must have already been lost in order to be

found again by consciousness (consciousness being this permanent losing and finding again – this *anamnesis*). Then, if what shows itself, be it the singular, by virtue of its essence still has to be identified, because of this loss, then the singular too in these rediscoveries will be an ideality.

Thus the a priority of the ideal will be affirmed behind language, as it is affirmed in language. To reach pure singularity, it is then not enough to suppress spoken discourse and abandon oneself to duration. If the thought behind speech is to remain a consciousness, it retains the structure of speech. We are thus brought to discover the place that language has in thought from the moment of the first movement of identification, from the moment the *aura* of ideality which surrounds thought qua thought first appears. In its running after what has already escaped through the original flowing of time, identification is borne by a discourse consubstantial with consciousness. Speech and universality will be born in the separation between feeling and felt, where consciousness awakens. This consciousness is, to be sure, without a subject; it is a “passive activity” of time, which no subject could claim to have initiated, a “passive synthesis” of what “passes,” which is born in the flow and divergency of time, an anamnesis and a rediscovery and consequently an identification, in which ideality and universality take on meaning.

It is then not correct to speak of the present as an “object” that slips away from view, or is metamorphosed as soon as one touches it, or, changing into a past under the eye of consciousness I try to acquire of it, already refuses the name I contrive for it. That is to confuse two distinct modes of consciousness, and to measure the a-thematic consciousness that takes place as time with an objectifying consciousness. It is to fail to recognize the order proper to consciousness and signification – consciousness without an active subject, from which the subject-object polarization, the initiative and intention of a subject proposing a theme to itself, is absent. In spite of the difference specified between the more general notion of intentionality and the more particular notion of voluntary intention, intentionality implying thematization (from which the notion of intentional horizon is inseparable) defines the very notion of activity and initiative. But there is a consciousness which is a passive work of time, with a passivity more passive still than any passivity that is simply antithetical to activity, a passivity without reserve, the passivity of a creature at the time of creation when there is no subject to assume the creative act, to, so to speak, hear the creative word. Consciousness as the passive work of time which no one activates cannot be described by the categories proper to a consciousness that aims at an object. If the present did not diverge from its coinciding with itself, it would be neither temporal nor conscious simply by virtue of temporality. But if the present is present according to the mode of consciousness which time is, this is not only because time would be the disquietude – the non-repose, the non-coinciding with self – of being, but because the instant which escapes itself is not pure negativity. Across the indiscernible phases of its moulting

into past, its “passive work” of sinking into the past, it is – also passively – retained in retention and meant as identical, despite the silence of language at this level which sets forth identity in retention as identical, despite the non-recourse of this idealizing language to the system of verbal signs supplied us by the cultural heritage.

3. Singularity without Universality

Language then belongs to the very work of truth, as a thematization and an identification in which being is at it were set, and appears. Then nothing real, however rigorously individuated it be, could appear outside of ideality and universality.⁵ Whence, as no doubt a simple consequence, the possibility of communication, although the original essence of communication did not have to intervene in the disclosure of being. Communication is, to be sure, a condition for truth, inasmuch as every truth implies *truth for everyone*, but this evocation of everyone remains purely formal, a non-thought evidence: the possibility of communication is given as a simple corollary of the *logical* work of speech. Yet we must ask if the relationship with the interlocutor, presupposed by the universal essence of truth, is in its turn a cognition of this interlocutor in his particularity, and thus still occurs on the basis of the ideality and universality which cognition proclaims. The movement would then be unending; a new “relation with everyone” will be required to ensure the certainty of the first truth of everyone, which truth for everyone presupposes. But this is not our objection, for it is not certain that the specter of infinite regression is a refutation; to not hold on to the beginning of a process does not prevent the thinker from being implicated in it, even if he has to suffer for that in his thought. This is what is called finitude! Infinite regression, or the bad infinity, at most compromises the certainty of truth, which is for just this reason also finite. For us the difficulty lies elsewhere: the hypothesis that the relationship with an interlocutor would still be a knowing reduces speech to the solitary or impersonal exercise of a thought, whereas already the kerygma which bears its ideality is, in addition, a *proximity* between me and the interlocutor, and not our participation in a transparent universality. Whatever be the message transmitted by speech, the speaking is contact.

One must then admit that there is in speech a relationship with a singularity located outside of the theme of the speech, a singularity that is not thematized by the speech but is approached. Speech and its logical work would then unfold not in knowledge of the interlocutor, but in his proximity. Is the not being able to enter

⁵ One can, to be sure, wonder if seeming and appearing, coextensive with being, exhaust the possibilities of the mind, that is, if the mind does not go beyond being. Western philosophy has been able to speak of this beyond, but forthwith took it as an Idea, that is, interpreted it in terms of being thus subordinating God to ontology. Our effort proceeds in a quite opposite direction. AUTHOR'S NOTE

into a theme, not being able to scatter into images, not being able to appear, invisibility, due to the non-signifyingness of a being, or the excess of a signification that comes from beyond the signification that the being of beings makes shine? The relationship in which the speaker who thematizes his object already finds himself would not be an intentionality, a thesis *positing* an object, an openness upon it, a disclosure, an orientation toward... In short, it would not be an aim, which, even if it is “fulfilled” by intuition, even if the intuition is the clearest and most distinct, will thereby already have lost the immediacy of contact. For the immediacy of contact is not spatial contiguity, visible to a third party and signifying through the “synthesis of the understanding.” Proximity is *by itself* a signification. The subject has gone into the openness of the intentionality and the vision. The orientation of the subject upon the object has become a proximity, the intentional has become ethical⁶ (but, for the moment, nothing moral is designated here). The *ethical* does not designate an inoffensive attenuation of passionate particularisms, which would introduce the human subject into a universal order and unite all rational beings, like ideas, in a kingdom of ends. It indicates a reversal of the subjectivity which is *open upon* beings and always in some measure represents them to itself, positing them and taking them to be such or such (whatever be the quality, axiological, practical, or logical, of the thesis which posits them), into a subjectivity that enters *into contact* with a singularity, excluding identification in the ideal, excluding thematization and representation – an absolute singularity, as such unrepresentable.⁷ This is the original language, the foundation of the other one. The precise point at which this mutation of the intentional into the ethical occurs, and occurs continually, at which the approach *breaks through* consciousness, is the human skin and face. Contact is tenderness and responsibility.

4. Language and the Sensible

The immediacy of the sensible is an event of proximity and not of knowledge. The mediation of the ideal, or of kerygmatic language, belongs essentially to knowing. It is not simply a makeshift which is left for a finite mind, the symptom of a frustration and the surrogate for the intellectual intuition which would be lacking. In sensible intuition the sensibility is already subordinated to the disclosure of being. But these functions of being an openness are not all there is to sensibility. Not that it would introduce into cognition an opaque element contrary to the structures of

⁶ We call ethical a relationship between terms such as are untied neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject or object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel. AUTHOR'S NOTE

⁷ As in Malebranche the understanding no doubt “knows” God since it “knows” him without ideas: “the Infinite is its own idea to itself.” AUTHOR'S NOTE

intelligibility, or lead toward cognitions other than those that are organized into a structured world. To conceive the sensible thus would still amount to measuring it with cognition. The sensible establishes with the real a relationship of another order. A gustative sensation, for example, can mean the discovery and experience of a savor. This possibility guides Husserl in his thesis concerning the privilege of the theoretical, and the ineffaceable possibility of converting every other “intentionality” into a theoretical one, without resorting to objectifying reflection.⁸

But in the gustative sensation, intentionality, that is, the openness *upon* the savor, already presupposes the detachment of the taster. The primordial signifying character of sensation itself is not equivalent to the role of being a “thought thinking something.” Psychologists know at least the affective charge of savors, but the psyche in, or the signifyingness of, this charge is immediately interpreted either as a “state” or as an intention of another type, certainly, than the theoretical type, but still always as an openness, a comprehension – an information about oneself, or, as in Heidegger, a comprehension of man’s disposition in being, always as an ontology.⁹ *Every transcendence is conceived as a knowing.* To be sure, this search for intentionality in the sensible avoided the pure and simple mechanization of sensibility, which the positivists wanted. But the structure of openness, discerned in all sensibility, resembles the structure of sight, in which the sensibility is invested as a knowing. Yet we can ask if, even in its intellectual function, sight has completely lost its other way of signifying, and if the expression “to eat up with one’s eyes” has to be taken as a pure metaphor. We must ask if every transcendence belongs to the sphere of the intellect.¹⁰ For if, for example, the gustative sensation is not exhausted in knowings about savors, the surplus of sense does not amount to a consciousness of the physico-physiological process of alimentation, nor to the consciousness of associated acts of biting, mastication, etc. The signification proper to gustative sensation consists somehow in “breaking through” the knowledge gathered, to as it were penetrate into the inwardness of things. Nothing here resembles a covering over of something aimed at by a given, as Husserl’s notion of fulfillment would require. Here the psyche resolves neither into consciousness nor into unconsciousness. In sensation something *comes to pass* between the feeling and the felt, below the openness of the feeling upon the felt, of consciousness upon a

⁸ This possibility is at the origin of ontology’s claim to be absolute, and of the claim that the texture of language plays the role of ultimate foundation. It is also at the origin of the definition of man by the comprehension of the essence of being, which we hope one day to show to be founded in proximity.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

⁹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 174–79.

¹⁰ By intellect we understand not only the function of theoretical representation properly so-called, but also all the other forms of intentionality in which the kerygmatic noesis-noema structure, which remains an openness, but aimed at, is found. Michel Henry denies the transcendent character of sensibility, which he takes to be due only to the theoretical intentionality which sensibility finds (which, moreover, is in its turn rooted in the manifestation of immanence). We agree with him that intentional transcendence in the sensibility is to be contested, but we do not limit transcendence to intentionality since we start with the notion of proximity. AUTHOR’S NOTE

phenomenon. We have chosen the example of gustative sensation because this schema of consumption is found in all the forms of sensibility; to feel the world is always a way of being nourished by it.

But sensibility must be interpreted as touch first of all. Here too the event does not lie in the openness upon the palpable quiddity of the touched being, even though, here too, contact can turn into palpation. A “doxic thesis” wells up to transform the event of contact into an informing, a cognition collected on the springy or rough surface of things, and thus slips the sensible into a thematizing, identifying, universal discourse. But before turning into a cognition of the outsides of things, and during this very cognition, touch is pure approach and a proximity that is not reducible to the experience of proximity.¹¹ A caress takes form in the contact without this signification turning into an experience of a caress. In the caress proximity remains a proximity and does not become an intention of something, although the caress could become an expressive gesture, a bearer of messages. To approach, to neighbor, is not tantamount to the knowing or consciousness one can have of approaching. In contact the things are near, but are so in a quite different sense from the sense in which they are rough, heavy, black, agreeable, or even existing or nonexisting. The way in which they are “in flesh and bone” (the usual translation of Husserl’s “*leibhaft gegeben*”) does not characterize their manifestation, but their proximity. An idea or a value can be given intuitively in the original, but one cannot get alongside of an idea. For that the sensible is needed. The sensed is defined by this relationship of proximity. It is a tenderness: it exists between the face and the nudity of the skin – the one in the context of the other, taking on its whole meaning in this context – between the pure and the troubled. And if perception, which science explains in its own way, appeared to philosophers to clarify the science that explains it, it does not owe this privilege to the rather irrational prestige of the concrete. Qua sensible the concrete is immediacy, contact, and language. Perception is a proximity with being which intentional analysis does not account for. The sensible is superficial only in its role being cognition. In the ethical relationship with the real, that is, in the relationship of proximity which the sensible establishes, the essential is committed. Life is there. Sight is, to be sure, an openness and a consciousness, and all sensibility, opening as a consciousness, is called vision; but even in its subordination to cognition sight maintains contact and proximity. The visible caresses the eye. One sees and one hears like one touches.

In reality, the caress of the sensible awakens in a contact and tenderness, that is, proximity, awakens in the touched only starting with the human skin, a face, only with the approach of a neighbor. The proximity of things is poetry; in themselves the things are revealed before being approached. In stroking an animal already the

¹¹ Without remaining inaccessible to experience, to be sure. Otherwise we would not have been able to speak of it here. But one can account for this accessibility to experience, as well as of the privilege of the doxic thesis, on the basis of proximity itself. This is for another study. AUTHOR'S NOTE

hide hardens in the skin. But over the hands that have touched things, places trampled by beings, the things they have held, the images of those things, the fragments of those things, the contexts in which those fragments enter, the inflexions of the voice and the words that are articulated in them, the ever sensible signs of language, the letters traced, the vestiges, the relics – over all things, beginning with the human face and skin, tenderness spreads. Cognition turns into proximity, into the purely sensible. Matter, which is invested as a tool, and a tool in the world, is also, via the human, the matter that obsesses me with its proximity. The poetry of the world is inseparable from proximity par excellence, or the proximity of a neighbor par excellence. And it is as though by reference to their origin in the other, a reference that would obtain as an a priori structure of the sensible, that certain cold and “mineral” contacts are only privatively congealed into pure information or pure reports.

This relationship of proximity, this contact unconvertible into a noetico-noematic structure, in which every transmission of messages, whatever be those messages, is already established, is the original language, a language without words or propositions, pure communication. It was by starting with a phenomenological description of knowing and its kerygmatic conditions that our analysis has encountered relationships whose intersection leads us to use ethical terminology and significations. Proximity, beyond intentionality, is the relationship with the neighbor in the moral sense of the term.

5. Consciousness and Obsession

Consciousness consists in thematizing across a multiplicity, and in thus manifesting being by proclaiming its unity and its identity. But language as a contact touches the neighbor in his non-ideal unity. Hence we can say that the neighbor does not show, does not manifest, himself. He lacks the horizon of multiplicity in which his identity could be proclaimed, maintained, thematized, and thus revealed. But he lacks what he has no need of. The neighbor is precisely what has a meaning *immediately*, before one ascribes one to him. But what has a meaning thus can be only as an other, as *he* who has a meaning before one gives meaning to him. Even the exposedness of a meaning to intuition does not realize immediacy. Intuition is a vision, is still (or already) an intentionality, an openness, and thus a distance. It thus has a “time of reflection” before what it aims at (even if it aims at it in the original), and is therefore a proclamation or an announcing. Immediacy is the obsessive proximity of the neighbor, skipping the stage of consciousness, not by default but by excess, by the “excession” of the approach. It does not culminate in confusion: we will “show” an absence, other than that of distance, in which the neighbor abides. But this excess or this “excession” makes proximity always be an anachronous presence to consciousness: consciousness is always late for the rendezvous with the neighbor. The I is summoned forth and faulty in the consciousness

it has of a neighbor, in its bad conscience. The neighbor is not to the measure and rhythm of consciousness.

We have called face the auto-signifyingness par excellence. The notion of face in our work *Totality and Infinity* already brought out the signifyingness of the singular which, although not referring to universality, does not therefore express some irrational essence. But to say that in the approach is woven a plot with a singular without the mediation of the ideal is not to consecrate an exception while continuing to reserve to cognition, even if it is called axiological or practical intentionality, the privilege of claiming to be the mind. It is on the basis of the approach that the very notion of the face is imposed. And in the face cognition and the manifestation of being or truth are engulfed in an ethical relationship. Consciousness reverts to obsession.

Obsession is neither a modification nor a pathological exasperation of consciousness, but the very proximity of beings. Consciousness in all its forms – representational, axiological, practical – has already lost this close presence. The fact that the neighbor does not enter into a theme, that in a certain sense he precedes cognition and commitment, is neither a blinding nor an indifference; it is a rectitude of relationship more tense than intentionality: the neighbor summons me. Obsession is a responsibility without choice, a communication without phrases or words.

But must not one become conscious of this assignation? Is not a becoming conscious inevitably precursory to every entry into relationship?

The extreme urgency of the assignation, which is the modality of obsession, breaks up the equality, or serenity, of consciousness, its equality with the object it understands intentionally. The neighbor's presence summons me with an urgency so extreme that we must not seek its measure in the way this presence is presented to me, that is, manifests itself and becomes a representation. For this still, or already, belongs to the order of images and cognition, which the assignation overwhelms. Here urgency is not a simple lack of time, but an anachronism: in representation presence is already past.

To approach the other is to still pursue what is already present, to still seek what one has found, to not be able to be quits with the neighbor. It is like caressing: the caress is the unity of approach and proximity. In it proximity is always also an absence. What else is the tenderness of the skin caressed but the divergency between presentation and presence?

In the neighbor's presence there then rises an absence by virtue of which proximity is not a simple coexistence and rest, but non-repose itself, restlessness. Not an intentional movement tending to fulfillment, and which is in this sense always *less* than the plenitude of this fulfillment. Here it is a hunger, glorious in its insatiable desire, a contact by love and responsibility. Is love a pleasant, tactile sensation, or a way to still seek him who is nonetheless as close as he can be?

But is it an absence? Is it not the presence of infinity? Infinity cannot be concretized in a term; it contests its own presence. In its unequalable superlative,

it is an absence, on the verge of nothingness. It always flees. But it leaves void, a night,¹² a trace, in which its visible invisibility is the face of the neighbor. Thus the neighbor is not a phenomenon, and his presence is not resolvable into presentation and appearing. It is ordered out of *the absence in which the infinite approaches*, out of its *null site [Non-Lieu]*, ordered in *the trace of its own departure*; it is ordered to my responsibility and my love, beyond consciousness, which it obsesses. Its trace is still warm, like the skin of another. In proximity skin is neither a container nor the protection of an organism, nor purely and simply the surface of a being, but nudity, presence abandoned by a departure, exposed to everyone and then too unfaithful to itself, insolvent, yet also delivered over to the things, contaminated, profaned, persecuted, in fault and in distress. The neighbor is ordered to my responsibility; he is already uprooted and without a country as soon as he arises on the earth. To not be an autochthonous being, to be torn up from culture, law, horizon, context, by reason of an absence which is the very presence of infinity, finding itself in the null site of a trace, is not to take on a certain number of attributes that might figure in a passport; it is *to come facing, to manifest oneself by undoing one's manifestation*. Such is the face, as we have said, the point at which an epiphany becomes a proximity.

6. A Sign

Proximity is not a simple coexistence, but a restlessness. Something passes from one to the other and from the other to the one, and these two movements do not differ only by their direction. Is something said, then, or learned, in the contact? Is something thematized? Nothing – but the contact, by the contact itself. Nothing will be uttered but this very contact, this alliance and this complicity, which is precisely a complicity or alliance “for nothing,” without content, if not for the sake of this very complicity or this alliance, this proximity antecedent to every convention, all understanding or misunderstanding, all frankness and all guile. This utterance of the contact says and learns only this very fact of saying and learning – here again, like a caress.

Is to not place oneself in the universe of a common language, in culture, still a saying? Is it not to only invoke the community whose members are not linked to one another as individuals of the same genus, or as pure intellects around the same truth? This saying no doubt precedes the language that communicates propositions and messages: it is a sign given from one to another by proximity about proximity. This sign is not already a discourse that would be still stammering. To not have any

¹² Cf. The Orphic Hymn to the Night admirably translated and commented on by Clemence Ramnoux in *La Nuit et les enfants de la nuit* (Paris: Flammarion) especially pp. 247–52. AUTHOR'S NOTE

other content than the very proximity that utters it, to invoke or recall a complicity “for nothing” and an alliance that was not chosen is to invoke or recall fraternity, which is an understanding without object or choice, and is the essence of proximity and the condition for all circulation of messages.

A sign is given from one to the other before the constitution of any system of signs, any common place formed by culture and sites, a sign given from null site to null site. The fact that a sign, exterior to the system of evidences, comes into proximity while remaining transcendent, is the very essence of language prior to every particular language.

This understanding passing from singularity to singularity is able to create for itself the verbal or non-verbal signs of a particular language. In a well-known text of Part V of the *Discourse on Method* Descartes refutes the opinion of “some ancients that brutes talk, although we do not understand their language” by advancing that “since they have many organs which are allied to our own, they could communicate their thoughts to us just as easily as to those of their own race.”¹³ Descartes thus refuses to admit a language that would be imprisoned in the particularisms of a species. An animal is a machine not only because it does not know how to utilize its organs in a polyvalent way, but because it is imprisoned in its constitution. That the animals have never spoken to man is said to prove that they do not speak among themselves. Language is the possibility of entering into relationship independently of every system of signs common to the interlocutors. Like a battering-ram, it is the power to break through the limits of culture, body, and race. In Descartes reason, the “universal instrument,” commands it. But how is reason individuated in the soul and united to a will? Our analyses have brought us to see fraternity with the neighbor as the essence of the original language; it finds universality, or, more precisely, universalization, starting with absolute singularities.

One will object: does not the original saying presuppose an essence of singularity, whose recognition is prior to this preliminary language? And, consequently, is not the original structure of discourse, its work of universalization, already secondary with respect to the kerygmatic intentionality? Yet is contact reducible to the assembling of individuals under a common genus (which would have of itself already united them long ago), of which they would be but the splinters or the wreckage? In that case, even if the individuals of a genus know the definition of the genus to which they belong (if they are rational), it is not the individual as an individuation of a genus, but a singularity unique in its kind that approaches the other. To speak before speaking is not even to understand singularity as an essence. The relationship moving from the I to the neighbor cannot be fixed in any quiddity, but is stabilized on what has a meaning without resorting to ideality, on the enigma

¹³ R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 117.

of a face, where manifestation becomes proximity and quiddity a mode of being. It is then not a knowledge of the universal, in which the individual is understood as an individuality ideally identified. It is not a knowing about the essence of singularity, it is not knowledge of singularity as an essence, that precedes the wink of complicity, the complicity in view of nothing. Language in terms of genus and species, the notion of the human race, will recover its rights after the event. It is in fraternity, or language, that this race is founded.

7. From Obsession to Hostage

Language, contact, is the obsession of an I “beset” by the others. Obsession is responsibility. But the responsibility characteristic of obsession does not derive from a freedom, for otherwise obsession would be only a becoming conscious. It would be the case of an I obsessed by a fault committed in full freedom, and we would recognize in it the thinking subject, in its splendid isolation, taking up intentional attitudes with regard to beings. Responsibility as an obsession is proximity; like kinship, it is a bond prior to every chosen bond. Language is fraternity, and thus a responsibility for the other, and hence a responsibility for what I have not committed, for the pain and the fault of others. At the antipodes of play, freedom not involving responsibilities, proximity is a responsibility that does not refer to my freedom. It is the state of a creature in a world without play, in the *gravity* which is perhaps the first coming of meaning to being *beyond* its stupid “that’s the way it is.” It is the state of being a hostage.

The I, the ego, are individuated completely “from within,” without recourse to a system. But this individuation cannot be described as a pole of a consciousness identifying itself, for the oneself is precisely the big secret that has to be described. The ipseity that the reflexive pronoun *self* expresses is not reducible to an objectification of the I by itself; the return to myself involved in the reflection already implies the initial reflexion of the *oneself*. In it an endless passivity is not assumed by any activity that would double it up and welcome it or preexist it. In its “accusative,” which the nominative does not precede, arises a beginning. Obsessed precisely with responsibilities that do not go back to decisions taken by a freely contemplating subject, and thus accused with what it never did, persecuted and thrown back upon itself, backed up to itself, ipseity “takes on itself,” in the absolute inability of slipping away from proximity, from the face, from the dereliction of the face where infinity is also absence. More exactly: the upsurge of ipseity is the very fact of this gravity in being.

The impossibility of evading becomes a power. The I is the point that bears the gravity of the world, that which in being undoes the work of being, imperturbable and without exemptions. Being *backed up to* itself, it is the non-being of being. It is not nothingness, for this *undoing* is ambiguous, “mixed,” or beyond being.

It is not because there exists, among beings, a thinking being structured as I, pursuing ends, that being takes on signification and becomes a world; it is because in the proximity of being is inscribed the trace of an absence, or of the infinite, that there is dereliction, gravity, responsibility, obsession and I. The I, the non-interchangeable par excellence, is, in a world without play, what in a permanent sacrifice substitutes itself for others and transcends the world. But this is the source of speaking, for it is the essence of communication.

It is not that the I would be only a being endowed with certain qualities called moral, which it would bear like attributes; the “egoness” of the I, its ex-ceptional and strange uniqueness is this incessant event of substitution,¹⁴ the fact of a being emptying itself of its being, of not-being. The ethical event of “expiation for another” is the concrete situation which the verb *to not be* designates. It is by reason of the state of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity (even the little there is). All the “transfers of feeling” by which the theorists of primordial war explain the birth of generosity would not succeed in being fixed in the ego if the ego were not, with all its being (or all its non-being), a hostage. It is not certain that at the beginning there was war. Before war there were altars.

The ethical language we resort to does not proceed from a special moral experience, independent of the description developed until then. It comes from the very meaning of approach, which contrasts with knowledge, of the face which contrasts with phenomena. Phenomenology can follow the reverting of thematization into ethics in the description of a face. Ethical language alone succeeds in being equal to the paradox in which phenomenology is abruptly thrown: starting with the neighbor, it reads this paradox in the midst of an absence which orders it as a face, but in a way that we would be wrong to confuse with an indication or a monstration of the signified in the signifier, according to the facile itinerary in which pious thought too quickly deduces theological realities. The trace in which a face is ordered is not reducible to a sign for the simple reason that a sign and its relationship with the signified are already thematized. But an approach is not the thematization of any relationship; it is this very relationship.

8. It is only a Word

Is language the transmission of and a listening in to messages which would be conceived independently of this transmission and of this listening, independently of communication (even though thoughts resort to historically constituted languages

¹⁴ The analytic identity of transcendental apperception in Kant is distinguished from the multiplicity of the given, irreducible to this identity. But the hostage ego is an identity which is all the others *by expiating*. AUTHOR'S NOTE

and conform to the negative conditions of communication, to logic, to the principles of order and universality)? Or, on the contrary, would language involve a positive and antecedent event of communication which would be an *approach* to and a *contact* with the neighbor, and in which the secret of the birth of thought itself and of the verbal statement that bears it would lie?

Without trying to set forth this latent birth, the present study has conceived together language and contact, in analyzing contact outside the “information” it can gather on the surface of beings, in analyzing language independently of the coherence and truth of the information transmitted, in grasping in them the event of *proximity*. It is an evanescent event, immediately submerged by the afflux of knowledge and truths which give themselves out to be the essence, that is, the condition for the possibility, of proximity. Is not this justice? Can blindness, error, absurdity, bring together?

But can thought and truth force the other to enter my discourse, to become an interlocutor? The evanescence of proximity in truth is its very ambiguity, its enigma, that is, its transcendence outside of intentionality.

Proximity is not an intentionality. To be in the presence of something is not to open it to oneself, and aim at it thus disclosed, nor even to “fulfill” by intuition the “signitive thought” that aims at it and always ascribes a meaning to it which the subject bears in itself. To approach is to touch the *neighbor*, beyond the data apprehended at a distance in cognition, that is, to approach the other. This turning of the given into a neighbor and of the representation into a contact, of knowledge into ethics, is the human face and skin. The caress is dormant in sensorial or verbal contact; in the caress proximity signifies: to languish in the presence of the neighbor as though his proximity and vicinity were also an absence – not a remoteness still admitting of being understood in intentionality, but an inordinate absence which cannot even be materialized or incarnated into a correlative of an understanding. An inordinate absence that is infinity, in an absolute sense, invisible, that is, exterior to all intentionality. The neighbor, this face and this skin in the trace of this absence, and consequently in their distress as forsaken, and in their unimpeachable right over me, obsesses me with an obsession irreducible to consciousness, which has not begun in my freedom. Am I in my egones qua I anything but a hostage?

The contact in which I approach the neighbor is not a manifestation or a knowledge, but the ethical event of communication which is presupposed by every transmission of messages, which establishes the universality in which words and propositions will be stated. This contact transcends the I to the neighbor, and is not its thematization; it is the deliverance of a sign prior to every proposition, to the statement of anything whatever. Language is a battering ram – a sign that says the very fact of saying, in which we have discerned a complicity which is a complicity “for nothing,” that is, a fraternity. Does not this sign bear the first word?

The first word says the saying itself. It does not yet designate beings, does not fix themes and does not mean to identify anything. Otherwise communication and

proximity would reduce to the logical function of language and would again presuppose communication. The first word says only the saying itself before every being and every thought in which being is sighted and reflected.

But if the first saying says this very saying, here the saying and the said cannot equal one another. For the saying in being said at every moment breaks the definition of what it says and breaks up the totality it includes. Even if it makes of this breakup itself its theme, and thus reconstitutes the totality it recounts in an, if possible, yet more total form, even if it thus shows its binding thread never worn out, here it interrupts its totality by its very speaking. Someone has escaped themes. The first saying goes beyond its own forces and its own reason; the original saying is a delirium. Coherent thought will no doubt be right to denounce its extravagance or its verbalism, to bring up as objections to this primary transcendence that breaks the Logos the conditions for its statement, to lay out its dissimulated history, and connect it to the world it claims to go beyond. Coherent thought forces one to coherent discourse. But it thereby understands the extravagance it combats and already recognizes its enigma. This first saying is to be sure but a word. But the word is God.

CHAPTER 8

HUMANISM AND AN-ARCHY*

Ich liebe den, dessen Seele uebervoll ist, so dass er sich selber vergisst, und alle Dinge in ihm sind: so werden alle Dinge sein Untergang.

Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Prologue, 4

I

The crisis of humanism in our age no doubt has its source in the experience of man's inefficacity which the very abundance of our means for acting and the extent of our ambitions exhibits. In the world in which everything is in its place, where the eyes, hand, and foot can find them, where science prolongs the topography of perception and praxis even if it transfigures their space, in the sites in which there are set cities and fields which human beings *inhabit*, but then take their place, by diverse groupings, among *entities* – in all this reality “right side up,” the counter-sense of the vast enterprises which have failed, in which politics and technology end up negating the projects that conducted them, teaches the inconsistency of man, plaything of his own works. The unburied dead in wars and extermination camps make one believe the idea of a death without a morning after and render tragic-comic the concern for oneself and illusory the pretension of the rational animal to have a privileged place in the cosmos and the power to dominate and integrate the totality of being in a self-consciousness.

But self-consciousness itself is disintegrating. Psychoanalysis attests to the instability and fallacious character of the coincidence with oneself in the *cogito*, which was supposed to put a stop to the impostures of the evil genius and restore to the universe, everywhere become suspect, its erstwhile security. The coincidence with oneself in consciousness, in which, since Descartes, being *is*, is seen by the other (and, after the fact, by the subject himself) to be a plaything of, or worked over

* “Humanism and An-archy” was published in French in the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 85–86 (1968): pp.323–37, and reprinted in *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, pp. 65–82. The notes in this chapter are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

by, impulses, influences, and a language, which compose a mask called a person, no one [*la personne ou personne*], or at best a personage of purely empirical consistency. Henceforth the world founded on the cogito appears to be human, all too human, to the extent of making us seek truth in *being*, in a somehow superlative objectivity, clear of all “ideology,” without human traces.

One can, to be sure, ask by what spirit of inconsistency anti-humanism can still reserve for man the discovery of true knowledge. Does not knowing in the last analysis pass through self-consciousness? Do not the sciences of man – for whom nothing is more dubious than an ego that listens to and feels itself (since its being is said to unfold outside of itself), for whom nothing is more horrible than the swarming of cultural meanings, approached from within by a subjectivity (while their formal expression simplifies or explains them)¹ – resort to the mediation of the man of science?

But these old objections, which neither the sociology nor the psychoanalysis of knowledge are ignorant of, do not have the last word. For the formalist “refutation” which claims to triumph over subjectivist relativism (to contest the subjective is to affirm the value of the subjective that contests!) does not escape the skeptical contestation which is reborn from its ashes. It is as though we had here a discourse without any last word, as though the logos, which is of itself a beginning, an origin, an *ἀρχή*, correlative of void without a past which is freedom, freedom, were here constantly submerged by the pre-original, as though the subjectivity were not the freedom to adhere to a term that presents itself to it, but a passivity more passive than the passivity involved in receptivity. Receptivity is still an initiative of welcome, capable of assuming what strikes against it. It consequently traverses the present of the logos, or restores it to memory.² In other words, the refutation of subjectivist relativism in its traditional form does not take into account the crisis which it surmounts and thinks itself to be in possession of the logos itself which, for a moment of ontological syncope, a between-time nowhere, it had lost. In overcoming the relativism of the human it operates a recuperation. The truth obtained as it were by rebound in the break-up of truths and by the wearing down of this “right side up” real is like the reverse of the True. But everything comes to pass as though in metaphysics the reverse were equivalent to the obverse. This is no doubt the sense of the objection Husserl addresses to Descartes when he reproaches him for having identified the “I am” of the cogito with the existence of a soul belonging to the world, that is, for having situated the absolute discovered in the destruction of the world among the things of the world, as though they had never

¹ Cf. M. Serres, “Analyse symbolique et méthode structurale,” one of the most clarifying statements of the meanings of the present-day mutation in philosophy (*Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, octobre-décembre, 1967). This remarkable study is dated 1961, which again underscores the sureness of its analysis.

² This would justify Sartre’s position, for whom every commitment and every *non-commitment* presuppose freedom.

been engulfed in the “nowhere,” as though their suspension had been contingent, as though the being that, in the cogito, came out of a coma were still the same as the being that had fallen into a coma.³ This is a failure to recognize the *modality* (as Jeanne Delhomme would say) of what Heidegger will call the history of being. It makes possible, on the basis of the cogito, the return of God and of the world, deduced according to the traditional norms, whereas Kant and Husserl will seek in the transcendental deduction of the object and in the *ἐποχή* of phenomenological reduction a new type of foundation. As consciousness was the foundation of being, metaphysics, is *inverted*; henceforth it does not take place in being, it is conceived with notions in the back of one’s mind, at the bottom of the thoughts healthily fixed on being. Is not the end of metaphysics, a theme concomitant with the theme of the end of humanism, a way of recounting this “reversing”? Indeed in our day there is no end to the end of metaphysics, and the end of metaphysics is our unavowed metaphysics, for no avowal will be its equivalent.

Yet the inconsistency in denouncing the absoluteness of the human in the name of evidences that the sciences of man, where man is not only the object but also the subject, contribute may be taken as only apparent. It would be enough to show the purely operational and provisional role of man in the unfolding and manifestation of a set of terms that *form a system*. Beyond “objectivity,” possibly “ideological,” an order would manifest itself in which subjectivity would no longer be anything but the detour that, in pursuance of an order, the manifestation or intelligibility or truth of this order would take. It is not man, having some vocation proper to him, that would invent or search or possess truth; it is truth that raises up and holds man (without holding on to him). Man appears as the route the structures of a formal or logico-mathematical type take to be ordered and be set in place according to their ideal architecture. Once set up they cast off the human scaffoldings which made their edification possible. Even if the existence of man, his being-there, consisted in existing in view of this very existence, it is to the guardianship or the illumination, or the occultation or the forgetting, of being which is not a being that this *existence* is devoted – all these movements and turns raise up and situate the human.⁴ Subjectivity would appear in view of its own disappearance, a moment necessary for

³ E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), §§ 18–19. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

⁴ The formulas for this subordination of the subject to anonymous structures or being have been sketched out in Western thought well before the present-day crisis of humanism. For Hegel the subject is but the divergency between the subject and the predicate in the speculative proposition: “But, since that first Subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul, the second Subject, viz. the knowing ‘I’, still finds in the Predicate what it thought it had finished with and got away from, and from which it hoped to return into itself; and, instead of being able to function as the determining agent in the movement of predication, arguing back and forth whether to attach this or that Predicate, it is really still occupied with the self of the content, having to remain associated with it, instead of being for itself.” *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 37–38. This text is commented on with penetration and clarity in J.F. Marquet’s fine article we refer to: “Système et sujet chez Hegel et Schelling,” in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1968, n. 2.

the manifestation of the structure of being, the Idea. It is a moment in the quasi-temporal sense of the momentaneous, the transitory, the passing, even if a whole history and civilization take form in its passage. This passage does not thereby constitute a new dimension. Studied by structural ethnography as a reality in its turn made up of structures, it belongs to an objective order, of which the ethnography itself is but a setting into place, and to which it is no exception.

As a setting into place of intelligible structures, subjectivity would have no internal finality. We are witnessing the ruin of the myth of man an end in himself, and the appearance of an order that is neither human nor inhuman, one that is, indeed, ordered across man and across the civilizations he is said to have produced, but ordered in the last analysis by the properly rational force of the dialectical or logico-formal system. To this nonhuman order the name matter – which is anonymousness itself – belongs.⁵

To find man again in this matter and a name in this anonymity, a being in this lunar landscape, are we not obliged to assert the “transcendentals” *something* or the One? Over against the universality of structures and the impersonal essence of being, over against the reciprocal relativity of the points in a system, a point that counts for itself is needed, a cell in itself sober in the midst of the “Bacchic delirium in which no member escapes intoxication.” The essence of man would then depend on the upsurge of *beings* in the matrix of the *something*, or on the model of the *One* in the midst of *being*, that is, of what is called the *being of entities*. But the danger of such an exigency is also clear; it is a return to the philosophy of substance, support, the reification of man, whereas what is at stake is giving back to him the highest dignity. How can the *one* and the *unique* arise in the essence? To seek this matrix of the entity in *pleasure* or the *present*, in the marvelous moment which deserves to last, or, more exactly, in time resting on its hour, happiness [*bonheur*], to oppose to the universality of reason, which is not a being, the resources of affectivity buried in the body and heart of man – is still to be attached to the idea of rest which suggests substance as its support. Whence the relapse and dissolution

⁵ It is on this point that Husserl’s phenomenology is radically opposed to all the philosophy that largely owes it its birth; on this point it remains fundamentally humanist. Subjectivity, irreducible to the purely logical, transcendental conditions of the Marburg school, so like the human psyche even after the phenomenological *éποχη*, is the Absolute. Against the wellsprings of systems *intentional implication* is affirmed: themes, horizons, memory, sedimentation of history await their reactivation in a living subjectivity. The subject is not a moment in a non-human or ideal order. On the contrary, objectivity, structure, meaning thought – everything that can be captured in the attitude aiming at or “intuiting” the object – is alone able to grasp what “thought wanted to get at.” *Thought turned to the object thinks of this object, one can say, infinitely less than it thinks of it.* One can to be sure, question Husserl about the *meaning of the being* of subjectivity. But then one has presupposed that the question about the “meaning of being” is ultimate, and that inquiry is the search for the ultimate. To go back to the concreteness of the historical subjectivity, to the intention, is perhaps an inquiry of an entirely different kind, *beyond the thematizable and the ultimate* – whatever be the ways Husserl’s phenomenology in fact took.

of the entity, torn up from the anonymity of being, into nature.⁶ The rational animal qua animal is founded in nature; qua rational it pales in the light in which it leads to manifestation Ideas, concepts that have come back to themselves, logical and mathematical chains and structures.

II

The inefficacy of human action teaches us the precariousness of the concept of man. But to conceive of human action on the level of labor and command is to approach it in its derivative forms. Action, as distinguished from a simple repercussion of energy along a causal chain, is the feat of *commencing*, that is, of *existing* as an origin and from an origin toward the future. It is then effected with the principal – incohesive – free characteristic of *consciousness*. Consciousness is a mode of being such that beginning is what is *essential* in it. To begin, to ignore or to suspend the indefinite thickness of the past, is the wonder of the *present*. Every content of consciousness has been welcomed, has been present, and, consequently, is present or represented, is memorable. Consciousness is the very impossibility of a past that would never have been present, that would be closed to memory and to history. Action, freedom, beginning, present, representation – memory and history – articulate in diverse ways the ontological modality consciousness is. Nothing can enter fraudulently, somehow smuggled into a conscious ego without being exposed to avow itself, being equaled in the avowal, becoming truth. All rationality then amounts to the discovery of the origin, the principle. Reason is an archeology, and the composite word archeology is a redundancy. The intelligibility of the subject itself can consist only in this return to the origin, a movement which, as the *Wissenschaftslehre* taught, is the very being of the ego, the “self-positing” of the oneself. The reflexivity of the ego is nothing else than the fact of being the origin of the origin.

But already the postponement ad infinitum of the *Sollen*, which devolves from the subject posited as ego, origin of itself or freedom, announces the failure involved in human action, and there arises the anti-humanism that will reduce man to a medium necessary for being so that it can be reflected and show itself in its truth, that is, in the systematic concatenation of concepts. We can then ask: might not humanism have a meaning, if we think through the way being belies freedom? Can we not find a meaning (a “reverse” sense, to be sure, but such is the only

⁶ This is certainly the major difficulty of Mikel Dufrenne's *Pour l'homme* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), a book rich in talent as well as in courage. In it man is restored to his natural essence, to his region in being, whereas perhaps the clearest result of the critique of humanism is the “impossibility” of speaking of man as the individual of a genus. “I” and “the other” of whom I am responsible are precisely *different*, by reason of this unilateral responsibility. I support all things and the other, but differently than in the image of a subject at rest under accidents.

authentic one here) in freedom itself, starting with the very passivity of the human in which its inconsistency seems to become apparent? Can we not find this meaning without being thereby brought back to the “being of entities,” system, and matter?

It would be a question of a new concept of passivity, of a passivity more radical than that of an effect in a causal series, on the hither side of consciousness and knowing, but also on the hither side of the inertia of things which rest on themselves as substances and oppose their nature, a material cause, to all activity. This passivity would refer to the *reverse side* of being, prior to the ontological plane in which being is posited as *nature*; it would refer to the antecedence, without any outside yet, of creation, the meta-physical antecedence. It would be as though beyond the ambit of a melody a more acute or more grave register resounded and mingled with the chords heard, but with a sonority that no voice can sing and no instrument produce.⁷ This pre-original antecedence one could, to be sure, call religious, if the term did not make us run the risk of evoking a theology impatient to recuperate “spiritualism.” Present, representation, and principles precisely exclude the “hither side.”

But when we see man being born again out of the inanity of man-as-principle, the inanity of principles, out of the putting into question of freedom understood as an origin and the present, when we seek subjectivity in radical passivity, do we not deliver ourselves over to fatality or to determination, which are the very abolition of a subject? That would be the case, if the alternative free/non-free were ultimate, and if subjectivity consisted in stopping at the ultimate or at the original. But it is on just this that our inquiry bears. No doubt in its isolation, in the apparently absolute separation which is the psyche, and in the sovereign freedom of representation, the ego knows nothing prior to its freedom or outside of the necessity which runs up against this freedom, but presents itself to it. It is obliged, as Fichte said, to be its own source. It is absent from its birth and from its death, without father and without murderer, and obliged to give them to itself – to deduce them – to deduce the non-I from its own freedom, with the risk of sinking into madness. The regression to the ultimate or to the original, the principle, is already effected by the freedom of the ego, which is beginning itself. The thesis and antithesis of the third Kantian antinomy imply the priority of the thesis, since the situation is not limited to themes: the thesis and antithesis present themselves to the consciousness that thematizes them and represents them to itself in the identity of the *said*, the logos;⁸ they both present themselves to a freedom for adoption or refusal. Absolute non-freedom could not show itself in any way. But the ego can be called into question by the other in an exceptional way – not as by an obstacle

⁷ Is not Nietzsche the exceptional breath to make this “beyond” resound?

⁸ Cf. our study “Language and Proximity,” *supra* 109-126.

which it can always measure, nor by the death which it can also give itself.⁹ The ego can be brought to accusation, despite its innocence, by violence, to be sure, but also, despite the separation in which the exclusiveness and insularity of the psychic leave it, by the other. The other, as other, nonetheless “obsesses” it, and, nearby or far-off, imputes to it a responsibility, unexceptionable as a traumatism, a responsibility for which it had not taken any decision but which, closed up in itself, it cannot escape. Reduced to silence it still gives a response beneath the logos, as though its voice disposed of a register of graves or acutes beyond graves and acutes. Prior to the amphibology of being and entities and to the state of being a nature,¹⁰ the subject is undeclinable precisely as a *hostage* irreplaceable with others.

We can then speak of the “beyond the ultimate” or of the “pre-original” without it becoming, by virtue of this *beyond* or this *hither side*, ultimate or originary. The “hither side,” the “pre-originary” or the “pre-liminary” designate (by an abuse of language, to be sure) this subjectivity prior to the ego, prior to its freedom and its non-freedom. The pre-originary subject is outside of being, *in itself*. *Inwardness* is here not described in any spatial terms, as the volume of a sphere enveloped and sealed against the other, but which, formed as a consciousness, would also be reflected in the said and thus belong to the space common to all, to the synchronic order, even if it had to be part of the most secret region of this sphere. *Inwardness is the fact that in being the beginning is preceded*. But what precedes does not present itself to the free gaze that would assume it, does not become present or a representation. Something has already come to pass “over the head” of the present, has not crossed the cordon of consciousness and does not let itself be recuperated, something that precedes the beginning and the principle, that is an-archically *despite* being, reverses or precedes being. Is it then a *something*? A something remains *in* being, assumable and exterior. Here it is a question of an unassumable passivity, which is not *named* or is named only by an abuse of language, with the pro-noun of subjectivity. The obverse of being involves a reverse that cannot be turned over. This formula does not result from some complacency for the ineffable and the incomunicable. What is ineffable or incomunicable in inwardness and cannot adhere in the said is a responsibility, prior to freedom. The unspeakability of the ineffable is described by the preoriginal element of responsibility for others, by a responsibility prior to every free commitment, before being described by its inability to appear in the said.¹¹ The subject does not stand out from being a freedom that

⁹ To be sure during the “last quarter of a second” death, unmeasured, comes against me, but there already the other approaches. Cf. *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff: 1979), pp. 234–35.

¹⁰ Cf. our article “La Substitution,” in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, août, 1968.

¹¹ Responsibility, the “pre-original” is a saying. But it is an imprudent and risked saying, a communication of oneself that every information presupposes. To be on the hither side, the hither side of being, is *to say*, to be always discovered, exposed, to turn the other cheek, which is the expiation for violence undergone by the fault of another, and in which the present of this violence thus already refers to the pre-original. But this *saying* involved in responsibility bears in its extravagance, in its

would render it master of things, but by a preoriginary susceptibility,¹² more ancient than the origin, a susceptibility provoked in the subject¹³ without the provocation ever becoming present or becoming a logos presenting itself to assumption or to refusal and situating itself in the bi-polar field of values. By this susceptibility the subject is responsible for its responsibility, incapable of withdrawing from it without retaining the trace of its desertion.¹⁴ The subject is a responsibility before being an intentionality.

III

But is not *not being able* to withdraw from responsibility servitude? How does this passivity place the subject “beyond the free and the non-free”? How is the susceptibility of the pre-originary responsibility – prior to the confrontation with logos, to its presence, prior to the beginning that presents itself (or is presentified) to the agreement one grants or refuses the logos – not a being chained? Why is the subject, expelled into itself, backed up to responsibility and brought back to its irreplaceable unicity by this undeclinable responsibility, exalted in the declinability of being the One?

For determination by the *other* to be able to be called servitude, the determined would have to remain other with respect to what determines it. Pure and simple determinism is not servitude for any of its terms, which constitute the unity of an order. But for the determined to be able to be other with respect to what determines it, it has to be free: it has to retain the memory of the present in which the determining determined it and has been its contemporary. This capacity for reminiscence is just what will have escaped determination; it is the part, however infinitesimal, of freedom necessary for there to be a state of servitude. An absolute passivity, in which the determining term never presented itself to the determined, not even in memory, is equivalent to determinism. Is determinism beyond freedom and servitude? Certainly. But subjectivity is found on this side of the determinism-servitude alternative. The rendez-vous of the presentation of the determining to the determined, to which one should like to refer the origin of responsibility, can have been impossible if the determining is the Good, which is not the object of a choice, for it has taken possession of the subject before the subject had the time – that is, the distance – necessary for choice. There is indeed no subjection more complete

transcendence, the possibility and the necessity of weighing, thought and justice. (Cf. the end of our article on “La Substitution,” op. cit.).

¹² On the hither side of the passivity, still quite relative, of matter and of the inertia of things.

¹³ Provoked in the subject – or a susceptibility that outlines the very subjectivity of the subject.

¹⁴ This is contrary to Fichte and Sartre, who think that everything that is in the subject, even the subject itself, devolves from a position due to this very subject. But Sartre has spoken of the subject condemned to freedom. The following pages describe the meaning of this condemnation.

than this possession by the Good, this election. But the subjecting character of responsibility overflowing choice, of obedience prior to the presentation or the representation of the command that obliges to responsibility, is nullified by the goodness of the Good that commands.¹⁵ The obeying one recovers his integrity on the hither side of subjection. Responsibility that is undeclinable, yet never assumed in full freedom, is *good*. The possession by the good, the passivity of “undergoing good,” is a contraction more deep-lying than that required by the movement of the lips imitating this contraction, when they articulate the *yes [oui]*. Ethics here makes its entry into philosophical discourse, which at the start was strictly ontological – as an extreme turning around of its possibilities. Starting with a radical passivity of the subjectivity, our analysis has come to the notion of a “responsibility overflowing freedom” (whereas freedom alone should have been able to justify and limit responsibilities), an obedience prior to the reception of orders. Starting with this anarchical situation of responsibility, our analysis has, no doubt by an abuse of language, named the Good.

To be dominated by the Good is not to choose the Good out of a neutrality before the axiological bi-polarity. The concept of such a bi-polarity already refers to freedom, to the absoluteness of the present; it would be equivalent to the impossibility of going back behind the *principle*, would be equivalent to the absoluteness of knowledge. But to be dominated by the Good is precisely to be excluded from the very possibility of choice, from coexistence in the present. The impossibility of choice is here not the effect of violence – a fatality or determinism – but of the unexceptionable election by the Good which for the elected one is always already effected. The election by the Good is not an *action*, but non-violence itself. Election is an investiture of the non-interchangeable. There is here then a passivity more passive than any passivity: filial, a pre-vious, pre-logical subjection, a one-way subjection which it would be wrong to understand on the basis of a dialogue. The passivity inconvertible into a present is not a simple *effect* of a Good, which would be reconstituted as the cause of this effect; it is in this passivity that the Good *is*. Properly speaking the Good does not have *to be*, and *is not*, were it not out of goodness. The passivity is the being, from *beyond being*, of the Good, which language is right to circumscribe – betraying it, to be sure, as always – by the word non-being. Passivity is the locus, or more exactly the non-locus, of the Good, its exception to the rule of being, always disclosed in logos, its exception to the present.¹⁶ Plato has reminded us of the long trials of the eye that wants to fix

¹⁵ This nullifying consists in “aggravating” the servitude by revealing to me the other’s face and ordaining me to him, but in liberating me from myself. We are not here developing this aspect of the problem of subjectivity which our above mentioned articles “Language and Proximity” and “La Substitution” often allude to, and which we reserve for another study.

¹⁶ The good must not be conceived on the level of the sentiment that softens the violence of the responsibility that is not justified by a free act, and would belong to the “experience of responsibility.” It is of itself a passivity – when it *is*.

the sun in its sojourn. But the sun is not forever withdrawn from the gaze. The invisible in the Bible is the idea of the Good beyond being. To be obliged to responsibility overflowing freedom, that is, responsibility for the others. It is the perpetuity, or a perpetuity that would claim to be eternity (and which is probably the extrapolation that gives the “bad infinity”), but in the sense of an unconvertibility into an assumable present. This notion is not purely negative. It is, responsibility overflowing freedom, that is responsibility for the others. It is the trace of a past which declines the present and representation, the trace of an immemorial past.

The Good makes the obligation to non-terminatable, irreversible, unexceptionable responsibility, which, however, does not originate in a choice, not be a violence that would strike against choice. It situates an “inwardness” preceding freedom and non-freedom, outside of the axiological bipolarity. This inwardness is an obedience to a unique value without anti-value, which it is impossible to escape,¹⁷ but which, “akin” to the subject, is neither chosen nor non-chosen. In this obedience the subject is elected and retains the trace of election. This value never presents itself as a theme, is neither present nor represented, and, not allowing itself to be thematized, not beginning, is more ancient than a principle. In an immemorial past without a present, through the ambiguity and the antiquity of the trace, it is non-absent. This value is, by an abuse of language, named. It is named God. A thematization would transform the pre-originary passivity of the elected one undergoing election into a choice that the subject effects, and transform the subjectivity, or the subjection, into a usurpation. The subjectivity of the in-itself is thus like an obedience to an order being carried out before the order is heard – anarchy itself. The subject as an ego already stands in freedom, beyond itself, beyond the relationship with the pre-original, the pre-liminary, beyond the pure passivity more ancient than that which *counters* activity with its inertia and thus presupposes that activity. The pure passivity that precedes freedom is responsibility. But it is a responsibility that owes nothing to my freedom; it is my responsibility for the freedom of others. There where I might have remained a spectator, I am responsible, that is, speaking. Nothing is theater any more; the drama is no longer a game. Everything is grave.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Where can I hide? Let us flee into the infernal night! But what am I saying? My father holds there the fatal urn,” says Racine in *Phaedra*, where the responsibility for responsibility is a fatality. But the possibility of the paternity of the Good is caught sight of. “I will not abandon you, but I will not let you go,” says the Eternal to Joshua according to the Bible: the impossible divorce is here the supreme refuge.

¹⁸ It is perhaps in this perspective of the pre-original that the unexceptionable responsibility for others, or the passivity of the good, opens that one can speak of creation ex nihilo: a passivity that excludes even receptivity, since in creation what would still be able to assume the action to a minimal extent, such as a matter assuming by its potencies the form that penetrates it, arises only once the creative act is completed. This thesis does not have any power, or does not have the weakness, to rejoin the dogmatic affirmation of a creation. The notion of creation is not introduced here as an ontological concept in the movement back to the primary cause of being from a given, nor in a return to the origin

IV

But nothing in this passivity of possession by the Good (in which the Good *is*, whereas, *properly speaking*, it does not have to be and is not, were it not out of goodness) becomes a natural tendency. The relationship with the other is not convertible into a nature, nor into a promise of happiness that envelops this relationship with the other with happiness. *The passivity in which the Good is does not become eros*; nothing suppresses in this passivity the trace of the other in his virility so as to reduce the other to the same. The anarchical bond between the subject and the Good is a bond that cannot be made as an assumption of a principle which would be in any way present to the subject in a choice. It is made without the subject having been a will. It is not the constitution of a “divine instinct” of responsibility, an “altruistic or generous nature,” or a “natural goodness.” It binds to an outside. This exteriority of the alliance is maintained in the effort required by the responsibility for others, foreign to eros as well as to enthusiasm – which is a possession in which the difference between the possessor and the possessed disappears. But it needs the temptation of the facility to make a break, the erotic attraction of irresponsibility, which, in a responsibility limited by the freedom of him “who is not his brother’s keeper,” has a presentiment of the evil of the absolute freedom of play. Thus there is, in the midst of the submission to the Good, the seduction of irresponsibility, the probability of egoism in the subject responsible for his responsibility, that is, the very birth of the ego in the obeying will. This temptation to separate oneself from the Good is the very incarnation of the subject¹⁹ or his presence in being. But it is not because the ego is an incarnate soul that temptation troubles the ante-cedent obedience to the Good and promises sovereign choice to man; it is because the obedience free of servitude to the Good is an obedience to an *other* that remains other that the subject is carnal, on the limit of eros, and becomes a being.

The insurmountable ambiguity of Evil is its essence. Seductive and facile evil is perhaps incapable of breaking the passivity of the pre-liminary, pre-historical subjection, annihilating the hither side, repudiating what the subject has never contracted. Evil shows itself to be sin, that is, a responsibility, despite itself, for the refusal of responsibilities. It is neither alongside of nor in front of the Good, but in the second place, beneath, lower than, the Good. The being that perseveres in being, egoism or Evil, thus outlines the dimension of baseness itself, and the birth

of time starting from the present, a movement which would have, despite the Kantian antinomies, miraculously found an argument that would enable one to reduce the antithesis to silence. Creation is not here conceived as the affirmation of a thesis, which in the theme, in the present, already presupposes freedom, that is, the supposedly uncreated, contesting creation. The “creatureness” of the subject cannot become a representation of creation. It is “for the ego,” allegedly uncreated, its expulsion into its self in the passivity of a responsibility that overflows freedom.

¹⁹ Incarnation, which is fundamentally erotic, is also the impossibility of escaping oneself, that is, of fleeing one’s responsibilities. The illusory character of a break with submission is thereby evinced.

of hierarchy. Here begins the axiological bipolarity. But Evil claims to be the contemporary, the equal, the twin, of the Good. This is an irrefutable lie, a Luciferian lie. It is the very egoism of the ego that posits itself as its own origin, an uncreated, sovereign principle, a prince. Without the impossibility of humbling this pride, the anarchical submission to the Good would no longer be anarchical and would be equivalent to the demonstration of God, to theology which treats God as though he belonged to being or to perception. It would be equivalent to the optimism a theology can teach and religion must hope in, but which philosophy is silent about.

This silence can be taken as the dissolution of man in being which tempts him, and into which he reenters. Modern anti-humanism is no doubt right when it does not find in man understood as the individual of a genus or of an ontological region, an individual persevering in being like all substances, a privilege that would make of him the goal of reality.

But the ego, brought back to itself, responsible despite itself, abrogates the egoism of the *conatus* and introduces a *meaning* into being. There can be meaning in being only through him who is not measured according to being. Death renders meaningless every concern that the ego would like to take for its existence and for its destiny – an enterprise without issue and always ridiculous. Nothing is more comical than the concern that a being destined to destruction takes for itself, as absurd as him who questions the stars, whose verdict is without appeal, in view of action. Nothing more comical, or nothing more tragic. It belongs to the same man to be a tragic and a comic figure. But the pre-original responsibility for the other is not measured by being, is not preceded by a decision, and death cannot reduce it to absurdity. Pleasure alone is capable of forgetting the tragic-comedy of being; it is perhaps defined by this forgetting. Death is recalled as the contradiction of pleasure, while it completes the sacrifice of the unexceptionable responsibility. No one is hypocritical enough to claim that he has taken from death its sting, not even religions' promisers. Yet we can have responsibilities for which we cannot not consent to death. It is despite myself that the other concerns me.

If one had the right to retain one trait from a philosophical system while neglecting the details of its architecture (though, according to Valéry, there are no details in architecture, and in philosophy it is the detail that prevents the whole from falling topheavy) we would here evoke Kantism: to find a meaning in the human without measuring it by ontology, without knowing and without asking “how does it stand with . . .?”, outside of mortality and immortality – that, perhaps, is the Copernican revolution.

In a responsibility always more ancient than the *conatus* of substance, more ancient than beginnings and principles, in the anarchical, the ego come back to itself, responsible for the other, is a hostage for everyone, substituted for all in its very non-interchangeability. It is a hostage for all the others who precisely as *others* do not belong to the same genus as the ego, since I am responsible for them without

concern with their responsibility in my regard – for in the last analysis and from the start I am responsible even for that. The ego, I, am a man supporting the universe, “full of all things.” This responsibility or saying, prior to being and entities, is not said in ontological categories. Modern anti-humanism is perhaps not right in not finding in man, lost in history and in order, the trace of this pre-historical and anarchical saying.

CHAPTER 9

NO IDENTITY*

If I do not answer for myself, who will answer for me? But if I answer only for myself, am I still myself?

(Babylonian Talmud, Treatise Aboth 6a)

1. The Sciences of Man

The end of humanism, of metaphysics, the death of man, the death of God (or death to God!) – these are apocalyptic ideas or slogans of intellectual high society. Like all the manifestations of Parisian taste (or Parisian disgusts), these topics impose themselves with the tyranny of the last word, but become available to anyone and cheapened.

Their first truth is methodological. They express a certain state of research in the sciences of man. A concern for strictness makes psychologists, sociologists, historians, and linguists distrustful of an ego that hearkens to itself and feels itself, but remains defenseless against the illusions of its class or the phantasms of its latent neurosis. A formalism is called for to tame the wild proliferation of facts in the human sphere which when considered in their content disturb the theorist's view, and to measure the very certainty of knowledge, more assured of the limits of its axiomatics than of any axiom. The study of man now caught up in a civilization and an economy that have become planetary cannot be limited to an awakening of consciousness: his death, his rebirth, his transformation are enacted henceforth far from him. Thus there is now an aversion for a certain preaching in which, despite its science and audacities of yesteryear, Western humanism fell, such that it now sets up, in the peculiar ambiguity of *belles lettres*, "fine souls" without a grip on the reality of violence and exploitation. All respect for the "mystery of man" is henceforth denounced as ignorance and oppression. "To speak nobly of the human

* "No Identity" was published in French in *L'Ephémère* 13 (1970): pp.27–44, and reprinted in *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972, pp. 83-101. The notes in this chapter are by the author.

in man, to conceive the humanity in man, is to quickly come to a discourse that is untenable and undeniably more repugnant than all the nihilist vulgarities," Maurice Blanchot wrote in November of 1967.¹

To take methodic principles as affirmations concerning the depth of things (if after the end of metaphysics it is still permissible to speak of the depth of things) is, indeed, characteristic of simple and hasty minds.

Yet the very rise of the sciences of man in our day precedes from a mutation of the light of the world, the preemption of certain significations. The nostalgia for logical formalism and mathematical structures in the understanding of man overflows methodological precautions and dexterities, as it goes beyond the positivist imitation of the archetypes of number and measure which triumph in physics. It consists in preferring even in the human order mathematical identities, identifiable from the outside, to the coinciding of self with self in which, yet a century ago, men wished to anchor the ship of exact knowledge. *Henceforth the subject is eliminated from the order of reasons.* It is as though its very congruence with itself were impossible, as though the inwardness of the subject did not close from the inside. The psyche and its freedoms (in which the exploratory thought of the scientist himself unfolds) would be but a detour taken by structures in order to link up into a system and show themselves in the light. It is no longer man, of his own vocation, that would seek or possess truth, but truth that raises up and maintains man (without depending on him!). The inwardness of the self-identical ego is dissolved into the totality which is without recesses or secrets. The whole of the human is outside. That can pass for a very firm formulation of materialism.

And where in being, which is without issue, can one find a no-man's-land for the retreat of transcendental subjectivity? Recalling the venerable reasons that had imposed a "transcendental consciousness" on philosophy in its desire to understand cognition, one could, to be sure, persist in conceiving being in function of subjectivity, and conceive a "null site" in which the legislative sovereignty of the transcendental consciousness would stand. But do not the contradictions that rend the rational world, allegedly issued from transcendental legislation, ruin the identity of the subjective? That an action could be obstructed by the technology destined to render it efficacious and easy, that a science, born to embrace the world, delivers it over to disintegration, that a politics and an administration guided by the humanist ideal maintain the exploitation of man by man and war – these are singular inversions of rational projects, disqualifying human causality, and thus trancendental subjectivity understood as spontaneity and act also. Everything comes to pass as though the ego, the identity par excellence from which every identifiable identity would derive, were wanting with regard to itself, did not succeed in coinciding with itself.

¹ *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, n. 179, pp. 820–21. And, prophetically, more than six months before May, 1968, Blanchot sees the humanity of the outcry and wall graffiti, the "written outcry," being substituted for literary humanism.

Men have, to be sure, long felt this alienation. But since the nineteenth century, with Hegel, a meaning was found in this alienation; it was recognized to be provisional and destined to contribute a surplus of consciousness and clarity to the completion of things. With Marx especially these deviations of the will were explained by social alienation; by exalting socialist hopes, one paradoxically rendered transcendental idealism plausible! Today's anxiety is more profound. It comes from the experience of revolutions that sink into bureaucracy and repression, and totalitarian violences that pass as revolutions. *For in them the disalienation itself is alienated.* In the revolutionary enterprise which, conducted with an extreme consciousness, nonetheless ends up disappointing the vigilant intention that wills it, in the action tearing itself away from the firm hand, the iron hand, that guides it, *recurrence to oneself*, the idea of an ego that identifies itself in finding itself again, fails, or at least is betrayed. The rediscoveries of self with self are missing. Inwardness seems to be not strictly inward. *I is an other.* Has not identity itself been held in check? Meaning would have to be sought in a world that does not bear human traces and does not falsify the identity of significations – a world purged of all ideology.

2. Heidegger

There exists a significant convergence in contemporary thought between this questioning of subjectivity by the sciences of man and the most influential philosophical thought of this century, a thought that already wishes to be post-philosophical.² Heidegger connects the notion of transcendental subjectivity with a certain orientation of European philosophy, metaphysics. He thinks that this metaphysics is at its term. Irreducible identity, ego, psyche, consciousness, subject, the possibility of closing oneself up in oneself and separating oneself from being, of then going unto being out of this retreat in oneself (which in modern thought is self-certainty, whose model has been fixed by the Cartesian cogito) – all this would be still metaphysical. Metaphysical too would be the conception according to which cultural, political, or technological action would project into the concealment of being the rays of its inward light, source of meaning, and would cover over opaque being with layers of meaning in the course of history, which would be the movement of reason itself, transfiguring being by art, science, the State, and industry. For Heidegger the very process of being, being's *essence*,³ is the unfolding of a certain

² Cf. Mikel Dufrenne's fine book *Pour l'homme* (Paris: Seuil, 1968). Also the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, n. 85–86, in particular Louis Marin's article. Yet one should note that Heidegger himself ranks logistics, sociology and psychology among the manifestations of nihilism and the will to power that belongs to metaphysics in its terminal phase. Cf. *The Question of Being*, trans. W. Kluback and J.T. Wilde (New York: Twayne, 1958), p. 47. Cf. note 4, infra.

³ This term is used in this study as the abstract noun of the verb *to be*.

meaning, a certain light, a certain peace that borrow nothing from a subject, express nothing that would be inside a soul. The process of being, or being's essence, is from the first manifestation, that is, expansion into a site, a world, hospitality. But the manifestation thus requires man, for it entrusts itself to man as a secret and as a task. Confidant, but also sayer, herald, messenger of being, man expresses no inward forum. Standing in the openness of being, whose essence is patency, man tells being. In the openness, but also in the forgetting! In the "forgetting of being" man shuts himself up like a monad; he becomes a soul, consciousness, psychic life. In this closedness, in which being is still interpreted, understood, and evinced, but unbeknownst to the soul that articulates only entities, the European metaphysics which is drawing to a close is said to have expressed history. But it is being concluded. The "inward forum" is no longer a world. *The inward world is contested by Heidegger, as by the sciences of man.* To think, after the end of metaphysics, is to respond to the silent language of invitation, to answer from the depths of a listening to the peace which is the original language, to wonder at this silence and this peace. This simplicity and wonder are also the endurance and extreme attention of the poet and the artist; it is, in the proper meaning of the term, to keep silence. The poem or the work of art keep silence, *leave being's essence be*, as the shepherd keeps his flock. *Being requires man as a native land or a ground requires its authochton.* The foreignness of man in the world, his stateless condition, is taken to attest to the last spasms of metaphysics and of the humanism it sustains. By this denunciation of the "inward world" Heidegger radicalized Husserl's antipsychologism.⁴ The end of subjectivity seems to have begun with the twentieth century. The sciences of man and Heidegger end either in the triumph of mathematical intelligibility, repressing the subject, the person, his uniqueness and his election, into ideology, or else in the enrootedness of man in being, of which he would be the messenger and the poet.

⁴ In Husserl's work antipsychologism was especially directed against the "naturalization" of consciousness, but maintained the sovereign inwardness of the subject in transcendental idealism. Transcendental subjectivity founded all knowledge. The intentionality by which consciousness signified *openness* was constituted as a *content* on the level of immanent time. Both noeses and noemata and intentional objects were in the last analysis constituted within consciousness, certain of itself. What did it matter if only phenomenology, and after the event, is able to reactivate and render explicit the at first clandestine work of the constitutive consciousness! Consciousness accounts for the universe; it is secured against every traumatic break-in, *secura adversus deos*. Heidegger's antipsychologism calls into question this origin of all meaning in the ego. Not, to be sure, by subordinating being for logical structures (which, for Heidegger, are not language) nor for a mathematical contexture (which for him is not a text). And this antipsychologism that is not logicist is quite new! But for Heidegger the subject has nothing inward to express. It is entirely conceived on the basis of being and of the truth of being. Our own inquiry is situated at this point: is not subjectivity sincerity, uncovering of the self, which is not a theoretical operation but an offering of oneself, *before* standing in the "openness of truth," before "unveiling being"?

3. Subjectivity and Vulnerability

But it is time to raise some questions. Does human causality correspond with the meaning of subjectivity? Action is the intervention in being founded on the representation of being, that is, founded on consciousness in which being presents itself and is thus always assembled, present and represented, returns in reminiscence “to its beginnings.” It thus delivers itself over to freedom, which is always correlative with an intentionality. Free action assumes what imposes itself on me; it remains a will, even before the ineluctable, making the best of a bad situation, an activity rising again under the passivity of impressions. But does free action answer to subjectivity’s vocation? Is not subjectivity able to refer (without representing it to itself) to a past that passes by every present, and thus overflows the measure of freedom? This would be a relationship prior to the understanding of a vocation, preceding understanding and disclosure, preceding truth. But, in approaching another, where the other is from the first under my responsibility, “something” has overflowed my freely taken decisions, has slipped into me *unbeknownst to me*, thus alienating my identity. Is it then certain that in the deportation or drifting of identity, caught sight of in the inversion of human projects, the subject would not signify with all the dash of its youth? Is it certain that Rimbaud’s formula “I is an other” only means alteration, alienation, betrayal of oneself, foreignness with regard to oneself and subjection to this foreigner? Is it certain that already the most humble experience of him who *puts himself in another’s place*, that is, accuses himself for another’s distress or pain, is not animated with the most eminent meaning of this “I is an other”?

Everything human is outside, say the sciences of man. Everything is outside, or everything in me is open. Is it certain that in this exposedness to all winds subjectivity is lost among the things or in matter? Does not subjectivity signify precisely by its incapacity to shut itself up from the outside? Indeed openness can be understood in several senses.

It can mean, first, the openness of every object to all others, in the unity of the universe governed by the third analogy of experience, laid out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

But the term openness can also designate the intentionality of consciousness, an ecstasy in being. The ecstasy of ex-istence, according to Heidegger, animates consciousness, which is called to a role in the drama of openness by the primordial openness of the *essence of being (Sein)*. Ex-istence is also said to be the vision or the speculation of this drama. The ecstasy of intentionality is thus said to be founded in the truth of being, in parousia. Did not naturalism have a presentiment of this mode of foundation when it posited consciousness as an avatar of nature? An avatar and then, in its extraneousness with respect to being, in its exception, an epiphenomenon.

But openness can have a third meaning. Here it is no longer being’s essence that



opens to show itself, and it is not consciousness that opens itself to the presence of the essence that has been opened and confided to it. Here openness is the denuding of the skin exposed to wounds and outrage. This openness is the vulnerability of a skin exposed, in wounds and outrage, beyond all that can show itself, beyond all that which in being's essence can be exposed to comprehension and celebration. In the sensibility is "uncovered," is exposed a nakedness more naked than that of the skin which, as form and beauty, inspires the plastic arts, the nakedness of a skin presented to contact, to the caress, which always – even, equivocally, in voluptuousness – is suffering for the suffering of the other. Uncovered, open like a city declared open upon the approach of the enemy, the sensibility, prior to all will, action, declaration, all taking up of positions, is vulnerability itself. *Is it?* Does not its being consist in divesting itself of being, not in dying but in altering itself, in "otherwise than being"? The subjectivity of the subject is a radical passivity of man, who also posits himself, declares himself to be, and considers his sensibility as an attribute. This passivity is more passive than every passivity; it is repressed in the pronominal particle self [se] which has no nominative form.

The "openness" of sensibility cannot be interpreted as a simple exposedness to being affected by causes. The other *from whom* I suffer is not just the "stimulus" of experimental psychology, nor even a cause which would be somehow thematized by the intentionality of suffering. Vulnerability is more (or less) than passivity receiving a form or a shock. It is the aptitude, which every being in its "natural pride" would be ashamed to admit, "to be beaten," "to receive blows." "He offered his cheek to the smiters and was filled with shame," says, admirably, a prophetic text.⁵ Without introducing a deliberate searching for suffering or humiliation (turning the other cheek), it suggests, in the primary suffering, in suffering as such, an unendurable and harsh consent that animates the passivity and does so strangely despite itself, although passivity as such has neither force nor intention, and no likes or dislikes. The impotency or humility of "suffering" is on the hither side of the passivity of undergoing. The word "sincerity" here takes on its full meaning: to be uncovered without any defense, to be delivered over. Intellectual sincerity, veracity, already refers to vulnerability, is founded on it.

In vulnerability there then lies a *relationship with the other* which causality does not exhaust, a relationship antecedent to being affected by a stimulus. The identity of the *self* does not set limits to undergoing, not even the last resistance that matter "in potency" opposes to the form that invests it. Vulnerability is obsession by the other or an approaching of the other. It is being *for another*, behind the *other* of a stimulus. This approach is not reducible to the representation of the other nor to consciousness of proximity. To suffer from another is to have charge of him, to support him, to be in his place, to be consumed by him. Every love or every hatred of a neighbor as a reflected attitude presupposes this prior vulnerability, this

⁵ Lamentations, 3:30.

mercy,⁶ this “groaning of the entrails.”⁷ Already on the level of sensibility the subject is *for the other*: there is substitution, responsibility, expiation. But I have not assumed this responsibility at any moment, in any present. Nothing is more passive than this being implicated prior to my freedom, this pre-original involvement, this frankness. The passivity of the vulnerable one is the condition (or uncondition) by which a being shows itself to be a creature.

Frankness exposes – even to wounds. The active ego reverts to the passivity of a *self*, to the accusative form of the *oneself [se]* which does not derive from any nominative, from the accusation prior to any fault.⁸ But this exposedness is never passive enough: exposedness is exposed, sincerity denudes sincerity itself. There is saying. It is as though saying had a meaning prior to the truth it discloses, prior to the advent of the knowledge and information it communicates, free of everything said, a saying that does not tell anything, that infinitely, prevoluntarily, consents. Uncovered in frankness in which veracity will, afterwards, be founded, and thus outside of every thematic display, here the subjectivity of the subject is innocent of ontological conjunctions, is prior to *essence* – is youth. but youth here does not mean simply the uncompleteness of a destiny newly entered upon, possibly calling for the essence. Youth, which the philosopher loves, is the “before being,” the “otherwise than being.” Does not Jeanne Delhomme’s modal thought aim at this difficult modality “without continuity with itself, without continuation of itself”? These are marvelous moments: the One without being of Plato’s *Parmenides*; the *I* that breaks through in the *cogito* when all being is in shipwreck, but before the *I* is rescued into being, as though the shipwreck had not taken place; the Kantian unity of the “I think” before its reduction to a logical form, which Hegel will reduce to a concept; Husserl’s pure ego, transcendent in immanence, on the hither side of the world, but also on the hither side of the absolute being of the reduced consciousness; the Nietzschean man shaking the world’s being in the passage to the overman, “reducing” being not by parenthesizing, but by the violence of an unheard-of word, undoing by the non-saying of dance and laughter (but why are

⁶ We are thinking of the Biblical term “Rakhamin,” which is translated as mercy, but contains a reference to the word “Rekhem,” uterus; it is a mercy that is like an emotion of maternal entrails.

⁷ Cf. Jeremiah, 31:20.

⁸ The notion of subjectivity that is proposed here consists neither in a conjunction of structures nor in a tissue of reflexes. It does not amount to the inwardness of the transcendental consciousness secured from all traumatism and even from the depths of its receptivity assuming the given. Subjectivity signifies by a passivity more passive than all passivity, more passive than matter, by its vulnerability, its sensibility, by its nudity more nude than nudity, the sincere denuding of this very nudity that becomes a saying, the saying of responsibility, by the substitution in which responsibility is said to the very end, by the accusative of the oneself without a nominative form, by exposedness to the traumatism of gratuitous accusation, by expiation for the other. This traumatism confounds consciousness which remains wakeful, but is cast into a resignation in the night, in which, by the effect of the traumatism, the ego reverts to the self. In a night of the unconscious, to be sure. But finding the inter-human drama and the unconscious again beyond the vigilance of transcendental idealism and classical psychology, we can think that the inter-human drama of the subjective is more profound than the erotic drama and sustains it. Eros presupposes the face.

they tragic and grave and on the verge of madness?) the worlds woven by the aphoristic word that demolishes them, withdrawing from the time of aging (of passive synthesis) by the thought of the eternal return. The phenomenological reduction that seeks the pure ego, beyond being, could not be secured by the effect of a writing, when the ink of the world stains the fingers that put this world between parentheses. But the philosopher must return to language to convey, even if in betraying them, the pure and the unutterable.

4. Foreignness to Being

Let us finally venture to raise some questions with regard to Heidegger. Is man's foreignness in the world the effect of a process that began with the Presocratics, who spoke of the openness of being without preventing the forgetting of this openness in Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes? The soul exiled here below, which Plato transmits to metaphysical thought, already attests to the forgetting of being. But does the notion of the subject reflect only what Heidegger calls the history of being, whose metaphysical forgetting marks the epochs of the history of philosophy? Does the crisis of inwardness mark the end of this foreignness, exception or exile, of the subject and of man? Is it for stateless man the return to a fatherland on the earth?

Are not we Westerners, from California to the Urals, nourished by the Bible as much as by the Presocratics, foreigners in the world, but in a way that owes nothing to the certainty of the *cogito*, which, since Descartes, is said to express the being of entities? The end of metaphysics does not succeed in dissipating this foreignness to the world. Are we standing before non-sense infiltrating into a world in which hitherto man was not only the shepherd of being, but elected for himself? Or shall the strange defeat or defection of identity confirm the human election – my own, to serve, but that of the other for himself? The verses of the Bible do not here have as their function to serve as proofs; but they do bear witness to a tradition and an experience. Do they not have a right to be cited at least equal to that of Hölderlin and Trakl? The question has a more general significance: have the Sacred Scriptures read and commented on in the West influenced the Greek scripture of the philosophers, or have they been united to them only teratologically? Is to philosophize to decipher a writing hidden in a palimpsest?

In Psalm 119 we read: "I am a stranger on the earth, do not hide from me your commandments." Would historical criticism show this text to be a late one, and would it already date from the Hellenistic period, in which the Platonic myth of the soul exiled in the body would have been able to seduce the spirituality of the West? But the psalm echos texts recognized as prior to the century of Socrates and Plato; in particular Leviticus 15:23: "No land will be alienated irrevocably, for the earth is mine, for you are but strangers, domiciled in my land." It is not here a question of the foreignness of the eternal soul exiled among passing shadows, nor of a

displaced state which the building of a house and the possession of land will enable one to overcome, by bringing forth, through building, the hospitality of sites which the earth envelops. For like in Psalm 119, which calls for commandments, this difference between the ego and the world is prolonged by obligations toward the others. They echo the Bible's permanent *saying*: the condition (or the uncondition) of being strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt brings man close to his neighbor. In their uncondition of being strangers men seek one another. No one is at home. The memory of this servitude assembles humanity. The difference that opens between the ego and itself, the non-coincidence of the identical, is a fundamental non-indifference with regard to men.

The free man is pledged to his neighbor; no one can save himself without the others. The closed domain of the soul cannot be closed from the inside. It is "the Eternal that closed the door of the Ark behind Noah," a text of Genesis tells us, with wonderful precision. How could it be shut at the hour in which humanity is perishing? And are there hours in which the deluge is not threatening? Here is the impossible inwardness, whose impossibility is in our day disorienting and reorienting the sciences of man, an impossibility we learn of neither from metaphysics nor from the end of metaphysics. There is a divergency between the ego and the self, an impossible recurrence, and impossible identity. No one can remain in himself: the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for the others, an extreme vulnerability. The return to the self becomes an interminable detour. Prior to consciousness and choice, before creation is assembled into the present and into a representation and becomes an essence, man approached man. He is made of responsibilities. With them he rends the essence. It is not a question of a subject assuming or escaping responsibilities, a subject constituted, posited in itself and for itself as a free identity; it is a question of the subjectivity of the subject, its non-indifference with regard to the other in a responsibility that is unlimited for not measured by commitments, to which assumption and refusal of responsibilities refer. It is a question of the responsibility for others to which the movement of recurrence is detoured, in the "troubled entrails" of the subjectivity it rends.

A stranger to itself, obsessed by the others, dis-quiet, the ego is a hostage, a hostage in its very recurrence as an ego ceaselessly missing itself. For it is thus always closer to the others, more obliged, aggravating its own insolvency. This debt is absorbed only by being increased; such is the pride of non-essence! It is a passivity no "healthy" will can will; it is thus expelled, apart, not collecting the merit of its virtues and talents, incapable of recollecting itself so as to accumulate itself and inflate itself with being. It is the non-essence of man, possibly less than nothing. "It may be," Blanchot also wrote, "that, as one is pleased to declare, 'man is passing.' Man is passing, man has even always already past, in the measure that he has always been appropriated to his own disappearance. . . . This then is not a reason to repudiate humanism, as long as it is recognized in the least deceptive mode, never in the zones of inwardness, power and law, order, culture, and heroic magnificence."

. . . ”⁹

Without rest in itself, not seated in the world, in this foreignness to every site, on the other side of being, beyond being – that is, surely, an inwardness in its own way! It is not something only constructed by philosophy; it is the unreal reality of men persecuted in the daily history of the world, whose dignity and meaning metaphysics has never recognized, from which philosophers turn their faces.

But this responsibility undergone beyond all passivity, from which no one can release me by taking from me my inability to shut myself up, this responsibility which the ego cannot escape (I for whom another cannot be substituted) designates the uniqueness of the irreplaceable. A uniqueness without inwardness, an ego without rest in itself, a hostage for everyone, turned away from itself in each movement of its return to itself – man is without identity. Man understood as the individual of a genus or as an *entity* situated in an ontological region, persevering in being like all substances, does not have any privilege that would establish him as the goal of reality. But man also has to be conceived on the basis of the responsibility more ancient than the *conatus* of a substance or inward identification, a responsibility which, always summoning from the outside, disturbs just this inwardness. Man has to be conceived on the basis of the self putting itself, despite itself, in place of everyone, substituted for everyone by its very non-interchangeability. He has to be conceived on the basis of the condition or uncondition of being hostage, hostage for all the others who, precisely qua others, do not belong to the same genus as I, since I am responsible even for their responsibility. It is by virtue of this supplementary responsibility that subjectivity is not the ego, but me.

5. Youth

Do these considerations belong to “thoughts out of season” despite their starting point in the intellectual situation of our time? Will they not shock by their outdated, idealist and humanist vocabulary? This occasion can serve to ask, in terminating, whether the aspirations of youth in the world today, despite the violences and irresponsibility into which they degenerate, do without a thought devoted to

⁹ It is interesting to note how among the most imperative “sentiments” of May, 1968 the dominant one was the refusal of a humanity that would be defined not by its vulnerability more passive than all passivity, by its debt toward the other, but by its self-satisfaction, its acquisitions and its acquaintances. Over and beyond capitalism and exploitation what was contested were their conditions: the person understood as an accumulation of being, by merits, titles, professional competence – an ontological tumefaction weighing on others and crushing them, instituting a hierarchized society maintained beyond the necessities of consumption, which no religious breath any longer succeeds in rendering egalitarian. Behind the capital of *having* weighed a capital of *being*.

subjectivity defined on the basis of responsibility and against the notion of being.¹⁰

The idea of a subjectivity incapable of shutting itself up, to the point of substitution, responsible for all the others, and, consequently, the idea of a defense of man understood as a defense of the man other than me, presides over what in our day is called the critique of humanism. It rejects the responsibility congealed into "belles lettres" in which the saying reduced to the said enters into conjunction with its own conditions, forms a structure with its contexts and loses its youth as a saying.¹¹ This youth is the break in a context, the trenchant, Nietzschean, prophetic word, without status in being. Yet it is not arbitrary, for it has come from sincerity, that is, from responsibility for the other. This unlimited responsibility is not felt as a state of the soul, but signifies in the oneself of the self, consuming itself, the subjectivity of the subject, as embers covered with ashes – and blazing up into a living torch. This responsibility, a wound smarting with cruelties and evils suffered by others, characterizes our epoch as much as these very cruelties and evils. Does the fact that despite the formal mathematism of structures, the new reading of Marx and psychoanalytic technique, man has not ceased to count for man mean that life is at bottom stupid and closed to the science it engenders, and that the human animal, according to the formula of a suspect wisdom, is invariable?

The subject we have surprised in the saying that precedes the said was called young. This adjective indicates the surplus of meaning over the being that bears it and claims to measure and restrict it. In the fulguration of some privileged moments of 1968, quickly extinguished by a language as conformist and garrulous as that it was to replace, youth consisted in contesting a world long since denounced. But the denunciation had long since become a literature and a way of speaking. Certain voices of certain outrages gave back to it its own unexceptionable signification. The vague notion of authenticity, which is much abused, here acquired precise meaning. Youth is authenticity. But youth defined by sincerity, which is not the brutality of avowal and the violence of action, but approach of the other, taking on the burden of a neighbor, which comes from human vulnerability. Able to find responsibilities again under the thick stratum of literature that undo them (one can no longer say "if youth only knew"¹²), youth ceased to be the age of transition and passage ("youth must pass"), and is shown to be man's humanity.

¹⁰ This impossibility of speaking is perhaps the most incontestable experience of our epoch. We experience discourse as an unendurable solemnity, declamation and sermon, such that we can no longer speak and hear without disgust anything but the algorithmic discourse of science, the everyday "give me a glass of water," and are tempted by violent discourse, already an outcry, destructive of the said.

¹¹ Does it possess powers that men formerly attributed to it when they denied it had knowledge? For unless we renounce society and in the unlimited responsibility for the others engulf every possibility for responding *in fact*, one can avoid neither the said, letters, belles lettres, the comprehension of being, nor philosophy. One cannot do without them if one means to manifest to thought, even if one thus deforms it, what is beyond being itself. This manifestation takes place at the price of a betrayal, but it is necessary for justice, which resigns itself to tradition, continuity and institutions, despite their very infidelity. To not care about them is to play with nihilism.

CHAPTER 10

GOD AND PHILOSOPHY*¹

1. The Priority of Philosophical Discourse, and Ontology

1. “Not to philosophize is still to philosophize.” The philosophical discourse of the West claims the amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy.

Rational theology accepts this vassalage. If, for the benefit of religion, it reserves a domain from the authority of philosophy, one will know that this domain will have been recognized to be philosophically unverifiable.

2. The dignity of being the ultimate and royal discourse belongs to Western philosophy because of the strict coinciding of thought, in which philosophy resides, and the idea of reality in which this thought thinks. For thought, this coinciding means not having to think beyond what belongs to “being’s move” [“geste d’être”], or at least not beyond what modifies a previous belongingness to “being’s move,” such as formal or ideal notions. For the being of reality, this coinciding means: to illuminate thought and the conceived by showing itself. To show oneself, to be illuminated, is just what having meaning is, what having intelligibility par excellence is, the intelligibility underlying every modification of meaning. Then we should have to understand the rationality of “being’s move” not as some

*¹ The notes in this chapter are by the author, unless otherwise indicated. “God and Philosophy” was published in French as “Dieu et la Philosophie” in *Le Nouveau Commerce*, 30–31, (1975): pp. 97–128, preceded by the following “Preliminary Note” written by the author:

The ideas put forth here have already been presented in different forms in lectures given at the University of Lille on March 13, 1973; at the annual congress of the Association des professeurs de philosophie des Facultés Catholiques de France on May 1, 1973; at the Symposium organized by the Académie des Sciences et des Humanités d’Israël and the philosophy department of the University of Jerusalem, in honor of the 90th birthday of Professor Hugo Bergman, on December 23, 1973, in Hebrew; at the Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis at Brussels on February 20–21, 1974; at the meeting organized by the Centre Protestant d’Études on March 3, 1974; and at the Faculté de Théologie Protestante at Geneva on March 4, 1974.

The text we are publishing here is based on the core content of each of these lectures. This itinerary of lectures has given it an ecumenical character. We mention this especially in order to render homage to the life and work of Professor Hugo Bergman who, having very early settled in Jerusalem, was always faithful to Israel’s universal vocation which the state of Zion ought to serve only, to make possible a discourse addressed to all men in their human dignity, so as then to be able to answer for all men, our neighbors.

characteristic which would be attributed to it when a reason comes to know of it. That a thought comes to know of it is intelligibility. Rationality has to be understood as the incessant emergence of thought from the energy of “being’s move” or its manifestation, and reason has to be understood out of this rationality. Meaningful thought, and thought about being, would be pleonasm and equivalent pleonasm, which, however, are justified by the vicissitudes and privations to which this identification of the thought of the meaningful and of being is de jure exposed.

3. Philosophical discourse therefore should be able to include God, of whom the Bible speaks – if this God does have a meaning. But as soon as he is conceived, this God is situated within “being’s move.” He is situated there as the *entity* par excellence. If the intellectual understanding of the biblical God, theology, does not reach to the level of philosophical thought, this is not because it thinks of God as a *being* without first explicating the “being of this being,” but because in thematizing God it brings God into the course of being. But, in the most unlikely way – that is, not analogous with an idea subject to *criteria*, or subject to the demand that it show itself to be true or false – the God of the Bible signifies the beyond being, transcendence. It is not by chance that the history of Western philosophy has been a destruction of transcendence. Rational theology, fundamentally ontological, strives to take account of transcendence in the domain of being by expressing it with adverbs of height applied to the verb being; God is said to exist eminently or par excellence. But does the height, or the height above all height, that is thus expressed belong to ontology? And does not the modality which this adverb, borrowed from the dimension of the sky over our heads, expresses modify the verbal meaning of the verb to be to the point of excluding it from the thinkable as something inapprehensible, excluding it from the *esse* showing itself, that is, showing itself meaningfully in a theme?

4. One can also, to be sure, claim that the God of the Bible does not have meaning, that is, is not properly speaking thinkable. This would be the other term of the alternative. “The concept of God is not a problematical concept; it is not a concept at all,” writes Mme. Delhomme in a recent book, continuing a major tradition of philosophical rationalism which refuses to accept the transcendence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob among the concepts without which there would be no thought. What the Bible puts above all comprehension would have not yet reached the threshold of intelligibility!

The problem which is thus posed, and which will be ours, is whether the meaning that is equivalent to the *esse* of being, that is, the meaning which is meaning in philosophy, is not already a restriction of meaning. Is it not already a derivative or a drifting of meaning? Is not the meaning equivalent to essence – to being’s move, to being qua being – first broached in presence, which is the time of the same? This supposition can be justified only through the possibility of going back from this allegedly conditioned meaning to a meaning which could no longer be put in terms of being or in terms of beings. We must ask if beyond the intelligibility and

rationalism of identity, consciousness, the present, and being – beyond the intelligibility of immanence – the signifyingness, rationality, and rationalism of transcendence are not understood. Over and beyond being does not a meaning whose priority, translated into ontological language, would have to be called *antecedent* to being, show itself? It is not certain that in going beyond the terms and beings one necessarily relapses into speaking of opinion or faith. In fact, in staying or wanting to be outside of reason, faith and opinion speak the language of being. Nothing is less opposed to ontology than opinion and faith. To ask, as we are trying to do here, if God can be expressed in a rational discourse which would be neither ontology nor faith is implicitly to doubt the formal opposition, established by Yehouda Halevy and taken up by Pascal, between the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, invoked in faith without philosophy, and the god of philosophers. It is to doubt that this opposition constitutes an alternative.

2. The Priority of Ontology and Immanence

5. We said that for Western philosophy meaning or intelligibility coincide with the manifestation of being, as if the very doings of being led to clarity, in the form of intelligibility, and then became an intentional thematization in an experience. Pressing toward or waiting for it, all the potentialities of experience are derived from or susceptible to such thematization. Thematic exposition concludes the business of being or truth. But if being *is* manifestation, if the exertion of being amounts to this exhibition, the manifestation of being is only the manifestation of this “exertion,” that is, the manifestation of manifestation, the truth of truth. Philosophy thus finds in manifestation its matter and its form. In its attachment to being, to beings or the being of beings, it would thus remain a movement of knowledge and truth, an adventure of experience between the clear and the obscure. It is certain that this is the sense in which philosophy is the bearer of the spirituality of the West, where spirit is taken to be coextensive with knowing. But knowing – or thought, or experience – is not to be understood as a kind of reflection of exteriority in an inner forum. The notion of reflection, an optical metaphor taken from thematized beings and events, is not the proper trope for knowing. Knowing is only understood in its proper essence when one begins with consciousness, whose specificity is lost when it is defined with the concept of knowing, a concept which presupposes consciousness.

It is as a modality or modification of *insomnia* that consciousness is consciousness of..., a gathering into being or into presence, which, at a certain depth of vigilance where vigilance has to clothe itself with justice, is essential to insomnia.² Insomnia, wakefulness or vigilance, far from being definable as the simple negation of the

² Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), pp. 153–62.



natural phenomenon of sleep, belongs to the categorial, antecedent to all anthropological attention and stupor. Ever on the verge of awakening, sleep communicates with vigilance; while trying to escape, sleep stays tuned in, in an *obedience to the wakefulness* which threatens it and calls to it, which *demands*. The categorial proper to insomnia is not reducible to the tautological affirmation of the same, dialectical negation, or the ecstasy of thematizing intentionality. Here being awake is not equivalent to *watching over ...*, where already the identical, rest, sleep, is sought after. It is in consciousness alone that the *watching*, already petrified, bends over toward a content which is identified and gathered into a presence, into a “move of being,” and is absorbed in it. Insomnia as a category – or as a meta-category (but the *meta-* becomes meaningful through it) – does not get inscribed in a table of categories from a determining activity exercised on the other as *given* by the unity of the same (and all activity is but the identification and crystallization of the same against the other, upon being affected by that other), in order to ensure to the other, consolidated into a being, the gravity of being. Insomnia – the wakefulness in awakening – is disturbed in the core of its formal or categorical *sameness* by the *other*, which tears away at whatever forms a nucleus, a substance of the same, identity, a rest, a presence, a sleep. Insomnia is disturbed by the other who breaks this rest, breaks it from this side of the state in which equality tends to establish itself. The irreducible categorial character of insomnia lies precisely in that. The other is in the same, and does not alienate the same but awakens it. Awakening is like a demand that no obedience is equal to, no obedience puts to sleep; it is a “more” in the “less.” Or, to use an obsolete language, it is the spirituality of the soul, ceaselessly aroused from its state of soul, in which wakefulness itself already closes over upon itself or falls to sleep, resting within the boundaries it has as a state. We find here the passivity of inspiration, or the subjectivity of the subjectivity of the subject aroused, sobered up, out of its being. There is a formalism in insomnia, a formalism more formal than that of any defining, delimiting, confining form, more formally formal than that of a form that closes into a presence and an *esse*, filling with content. Insomnia is wakefulness, but a wakefulness without intentionality, dis-interested. Its indeterminateness does not call for a form, is not a materiality. It is a form that does not *terminate* the drawing out of a form in it, and does not condense its own emptiness into a content. It is uncontained – infinity.

6. Consciousness has already broken with this dis-interestedness. It is the identity of the same, the presence of being, the presence of presence. We must think of consciousness beginning with the emphasis of presence.³ Presence is only possible as a return of consciousness to itself, outside of sleeping and consciousness beginning with this emphasis of presence.³ Presence is only possible as a return of

³ Which is required by justice, itself required by vigilance, and thus by the Infinite in me, by the idea of infinity.

consciousness to itself, outside of sleep – and consciousness thus goes back to insomnia. That is so even though this return to itself, in the form of self-consciousness, is only a forgetting of the other which awakens the same from within, and even if the freedom of the same is still only a waking dream. Presence is only possible as an incessant taking up of presence again, an incessant representation. The incessance of presence is a repetition, its being taken up again an apperception of representation. Representation is not to be described as a taking up again. Re-presentation is the very possibility of a return, the possibility of the *always*, or of the presence of the present. The unity of apperception, the “I think,” which is discovered and acquired its role in re-presentation, is not a way to make presence purely subjective. The synthesis effected by the unity of the *I think* behind experience constitutes the act of presence, presence as an act, or presence in act. This encompassing movement is accomplished by the unity formed into a nucleus in the “I think,” a synopsis which is a structure necessary for the actuality of the present. The “activity of the mind,” the operative concept of transcendental idealism, is not based on an empirical experience of the deployment of intellectual energy. It is rather the extreme purity – to the point of tension – of the presence of presence, which is Aristotle’s being in act, a presence of presence, an extreme tension breaking up *presence* into an “experience of a subject,” where precisely presence returns upon itself and is filled up and fulfilled. The psychic nature of consciousness is this emphasis of being, this presence of presence, a presence outdoing itself, without loopholes, without hedging, without any possible forgetting in the folds of what would be only implicit and could not be unfolded. The “incessance” is an explication without any possible shading off; it refers to an awakening that would be lucidity, but also to a watching over being, an attention to..., and not an exposedness to the other (and already a modification of the formalism without intentionality of insomnia). It is always true that because of consciousness nothing can be dissimulated in being. Consciousness is a light which illuminates the world from one end to the other; everything which goes off into the past is recalled or recovered by history. Reminiscence is the extreme consciousness which is also the universal presence and the universal ontology; whatever is able to fill the field of consciousness was, in its time, received or perceived, had an origin. Through consciousness the past is only a modification of the present. Nothing can happen and nothing could have happened without presenting itself, nothing could be smuggled by without being declared, without being shown, without being inspected as to its truth. Transcendental subjectivity is the figure of this presence; no signification precedes that which I give to myself.

Thus the process of the present unfolds through consciousness like a “held note” held in its *always*, in its identity of being the same, in the simultaneity of its moments. The process of the subjective does not come from the outside; the presence of the present involves consciousness. And philosophy, then, in search of the transcendental operations of the apperception of the *I think*, is not some

unhealthy and accidental curiosity; it is representation, the reactualization of representation, that is, the emphasis of presence, being's remaining-the-same in the simultaneity of its presence, in its always, in its immanence. Philosophy is not merely the knowledge of immanence; it is immanence itself.⁴

7. Immanence and consciousness, as gathering up the manifestation of manifestation, are not disturbed by the phenomenological interpretation of affective states or of the voluntary psyche, which puts in the very heart of consciousness the emotion or the anxiety which upset its imperturbability – nor by that interpretation that starts from fear or trembling before the sacred, and understands them as primary lived states. It is not accidental that the axiological and practical strata in Husserl cover over a representational ground.

The axiological and the practical strata remain experiences – experiences of values, or experiences of the willed *qua* willed. The representational ground, which Husserl brings out in them, consists, moreover, less in some serenity of the theoretical intention than in the identification of the identical in the form of ideality, in the assembling, in the representation in the form of a presence, a lucidity which allows nothing to escape. In short, it consists in immanence.

8. But let us take note of this: the interpretation of affectivity as a modification of representation, or as founded on a representation, succeeds in the measure that affectivity is taken at the level of a tendency, or concupiscence, as Pascal would say – at the level of an aspiration which can be satisfied in pleasure or, when unsatisfied, remains a pure lack which causes suffering. Beneath such an affectivity is found the ontological activity of consciousness – wholly investment and comprehension, that is, presence and representation (of which the specifically theoretical thematization is but a modality). This does not exclude the possibility that, in another direction besides that of a tendency going to its term, there break out an affectivity which breaks with the form and purpose of consciousness, and leaves immanence, is a transcendence. We are going to try to speak of this “elsewhere.”

9. A religious thought which appeals to religious experiences allegedly

⁴ The notion of experience is inseparable from the unity of presence, or simultaneity. It thus refers to the unity of apperception which does not come from the outside and “become conscious” of simultaneity. It belongs to the very “way” of presence, for presence, being, is only possible as a thematization or gathering of the transitory, and thus as a phenomenon, which is thematic exhibition itself. But all signification does not derive from experience, does not resolve into a manifestation. The formal structure of signifyingness, the-one-for-the-other, does not from the first amount to a “showing oneself.” Suffering for another, for example, has a meaning in which knowing is adventitious. The adventure of knowledge which is characteristic of being, ontological from the first, is not the only mode, nor the preliminary mode, of intelligibility or meaning. Experience as the source of meaning has to be put into question. It is possible to show that meaning *qua* knowing has its motivation in a meaning that at the start is not a knowing at all. This is not to deny that philosophy is itself knowledge. But the possibility for knowing to take in all meaning does not reduce all meaning to the structures that its exhibition imposes. This then suggests the idea of a dia-chrony of truth in which the said has to be unsaid, and the unsaid unsaid in its turn. In this sense the skeptical essence of philosophy can be taken seriously: skepticism is not an arbitrary contestation; it is a doctrine of inspection and testing, although not reducible to testing of the scientific sort.

independent of philosophy already, inasmuch as it is founded on experience, refers to the "I think," and is wholly connected on to philosophy. The "narration" of religious experience does not shake philosophy and cannot break with presence and immanence, of which philosophy is the emphatic completion. It is possible that the word God has come to philosophy out of religious discourse. But even if philosophy refuses this discourse, it understands it as a language made of propositions bearing on a theme, that is, as having a meaning which refers to a disclosure, a manifestation of presence. The bearers of religious experience do not conceive of any other signification of meaning. Religious "revelation" is therewith already assimilated to philosophical disclosure; even dialectical theology maintains this assimilation. That a discourse can speak otherwise than to say what has been seen or heard on the outside, or previously experienced, remains unsuspected. From the start then a religious being interprets what he lived through as an experience. It spite of himself he already interprets God, of whom he claims to have an experience, in terms of being, presence and immanence.

Then the first question has to be: can discourse signify otherwise than by signifying a theme? Does God signify as the theme of the religious discourse which names God – or as the discourse which, at least to begin with, does not name him, but says him with another form of address than denomination or evocation?

3. The Idea of the Infinite

10. The thematization of God in religious experience has already dodged or missed the inordinate plot that breaks up the unity of the "I think."⁵

In his meditation on the idea of God, Descartes, with an unequalled rigor, has sketched out the extraordinary course of a thought that proceeds on to the breakup of the *I think*. Although he conceives of God as a being, he conceives of him as an eminent being or being that *is* eminently. Before this rapprochement between the idea of God and the idea of being, we do indeed have to ask whether the adjective *eminent* and the adverb *eminently* do not refer to the elevation of the sky above our heads, and whether they do not go beyond ontology. Be that as it may, interpreting the immeasurability of God as a superlative case of existing, Descartes maintains a substantialist language. But for us this is not what is unsurpassable in his meditation. It is not the proofs of God's existence that matter to us here, but the breakup of consciousness, which is not a repression into the unconscious, but a sobering up or an awakening, jolting the "dogmatic slumber" which sleeps at the bottom of every consciousness resting on its object. The idea of God, the *cogitatum*

⁵ This possibility of conjuring away or missing the division of truth into two times – that of the *immediate* and that of the *reflected* – deserves consideration and prudence. It does not necessarily lead to the subordination of one to the other. Truth as *dia-chrony*, as refusal of synchronization and synthesis, is perhaps proper to transcendence.

of a *cogitatio* which *to begin with* contains that *cogitatio*, signifies the non-contained par excellence. Is not that the very absolution of the absolute? It overflows every capacity; the “objective reality” of the *cogitatum* breaks up the “formal reality” of the *cogitatio*. This perhaps overturns, in advance, the universal validity and primordial character of intentionality. We will say that the idea of God breaks up the thought which is an investment, a synopsis and a synthesis, and can only enclose in a presence, re-present, reduce to presence or let be.

Malebranche knew how to gauge the import of this event; there is no idea of God, or God is his own idea. We are outside the order in which one passes from an idea to a being. The idea of God is God in me, but God already breaking up the consciousness which aims at ideas, and unlike any content. This difference is certainly not an emergence, which would be to imply that an inclusion of God in consciousness had been possible, nor some sort of escaping the realm of consciousness, which is to imply that there could have been *comprehension*. And yet there is an idea of God, or God is in us, as though the being-not-includable were also an ex-ceptional relationship with me, as though the difference between the Infinite and what ought to include and comprehend it were a non-indifference of the Infinite to this impossible inclusion, a non-indifference of the Infinite to thought. There is a putting of the Infinite into thought, but this is wholly different from what is structured as a comprehension of a *cogitatum* by a *cogitatio*. This putting is an unequalled passivity, because it is unassumable. (It is perhaps in this passivity – beyond all passivity – that we should recognize awakening.) Or, conversely, it is as though the negation of the finite included in In-finity did not signify any sort of negation resulting from the formal structure of negative judgment, but rather signified the *idea of the Infinite*, that is, the Infinite in me. Or, more exactly, it is as though the psyche in subjectivity were equivalent to the negation of the finite by the Infinite, as though – without wanting to play on words – the *in* of the Infinite were to signify both the *non* and the *within*.⁶

11. The actuality of the *cogito* is thus interrupted by the unincludable, not thought but undergone in the form of the idea of the Infinite, bearing in a second moment of consciousness what in a first moment claimed to bear it. After the certainty of the cogito, present to itself in the second Meditation, after the “halt” which the last lines of this Meditation mark, the third Meditation announces that “in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite – to wit, the notion of God before that of myself.” The idea of the Infinite, *Infinity in me*, can only be a passivity of consciousness. Is it still consciousness? There is here a passivity which cannot be likened to receptivity. Receptivity is a collecting that takes place in a welcome, an assuming that takes place under the force of the blow

⁶ The latent birth of negation occurs not in subjectivity, but in the idea of the Infinite. Or, if one prefers, it is in subjectivity qua idea of the Infinite. It is in this sense that the idea of the Infinite, as Descartes affirms, is a “genuine idea” and not merely what I conceive “by the negation of what is finite.”

received. The breakup of the actuality of thought in the “idea of God” is a passivity more passive still than any passivity, like the passivity of a trauma through which the idea of God would have been put into us. An “idea put into us” – does this stylistic turn suit the subjectivity of the cogito? Does it suit consciousness and its way of holding a content, which is to always leave some traces of its grasp on it? Does not consciousness, in its present, get its origin and its contents from itself? Can an idea be put into a thought and abjure its letters patent of Socratic nobility, its immanent birth in reminiscence, that is, its origin in the very presence of the thought that thinks it, or in the recuperation of this thought by memory? But in the idea of the Infinite there is described a passivity more passive still than any passivity befitting consciousness: there is the surprise or susception of the unassumable, more open still than any openness – wakefulness – but suggesting the passivity of someone created.⁷ The putting into us of an unincludable idea overturns that presence to self which consciousness is, forcing its way through the barrier and checkpoint, eluding the obligation to accept or adopt all that enters from the outside. It is then an idea signifying with a signifyingness prior to presence, to all presence, prior to every origin in consciousness and thus anarchical, accessible in its trace. It signifies with a signifyingness from the first older than its exhibition, not exhausting itself in exhibiting itself, not drawing its meaning from its manifestation, and thus breaking with the coinciding of being with appearance in which, for Western philosophy, meaning or rationality lie, breaking with synopsis. It is more ancient than the rememberable thought which representation retains in its presence. What can this signification more ancient than exhibition mean? Or, more exactly, what can the antiquity of a signification mean? In exhibition, can it enter into another time than that of the historical present, which already annuls the past and its dia-chrony by re-presenting it? What can this antiquity mean if not the trauma of awakening – as though the idea of the Infinite, the Infinite in us, awakened a consciousness which is not awakened enough? As though the idea of the Infinite in us were a demand, and a signification in the sense that an order is signified in a demand.

⁷ Inquiring after the “manner in which I have acquired this idea,” the sense of this receptivity, Descartes says in the third Meditation: “For I have not received it through the senses, and it is never presented to me unexpectedly, as is usual with the ideas of sensible things when these things present themselves, or seem to present themselves, to the external organs of my senses....” In the ideas of sensible things, the surprise of the experience is taken up by the understanding, which extracts from the sense the clear and distinct intelligible, and this allows one to say that the sensible things “seem to present themselves to the external organs of my senses.” This is the very process of receptivity! “Nor is it [the idea of infinity],” Descartes continues, “likewise a fiction of my mind, for it is not in my power to take from or add anything to it; and consequently the only alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.” [*The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. I, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 170. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE]

4. Divine Comedy

12. We have already said that it is not in the negation of the finite by the Infinite, understood in its abstraction and logical formalism, that the idea of the Infinite, or the Infinite in thought, is to be interpreted. On the contrary, the idea of the Infinite, or the Infinite in thought, is the proper and irreducible figure for the negation of the finite. The *in* of infinity is not a *not* like any other; its negation is the subjectivity of the subject, which is behind intentionality. The difference between the Infinite and the finite is behind intentionality. The difference between the Infinite and the finite is a non-indifference of the Infinite to the finite, and is the secret of subjectivity. The figure of the Infinite put in me, and, according to Descartes, contemporaneous with my creation,⁸ would mean that the not being able to comprehend the Infinite by thought is somehow a positive relationship with this thought – but with this thought as passive, as a *cogitatio* as though dumbfounded and no longer, or not yet, commanding the *cogitatum*, not yet hastening toward adequation between the term of the spontaneous teleology of consciousness and this term given in being. Such an adequation is the destiny of the essential teleology of consciousness, which proceeds to its intentional term, and conjures up the presence of re-presentation. Better yet, the not-being-able-to-comprehend-the-Infinite-by-thought would signify the condition – or the unconditionality – of thought, as though to speak of the non-comprehension of the Infinite by the finite did not amount to simply saying that the Infinite is not finite, and as though the affirmation of the difference between the Infinite and the finite had to remain a verbal abstraction, without consideration of the fact that through the non-comprehension of the Infinite by thought, thought is posited as thought,⁹ as a posited subjectivity, that is, is posited as self-positing. The Infinite has nothing to add on to itself so as to affect subjectivity; its very in-finity, its difference from the finite, is already its non-indifference to the finite. This amounts to a *cogitatio not comprehending* the *cogitatum* which affects it utterly. The Infinite affects thought by devastating it and at the same time calls upon it; in a “putting it back in its place” it puts thought in place. It awakens it. The awakening of thought is not a welcoming of the Infinite, is not a recollecting, not an assuming, which are necessary and sufficient for *experience*. The idea of the Infinite puts these in question. The idea of the Infinite is not even taken up as love, which is awakened when the arrow strikes, but then the subject stunned by the trauma finds himself forthwith in the immanence of a state of soul. The Infinite signifies precisely prior to its manifestation; here the meaning is not reducible to manifestation, the representation of presence, or teleology. Here meaning is not measured by the possibility or impossibility of the truth of being, even if this antecedent signification should, in one way or another

⁸ Cf. preceding note.

⁹ Or, as Descartes says, “which is *created*”.

– and if only through its trace – show itself in the enigmas involved in saying.

13. What then is the plot of meaning, other than that of re-presentation and of empirical experience, which is hatched in the idea of the Infinite – in the monstrosity of the Infinite *put* in me – an idea which in its passivity over and beyond all receptivity is no longer an idea? What is the meaning of the trauma of awakening, in which the Infinite can neither be posited as a correlate of the subject, nor enter into a structure with it, nor become its contemporary in a co-presence – but in which it transcends him? How is transcendence as a relationship thinkable if it must exclude the ultimate and the most formal co-presence which a relationship guarantees to its terms?

The *in* of the Infinite designates the depth of the affecting by which subjectivity is affected through this “putting” of the Infinite into it, without prehension or comprehension. It designates the depth of an undergoing that no capacity comprehends, that no foundation any longer supports, where every process of investing fails and where the screws that fix the stern of inwardness burst. This putting in without a corresponding recollecting devastates its site like a devouring fire, catastrophying its site, in the etymological sense of the word.¹⁰ It is a dazzling, where the eye takes more than it can hold, an igniting of the skin which touches and does not touch what is beyond the graspable, and burns. It is a passivity or a passion in which desire can be recognized, in which the “*more* in the *less*” awakens by its most ardent, noblest and most ancient flame a thought given over to thinking more than it thinks.¹¹ But this desire is of another order than the desires involved in hedonist or eudaemonist affectivity and activity, where the desirable is invested, reached, and identified as an object of need, and where the immanence of representation and of the exterior world is restored. The negativity of the *in* of the Infinite – otherwise than being, divine comedy – hollows out a desire which cannot be filled, nourishes itself with its very augmentation, and is exalted as a desire, withdraws from its satisfaction in the measure that it approaches the desirable. It is a desire that is beyond satisfaction, and, unlike a need, does not identify a term or an end. This endless desire for what is beyond being is *dis-interestedness*, transcendence – desire for the Good.

But if the Infinite in me means a desire for the Infinite, is one certain of the transcendence which *passes* there? Does not desire restore the contemporaneousness of desiring and the desirable? Or, in other words, does not the desiring being derive from the desirable a complacency in desiring, as though it had already grasped it

¹⁰ “For, lo, the LORD is coming forth from his place, and he will descend and tread upon the heights of the earth; and the mountains shall melt under him, and the valleys be split asunder, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a precipice.” Micah 1:3–4. “What sustains yields to what is sustained,” is overwhelmed or gives way. This “structure” (which is, so to speak, destructure itself) is what is announced and expressed in this text, which we cite independently of considerations of its authority and “rhetoric” as Holy Writ.

¹¹ Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), pp. 33–104 and *passim*.

by its intention? Is not the *disinterestedness* of the desire for the Infinite an *interestedness*? We have spoken of a desire for the Good beyond being, a transcendence, without giving our attention to the way interestedness is excluded from the desire for the Infinite, and without showing how the transcendent Infinite deserves the name Good, when its very transcendence can, it seems, only mean indifference.

14. Love is possible only through the idea of the Infinite – through the Infinite put in me, through the “more” which devastates and awakens the “less,” turning away from teleology, destroying the moment and the happiness of the end. Plato forces out of Aristophanes an admission which, coming from the lips of the master of comedy, is striking indeed: “These are the people who pass their whole lives together; yet they could not explain what they desire of one another.”¹² Hephaestus will say that they want to become “one instead of two,”¹³ and he thus assigns an end to love and reduces it to a nostalgia for what was in the past. But why can the lovers themselves not say what they ask from one another beyond pleasure? Diotima will put love’s intention beyond this unity, but will find love to be indigent, needy, and subject to vulgarity. The celestial and the vulgar Venus are sisters. Love is complacent in waiting for the lovable, that is, it enjoys the lovable through the representation which fills up the waiting. Perhaps pornography is that, arising in all eroticism, as eroticism arises in all love. Losing in this enjoyment the inordinateness of desire, love is concupiscence in Pascal’s sense of the term, an assuming and an investing by the *I*. The *I think* reconstitutes presence and being, *interestedness* and immanence, in love.

Is a transcendence of the desirable beyond the *interestedness* and eroticism in which the beloved abides possible? Affected by the Infinite, desire cannot proceed to an end which it would be equal to; in desire the approach distances, and enjoyment is but the increase of hunger. Transcendence or the *disinterestedness* of desire “passes” in this reversal of terms. How? And in the transcendence of the Infinite what dictates to us the word Good? For *dis-interestedness* to be possible in the desire for the Infinite, for the desire beyond being, or transcendence, not to be an absorption in immanence, which would thus make its return, it is necessary that the desirable or God remain separated in the desire; as desirable it is near but different: holy. This can only be if the desirable orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence – the other. The reference to the other is an awakening, an awakening to proximity, and this is a responsibility for the neighbor, to the point of substituting for him. Elsewhere¹⁴ we have shown that substitution for another lies in the heart of responsibility, an undoing of the nucleus of the transcendental subject, the transcendence of goodness, the nobility of a pure

¹² *Symposium*, 192c.

¹³ *Ibid.* 192e.

¹⁴ Cf. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, Ch. 4.

supporting, an ipseity of pure election. Such is love without Eros. Transcendence is ethics, and subjectivity which is not, in the last analysis, the “I think” (which it is at first) or the unity of “transcendental apperception” is, as a responsibility for another, a subjection to the other. The I is a passivity more passive still than any passivity because it is from the first in the accusative – oneself [*soi*] – and never was in the nominative; it is under the accusation of the other, even though it be faultless. It is a hostage for the other, obeying a command before having heard it, faithful to a commitment that it never made, to a past that has never been present. This wakefulness or openness to oneself is completely exposed, and sobered up from the ecstasy of intentionality. We have designated this way for the Infinite, or for God, to refer, from the heart of its very desirability, to the non-desirable proximity of others, by the term “illeity”; it is the extraordinary reversal of the desirability of the desirable, the supreme desirability, calling to itself the rectilinear straightforwardness of desire. Through this reversal the desirable escapes desire. The goodness of the Good – the Good which never sleeps or nods – inclines the movement it calls forth, to turn it from the Good and orient it toward the other, and only thus toward the Good. Here is an obliqueness that goes higher than straightforwardness. The desirable is intangible and separates itself from the relationship with desire which it calls for; through this separation or holiness it remains a third person, the *he* in the depth of the *you*. He is good in just this eminent sense; He does not fill me up with goods, but compels me to goodness, which is better than goods received.¹⁵

To be good is a deficit, waste and foolishness in a being; to be good is excellence and elevation beyond being. Ethics is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of the beyond.¹⁶ In this ethical reversal, in this reference of the desirable to the non-desirable, in this strange mission that orders the approach to the other, God is drawn out of objectivity, presence and being. He is neither an object nor an interlocutor. His absolute remoteness, his transcendence, turns into my responsibility – non-erotic par excellence – for the other. And this analysis implies that God is not simply the “first other,” the “other par excellence,” or the “absolutely other,” but other than the other [*autre qu’autrui*], other

¹⁵ Franz Rosenzweig interprets the *response* given by man to the love with which God loves him as the movement unto the neighbor (*The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo, Boston: Beacon, 1964, Part III.) This takes up the structure which commands a homiletic theme in Jewish thought. The “fringes” on the corners of their garments,” whose sight should remind the faithful of “all the commandments of the Eternal” (Numbers 15:38–40), are in Hebrew called *tsitsith*. The ancient rabbinical commentary *Siphri* connects this word with the verb *tsouts* of which one form, in the Song of Songs 2:9, means “to observe” or “to look at” as in “My beloved … peereth through the lattice.” The faithful looking at the “fringes” which remind him of his obligations, thus returns the gaze of the beloved who observes him. This would be the vis-a-vis or the face-to-face with God!

¹⁶ It is the meaning of the beyond, of transcendence, and not ethics, that our study is pursuing. It finds this meaning in ethics. There is *signification*, for ethics is structured as the-one-for-the-other; there is signification of the beyond being, for one finds oneself outside of all finality in a responsibility which ever increases, in a dis-interestedness where a being undoes itself of its being.

otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the *there is*.¹⁷ In this confusion the substitution for the neighbor gains in dis-interestedness, that is, in nobility, and the transcendence of the Infinite arises in glory. Such transcendence is true with a dia-chronic truth and without any synthesis, higher than the truths that are without enigma.¹⁸ For this formula “transcendence to the point of absence” not to mean the simple explicitation of an ex-ceptional word, this word itself has to be put back into the significance of the whole plot of the ethical or back into the divine comedy without which it could not have arisen. That comedy is enacted equivocally between temple and theater, but in it the laughter sticks to one’s throat when the neighbor approaches – that is, when his face, or his forsakenness, draws near.

5. Phenomenology and Transcendence

15. The exposition of the ethical signification of transcendence and of the Infinite beyond being can be worked out beginning with the proximity of the neighbor and my responsibility for the other.

Until then a passive subjectivity might seem something constructed and abstract. The receptivity of finite knowledge is an assembling of a dispersed given in the simultaneity of presence, in immanence. The passivity “more passive still than any passivity” consisted in undergoing – or more exactly in having already undergone, in a non-representable past which was never present – a trauma that could not be assumed; it consisted in being struck by the “*in*” of infinity which devastates presence and awakens subjectivity to the proximity of the other. The non-contained, which breaks the container or the forms of consciousness, thus *transcends* the essence or the “move” of knowable being which carries on its being in presence; it transcends the *interestedness* and simultaneity of a representable or historically reconstitutable temporality; it transcends immanence.

This trauma which cannot be assumed, inflicted by the Infinite on presence, or this affecting of presence by the Infinite – this affectivity – takes shape as a subjection to the neighbor. It is thought thinking more than it thinks, desire, the reference to the neighbor, the responsibility for another.

This abstraction is nevertheless familiar to us in the empirical event of obligation to another, as the impossibility of indifference – impossible without fail – before the misfortunes and faults of a neighbor, the unexceptionable responsibility for him. It is impossible to fix limits or measure the extreme urgency of this

¹⁷ Trace of a past which was never present, but this absence still disturbs.

¹⁸ Dia-chronic truth; that is, the dia-chrony of truth that is without any possible synthesis. Contrary to what Bergson teaches us, there would be “a disorder” which is not another order, there where the elements cannot be made contemporary, in the way, for example (but is this an example or the ex-ception?), in which God contrasts with the presence of re-presentation.

responsibility. Upon reflection it is something completely astonishing, a responsibility that even extends to the obligation to answer for another's freedom, to be responsible for his responsibility, whereas the freedom which would demand an eventual commitment or even the assuming of an imposed necessity cannot find a present that includes the possibilities which belong to the other. The other's freedom can neither constitute a structure along with my freedom, nor enter into a synthesis with it. Responsibility for the neighbor is precisely what goes beyond the legal and obliges beyond contracts; it comes to me from what is prior to my freedom, from a non-present, an immemorial. A difference gapes open between me and the other that no unity of transcendental apperception can undo. My responsibility for the other is precisely the non-indifference of this difference – the proximity of the other. An absolutely extra-ordinary relation, it does not reestablish the order of representation in which every past returns. The proximity of a neighbor remains a dia-chronic break, a resistance of time to the synthesis of simultaneity.

The biological human brotherhood – conceived with the sober coldness of Cain – is not a sufficient reason for me to be responsible for a separated being. The sober coldness of Cain consists in conceiving responsibility as proceeding from freedom or in terms of a contract. But responsibility for another comes from what is prior to my freedom. It does not come from the time made up of presences, nor presences that have sunk into the past and are representable, the time of beginnings or assumings. It does not allow me to constitute myself into an *I think*, substantial like a stone, or, like a heart of stone, existing in and for oneself. It ends up in substitution for another, in the condition – or the unconditionality – of being a hostage. Such responsibility does not give one time, a present for recollection or coming back to oneself; it makes one always late. Before the neighbor I am summoned and do not just appear; from the first I am answering to an assignation. Already the stony core of my substance is dislodged. But the responsibility to which I am exposed in such a passivity does not apprehend me as an interchangeable thing, for here no one can be substituted for me; in calling upon me as someone accused who cannot reject the accusation, it obliges me as someone unreplaceable and unique, someone chosen. Inasmuch as it calls upon my responsibility it forbids me any replacement. Unreplaceable in responsibility, I cannot, without defaulting, incurring fault or being caught up in some complex, escape the face of a neighbor; here I am pledged to the other without being able to take back my pledge.¹⁹ I cannot evade the face of the other, naked and without resources. The nakedness of someone forsaken shows in the cracks in the mask of the personage, or in his wrinkled skin; his being "without resources" has to be heard like cries not voiced or thematized, already addressed to God. There the resonance of silence – *Gelaut*

¹⁹ A devotedness as strong as death, and in a sense stronger than death. In *finitude* death outlines a destiny which it interrupts, but nothing can dispense me from the response which I am *passively* held to. The tomb is not a refuge; it is not a pardon. The debt remains.

der Stille – certainly sounds. We here have come upon an imbroglio that has to be taken seriously: a relationship to ... that is not represented, without intentionality, not repressed; it is the latent birth of religion in the other, prior to emotions or voices, prior to “religious experience” which speaks of revelation in terms of the disclosure of being, when it is a question of an unwonted access, in the heart of my responsibility, to an unwonted disturbance of being. Even if one says right away, “It was nothing.” “It was nothing” – it was not being, but otherwise than being. My responsibility in spite of myself – which is the way the other’s charge falls upon me, or the way the other disturbs me, that is, is close to me – is the hearing or understanding of this cry. It is awakening. The proximity of a neighbor is my responsibility for him; to approach is to be one’s brother’s keeper; to be one’s brother’s keeper is to be his hostage. Immediacy is this. Responsibility does not come from fraternity, but fraternity denotes responsibility for another, antecedent to my freedom.

16. To posit subjectivity in this responsibility is to catch sight of a passivity in it it never passive enough, that of being consumed for the other. The very light of subjectivity shines and illuminates out of this ardor, although the ashes of this consummation are not able to fashion the kernel of a being existing in and for itself, and the I does not oppose to the other any form that protects itself or provides it with a measure. Such is the consuming of a holocaust. “I am dust and ashes,” says Abraham in interceding for Sodom.²⁰ “What are we?” says Moses more humbly still.²¹

What is the meaning of this assignation in which the nucleus of the subject is uprooted, undone, and does not receive any form capable of assuming this? What do these atomic metaphors mean, if not an I torn from the concept of the ego and from the content of obligations for which the concept rigorously supplies measure and rule, and thus left to an unmeasured responsibility, because it increases in the measure – or in the immeasurableness – that a response is made, increasing gloriously. This is the I that is not designated, but which says “here I am.” “Each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and for each one, and I more than others,” writes Dostoyevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The I which says I is not that which singularizes or individuates a concept or a genus. It is I, unique in its genus, who speaks to you in the first person. That is, unless one could maintain that it is in the individuation of the genus or the concept of the ego that I myself awaken and expose myself to others, that is, begin to speak. This exposedness is not like self-consciousness, the recurrence of the subject to himself, confirming the ego by itself. The recurrence in awakening is something one can describe as a shudder of incarnation through which giving takes on meaning, as the primordial dative of the *for another*, in which a subject becomes a heart, a sensibility, and hands which give.

²⁰ Genesis 18:27.

²¹ Exodus 16:7.

But it is thus a position already deposed of its kingdom of identity and substance, already in debt, "for the other" to the point of substitution for the other, altering the immanence of the subject in the depths of its identity. This subject unreplaceable for the responsibility assigned to him finds in that very fact a new identity. But in extracting me from the concept of the ego, the fission of the subject is a growth of obligation in proportion as obedience grows, the augmentation of guilt that comes with the augmentation of holiness, the increase of distance proportionate to the approach. Here there is no rest for the self sheltered in its form, in its ego-concept! There are no conditions, not even those of servitude. There is an incessant solicitude for solicitude, the extreme of passivity in responsibility for the responsibility of the other. Thus proximity is never close enough; as responsible, I am never finished with emptying myself of myself. There is infinite increase in this exhausting of oneself, in which the subject is not simply an awareness of this expenditure, but is its locus and event and, so to speak, its goodness. The *glory of a long desire!* The subject as a hostage has been neither the experience nor the proof of the Infinite, but a witness borne of the Infinite, a modality of this glory, a testimony that no disclosure has preceded.

17. This growing surplus of the Infinite that we have ventured to call *glory* is not an abstract quintessence. It has a signification in the response to the summons which comes to me from the face of a neighbor, and which could not be evaded; it is the hyperbolic demand which at once exceeds that response. This comes as a surprise for the respondent himself by which, ousted from his inwardness as an ego and a "being with two sides," he is awakened, that is, exposed to the other without restraint or reserve. The passivity of such an exposure to the other is not exhausted in some sort of being open to the other's look or objectifying judgment. The openness of the ego exposed to the other is the breakup or turning inside out of inwardness. Sincerity is the name of this extra-version.²² But what else can this inversion or extra-version mean but a responsibility for others such that I keep nothing for myself? A responsibility such that everything in me is debt and donation and such that my being-there is the ultimate being-there where the creditors find the debtor? It is a responsibility such that my position as a subject in its *as for me* is already my substitution or expiation for others. Responsibility for the other – for his distress and his freedom – does not derive from any commitment, project or antecedent disclosure, in which the subject would be posited for itself before being-in-debt. Here passivity is extreme in the measure (or inordinateness) that the devotion for the other is not shut up in itself like a state of soul, but is itself from the start given over to the other.

This excess is *saying*. Sincerity is not an attribute which eventually receives the

²² The-one-for-the-other, the formal structure of signification, the signifyingness or rationality of signification, here does not begin by being exposed in a theme. It is my openness to the other, my sincerity or *veracity*.

saying; it is by saying that sincerity – exposedness without reserve – is first possible. Saying makes signs to the other, but in this sign signifies the very giving of signs. Saying opens me to the other before saying what is said, before the said uttered in this sincerity forms a screen between me and the other. This saying without a said is thus like silence. It is without words, but not with hands empty. If silence speaks, it is not through some inward mystery or some sort of ecstasy of intentionality, but through the hyperbolic passivity of giving, which is prior to all willing and thematization. Saying bears witness to the other of the Infinite which rends me, which in the saying awakens me.

Language understood in this way loses its superfluous and strange function of doubling up thought and being. Saying as testimony precedes all the said. Saying, before setting forth a said, is already the testimony of this responsibility – and even the saying of a said, as an approach to the other, is a responsibility for him. Saying is therefore a way of signifying prior to all experience. A pure testimony, it is a martyr's truth which does not depend on any disclosure or any "religious" experience; it is an obedience that precedes the hearing of any order. A pure testimony, it does not testify to a prior experience, but to the Infinite which is not accessible to the unity of apperception, non-appearing and disproportionate to the present. Saying could neither include nor comprehend the Infinite; the Infinite concerns and closes in on me while speaking through my mouth. And the only pure testimony is that of the Infinite. This is not a psychological wonder, but the modality in which the Infinite *comes to pass*, signifying through him to whom it signifies, understood inasmuch as, before any commitment, I answer for the other.

Like someone put under leaden skies that suppress every shadowy corner in me, every residue of mystery, every mental reservation, every "as for me," and every hardening or relaxing of the plot of things by which escape would be possible, I am a testimony, or a trace, or the glory of the Infinite, breaking the bad silence which harbors Gyges's secrecy. There is extra-verting of a subject's inwardness; the subject becomes visible before becoming a seer! The Infinite is not "in front of" me; I express it, but precisely by giving a sign of the giving of signs, of the "for-the-other" in which I am dis-intereted: here I am [me voici]! The accusative [me voici!] here is remarkable: here I am, under your eyes, at your service, your obedient servant. In the name of God. But this is without thematization; the sentence in which God gets mixed in with words is not "I believe in God." The religious discourse that precedes all religious discourse is not dialogue. It is the "here I am" said to a neighbor to whom I am given over, by which I announce peace, that is, my responsibility for the other. "Creating language on their lips.... Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near, says the Eternal."²³

²³ Isaiah 57:11.

6. Prophetic Signification

18. In the description which has been elaborated up to now there has been no question of the transcendental condition for some sort of ethical experience. Ethics as substitution for the other, giving without reserve, breaks up the unity of transcendental apperception, that condition for all being and all experience. Disinterestedness in the radical sense of the term, ethics designates the improbable field where the Infinite is in relationship with the finite without contradicting itself by this relationship, where on the contrary it alone *comes to pass* as Infinity and as awakening. The Infinite transcends itself in the finite, it *passes* the finite, in that it directs the neighbor to me without exposing itself to me. This order steals into me like a thief, despite the outstretched nets of consciousness, a trauma which surprises me absolutely, always already *passed* in a past which was never present and remains un-representable.

One can call this plot of infinity, where I make myself the author of what I understand, *inspiration*. It constitutes, prior to the unity of apperception, the very psyche in the soul. In this inspiration, or prophesying, I am the go-between for what I set forth. “God has spoken that you shall not prophesy,” says Amos,²⁴ comparing the prophetic reaction to the passivity of the fear which takes hold of him who hears the roaring of wild beasts. Prophesying is pure testimony, pure because prior to all disclosure; it is subjection to an order before understanding the order. In the recoverable time of reminiscence, this anachronism is no less paradoxical than a prediction of the future. It is in prophesying that the Infinite passes – and awakens. As a transcendence, refusing objectification and dialogue, it signifies in an ethical way. It *signifies* in the sense in which one says *to mean an order*; it *orders*.

19. In sketching out, behind philosophy where transcendence is always reduced, the outlines of prophetic testimony, we have not entered into the shifting sands of religious experience. To say that subjectivity is the temple or the theater of transcendence, and that the understanding of transcendence takes on an ethical meaning, does indeed not contradict the idea of the Good beyond being. This idea guarantees the philosophical dignity of an undertaking in which the signifyingness of meaning is separated from the manifestation or the presence of being. But one can only wonder if Western philosophy has been faithful to this Platonism. It discovered intelligibility in terms in conjunction, posited by relation with one another, signifying one another; for Western philosophy being, thematized in its presence, is illuminated in this way. The clarity of the visible signifies. The appropriate trope for the signifyingness of signification is: the-one-for-the-other. But signifyingness becomes visibility, immanence and ontology, inasmuch as the terms unite into a whole, and even their history is systematized, so as to be clarified.

On the pages of this study transcendence as the ethical structure, the-one-for-the-

²⁴ Amos 2:12.

other has been formulated in terms of signifyingness and intelligibility.²⁵ The trope of intelligibility takes form in the ethical one-for-the-other, a signifyingness prior to that which terms in conjunction in a system acquire. But does this signifyingness more ancient than all patterns really *take form*? We have shown elsewhere the latent birth of systems and philosophy out of this august intelligibility; we shall not return to that here.²⁶

The intelligibility of transcendence is not something ontological. The transcendence of God cannot be stated or conceived in terms of being, the element of philosophy, behind which philosophy sees only night. But the break between philosophical intelligibility and the beyond being, or the contradiction there would be in com-prehending infinity, does not exclude God from signifyingness, which, if it is not ontological, does not simply amount to thoughts bearing on being in decline, to views lacking necessity and word-plays.

In our times – is this its very modernity? – a presumption of being an ideology weighs on philosophy. This presumption cannot claim to be a part of philosophy, where the critical spirit cannot content itself with suspicions, but owes it to itself that it bring forth proofs. This presumption, which is irrecusable, draws its force from elsewhere. It begins in a cry of ethical revolt, bearing witness to responsibility; it begins in prophecy. Philosophy does not become suspect at just any moment in the spiritual history of the West. To recognize with philosophy – or to recognize philosophically – that the real is rational and that the rational is alone real, and not to be able to smother or cover over the cry of those who, the morrow after this recognition, mean to transform the world, is already to move in a domain of meaning which the inclusion cannot comprehend and among reasons that “reason” does not know, and which have not begun in philosophy. A meaning thus seems to bear witness to a beyond which would not be the no-man’s-land of non-sense where opinions accumulate. *Not to philosophize would not be “to philosophize still,”* nor to succumb to opinions. There is meaning testified to in interjections and outcries, before being disclosed in propositions, a meaning that signifies as a command, like an order that one signifies. Its manifestation in a theme already devolves from its signifying as ordering; ethical signification signifies not *for* a consciousness which thematizes, but *to* a subjectivity, wholly an obedience, obeying with an obedience that precedes understanding. Here is a passivity still more passive than that of receptivity in knowing, the receptivity that assumes what affects it. In this signification the ethical moment is not founded on any preliminary structure of theoretical thought, on language or on any particular language. Language then has over signification only the hold a form has, clothing matter. This recalls the distinction between form and signification, which shows itself in that distinction and

²⁵ It is quite remarkable that the word signifyingness [significance] has empirically the meaning of a mark of attention given to someone.

²⁶ Cf. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, pp. 46 and 153.

through its references to a linguistic system. The distinction holds even if this *said* has to be *unsaid* – and it will have to do so as to lose its linguistic alternation. The signification will indeed have to be reduced and lose the “stains” to which it owed its exposition to the light or its sojourn in shadow. An alternating rhythm of the said and the unsaid, and the unsaid being unsaid in its turn, will have to be substituted for the unity of discourse. There is here a breakup of the omnipotence of the logos, that of system and simultaneity. The logos breaks up into a signifier and a signified which is not *only* a signifier. This negates the attempt to amalgamate signifier and signified and to drive transcendence from its first or last refuge, in consigning all thought to language as a system of signs. Such an attempt was elaborated in the shadow of a philosophy for which meaning is equivalent to the manifestation of being, and manifestation equivalent to being's *esse*.

Transcendence as signification, and signification as the signification of an order given to subjectivity before any statement, is the pure one-for-the-other. Poor ethical subjectivity deprived of freedom! Unless this would be the trauma of a fission of the self that occurs in an adventure undergone with God or through God. But in fact this ambiguity also is necessary to transcendence. Transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own demonstration and monstration, its phenomenality. It requires the blinking and dia-chrony of enigma, which is not simply a precarious certainty, but breaks up the unity of transcendental apperception, in which immanence always triumphs over transcendence.

CHAPTER 11

TRANSCENDENCE AND EVIL*

I make peace, and create evil:
I the Lord do all these things.
Isaiah 45:7

1. Thought and Transcendence

The attempt to throw doubt on the very meaning of words such as “transcendence” and “beyond” attests to their semantic consistency, since, at least in this critical discourse which concerns them, one recognizes what one is contesting. The reduction of the absolute meaning of these terms to a relative transcendence and a relative beyond, then taken, by the force of some impulse, to the furthest extent and highest degree, already brings transcendence and the beyond into this superlative, or ascribes a transcending power to certain of our psychological forces. And yet is there not lacking something in the intelligibility of these notions, for them to be veritably conceived? In our philosophical tradition veritable thought is true thought, a knowing, a thought referred to being – to being designating an entity, but also to being understood as a verb, expressing the fulfillment by entities of that task or destiny of being, without which we could not recognize an entity as an entity.

In distinguishing between ideas and concepts, reason and understanding, Kant was indeed the first to separate thought from knowing, and thus to discover meanings that do not rejoin being, or, more exactly, meanings not subject to reality which is in fact correlative with these categories. But this thought distant from being, which is nevertheless not reducible to the meaningless, is still understood by Kant to be empty of the things in themselves it aims at. It is still measured against the being that it lacks. Ideas thus have a dialectical status, in the pejorative sense which Kant gives to this adjective; the transcendental illusion which plays in this thought is the drama of an aspiration after being. It is always as though rationality and the “spirit” were equivalent to the appearing of and knowledge of being, as though the signification of meaning, intelligibility, were due to the manifestation of

*“Transcendence and Evil” was published in French as “Transcendance et Mal” in *Le Nouveau Commerce* 41 (1978): pp. 55-75.

The notes in this chapter are by the author.

being, were an ontology, here in the form of intentionality – a will for a nostalgia for being. To be sure, across these returns of ontology, Kant was bold enough to formulate a more radical distinction between thought and knowing. He discovers in the practical usage of pure reason a plot which is not reducible to a reference to being. A good will, as it were utopian, deaf to the information, indifferent to the confirmations, that could come to it from being (which are important for technique and for the hypothetical imperative, but do not concern practice nor the categorical imperative), preceeds from a freedom situated above being and prior to knowing and ignorance. And yet, after a moment of separation, the relationship with ontology is reestablished in the “postulates of pure reason,” as though it were expected in the midst of all these daring moves. In their own way the ideas rejoin being in the existence of God, who guarantees either, in the letter of criticism, the concord of virtue with happiness, or, according to Hermann Cohen’s reading, the concord of freedom with nature and the efficacy of a practice decided upon without knowledge. The absolute existence of the Ideal of pure reason, the existence of the Supreme Being, finally prevails in an architecture where the keystone was to be the concept of freedom alone.

This capacity which the idea has to be equal to the given, or the obligation it has to justify its emptiness, this liability to refer to being, always to being, even if in a way different from the intuitive way, this necessity for thought to belong to cognition – does it remain the measure of all intelligibility? Is the thought that proceeds to God bound to this measure, if it is to not appear as a thought in decline, a privation of knowing? Can we not show that, far from being limited to a pure refusal of the norms of knowledge, the thought that proceeds to God, and proceeds otherwise than to the thematized, involves psychic modalities that are original, beyond those required by a world of laws without play, with its relation of reciprocity and compensation and its identifications of differences? Such would be the modalities of the disturbance of the Same by the Other, original modalities proper to the “unto-God” in which the ontological adventure of the soul is interrupted, in which the idea of being (perhaps, in God, demoted to the status of a simple attribute) *eclipses* before Glory, and in which, in dis-inter-*est-edness*,¹ the alternative of the real and the illusory breaks down.

2. Transcendence and Phenomenology

How and where in the psyche in experience is the major break capable of accrediting an other as irreducibly other, and, in this sense, as *beyond*, produced? In the fabric of the thematized thinkable, every rending conserves or ties again the thread of the

¹ Levinas sees being within the *essence*, the work or exercise, of being in interest (*interessement*). Cf. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp. 4–5. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

Same. How can a thought go *beyond* the world, which is the way in which the being it thinks is assembled, however heterogeneous its elements and however diverse their modes of being may be? How can the transcendent signify the “utterly other” – which is indeed easy to say, but which the common ground of the thinkable and of discourse puts back into the world, and makes into a world? It is not enough that in the thinkable there is brought out a difference or there opens a contradiction for an interval to open up to the measure of transcendence. Even a nothingness, before which the dialectical and logical resources of thought are exhausted and are impotent, is not enough. How can a nothingness take on meaning which would not only be the nothingness of negation, which “conserves” (*aufhebt*) the being it denies? How does the difference of an alterity which does not rest on some common ground take on meaning?

I think that, on these two points, Husserl's phenomenology has opened new possibilities. It affirms the strict solidarity between any intelligible and the psychic modalities through which and in which it is conceived: not just any meaning is accessible to any thought. These psychic modalities involve, to be sure, intentional implications – repressed or forgotten intentions; but they are irreducible essences, *origins* (whatever be the reductive ambitions of the phenomenology called “genetic”). Husserl's phenomenology is in the last analysis an *eidetics of pure consciousness*. It is, on the one hand, a confidence in the idea of the irreducible structure of the psyche, irreducible to any mathematical or logical order, more fundamental than every mathematics and all logic, with an irreducibility that can thus only be described. Phenomenology is the idea that the essences of the psyche do not constitute a “definite manifold” (*definite Mannigfaltigkeit*). It is, on the other hand, the reference of sense to the giving of sense, the *Sinngebung*, which animates these irreducible thoughts. Phenomenology has taught us thus not to explicate a meaning by conceiving it uniquely or principally in terms of its relations with other objective meanings, for then all sense gets relativized, and every signification closed up in a *system* without issue. Phenomenology has taught us to make explicit or to elucidate a sense in terms of the irreducible psyche in which it is given, to thus seek it in its origin, to seek out the originating meaning. This method developed out of a philosophy of arithmetic and logical investigations affirms the primacy, the principality, of the non-formal!

In this perspective, one understands the newness of Heidegger's procedure, which, for example, moves to nothingness out of lived anxiety, a modality of the psyche leading further than negation. But for the notions of the other and of a difference without common ground, contemporary thought seems also to be indebted to a Heideggerian concept developed on the basis of anxiety, that of the *ontological difference*. For the difference between being and the beings does not presuppose anything common but the paper on which the words which designate them are written, or the air in which the sounds which serve to pronounce them vibrate. The difference between being and beings is difference itself. It is then not

surprising that it fascinates philosophers who, after Nietzsche's word on the death of God, and outside of all onto-theology, venture to take an interest in the meaning of transcendence, guided, no doubt, by the conviction that the domain of the meaningful is not limited to the seriousness of the sciences and the works attached to thematized being, nor to the play of pleasures and arts, which evade being but retain a memory of it, are complacent in its images or involve putting up stakes.

One can indeed wonder whether Heidegger's being in the verbal sense, transcending beings but giving itself to all beings, remains beyond the world it makes possible, and whether it makes possible the conception of a transcendent God beyond being. One can wonder whether the neutrality that the thought of being transcending beings presents can be suitable and suffice for divine transcendence. Yet the ontological difference serves philosophers as a model of transcendence, and it is often invoked even when it is repudiated, in investigations related to religious thought. We shall here only recall Jean-Luc Marion's profound and subtle essay on the divinity of God.² It is a courageous attempt at breakthrough, an attempt, still alone among philosophers, to no longer understand God primordially in terms of being. While recognizing his debt to Heidegger, and while fixing his own itinerary by inquiring along Heideggerian pathways, the author finally puts himself "at a distance from the ontological difference."³

With the same attention given to transcendence, and starting with a certain modality of the psyche, a certain noteworthy lived experience, which interrupts the world (even if psychology which, as a science, as a thematization, recovers after this interruption and always has its recovery-time, and takes this interrupting phenomenon to be a psychological state among others,⁴ accessible to theory and treatment), another young thinker, Philippe Nemo, has just written a book about evil in Job. It is an exegesis of a Biblical text.⁵ Here again the ontological difference seems to have been the major encouragement. But it is a description of the lived experience which is justified by the phenomenon itself, even if it is suggested by the verses of the book commented on. The break-up of the same is there broached in a psychic content charged with exceptional significance; what it involves that is extreme is not sought in some superlative, but in the simple datum of an experience. We would like to bring out this phenomenology and judge it for itself, forgetting the exegetical intentions from which it proceeds, despite the great finesse and scrupulousness of this hermeneutics. But we do not here mean to take up a position with regard to the truth of the ultimate meaning it ascribes to the book of Job. The

² *L'Idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977).

³ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴ This interpretation cannot be put aside once and for all; across it the thematization and discourse of science are superimposed over every break-up, and put transcendence into question – but without preventing the return of the lived experience and of the interrupting meaning. Can transcendence have anything but an ambiguous meaning for modern man? But such is also the case for the world. Cf. the lines that terminate the present essay.

⁵ *Job et l'excès du Mal*, (Paris: Grasset, 1978).

philosophical language used by the author to which we are responding seems perfectly justified by the philosophical perspective opened by this work, which is not an exercise of piety.

3. The Excess of Evil

To describe evil as it seems to have been lived in the suffering of Job, Philippe Nemo first emphasizes the anxiety which he takes to be its underlying event. In agreement with Heidegger, anxiety is interpreted as a disclosure of nothingness, as being-for-death, as the fact of a world that slips away and isolates man, and of a man that closes himself to words of consolation, which still belong to the resources of the world that collapses.

Anxiety thus understood cannot be taken as a simple “state of mind,” a form of “moral affectivity”, a simple consciousness of finitude or a moral symptom preceding, accompanying, or following a pain which is, no doubt lightly, called physical. Anxiety is the cutting point at the heart of evil. Sickness, evil in living, aging, corruptible flesh, perishing and rotting, would be the modalities of anxiety itself; through them and in them dying is as it were lived, and the truth of this death is unforgettable, unimpeachable, irremissible. In the impossibility of dissimulating it from oneself is non-dissimulation itself, and, perhaps, disclosure and truth par excellence, the open of itself, the original insomnia of being. There is a consuming of human identity, which is not an inviolable spirit charged with a perishable body, but *incarnation*, in all the gravity of an identity which alters in itself. Here we find ourselves prior to, or already beyond, the Cartesian dualism of thought and extension in man. The taste and odor of corruption is not here added to the spirituality of a tragic wisdom, to some presentiment or prevision, however desperate, of death. Despair despairs as the evil of flesh; physical evil is the very depth of anxiety. Then – Philippe Nemo shows it by verses of Job – anxiety, in its carnal severity, is the root of all social miseries, all human dereliction: of humiliation, solitude, persecution.

But this conjunction of evil and anxiety does not receive in the analysis presented to us the meaning to which the philosophers of existence have accustomed us, and whose model Heidegger, at least in *Being and Time*, has drawn in the clearest way. There the essential in anxiety was taken to consist in opening up the horizon of nothingness, more radically negative than that of negation, incapable of making one forget the being it negates. Death, which anxiety understood, announced itself as pure nothingness. What seems to us to be strongest and newest in Nemo’s book is the discovery, in the conjunction of anxiety and evil, of another dimension of meaning. Evil will indeed mean an “end” of the world, but an end which, in a very significant way, leads beyond; elsewhere than to being, to be sure, but also elsewhere than to nothingness, to a *beyond* that is conceived neither by negation, nor by the anxiety the philosophers of existence speak of. Evil is neither a mode nor

a species, nor a culmination of negation. Why then this insistence of anxiety at the bottom of evil? We will come back to this question.

In its malignancy as evil, evil is an excess. While the notion of excess evokes first the quantitative idea of intensity, of a degree surpassing measure, evil is an excess in its very quiddity. This notation is very important: evil is not an excess because suffering can be terrible, and go beyond the endurable. The break with the normal and the normative, with order, with synthesis, with the world, already constitutes its qualitative essence. Suffering qua suffering is but a concrete and quasi-sensible manifestation of the non-integratable, the non-justifiable. The “quality” of evil is this very non-integratability, if we can use such a term; this concrete quality is defined by this abstract notion. Evil is not only the non-integratable; it is also the non-integratability of the non-integratable. It is as though to synthesis, even the purely formal synthesis of the Kantian “I think,” capable of uniting the data however heterogeneous they may be, there would be opposed, in the form of evil, the non-synthesizable, still more heterogeneous than all heterogeneity subject to being grasped by the formal, which exposes heterogeneity in its very malignancy. It is as though the Bergsonian teaching given in *Creative Evolution* about disorder being another order were contradicted by evil, an irreducible disturbance. It is most noteworthy that what is purely quantitative in the notion of excess shows itself in the quiddity of the phenomenon, in the form of a qualitative content characteristic of the malignancy of evil. In the appearing of evil, in its original phenomenality, in its *quality*, is announced a *modality*, a manner: not finding a place, the refusal of all accommodation with..., a counter-nature, a monstrosity, what is disturbing and foreign of itself. *And in this sense transcendence!* The intuition that consists in catching sight, in the pure quality of a phenomenon such as evil, of the *how* of a break with immanence is a view that seems to us to be intellectually as rich as the rediscovery of intentionality appeared at the beginning of phenomenology, or the dazzling pages about *Zuhandenheit* and *Stimmung* in *Being and Time*. But these are perhaps personal impressions, which belong only to the lesser and anecdotal history of phenomenology!

The exteriority or transcendence in evil does not acquire its meaning through opposition to psychic “inwardness,” does not derive it from any prior correlation and inwardness, which would make possible the illusion of multiple background-worlds accumulating nonetheless in the same space. It is in the *excess* of evil that the preposition *ex-* signifies with its original meaning, excessiveness itself, the *ex-* of all exteriority. No categorical form could invest it, could retain it in its framework. The “wholly other,” beyond the community of the common, is no longer a simple word! It is the other, the “other scene,” as Nemo calls it, for more foreign to the consciousness of the being-in-the-world than the scene of the unconscious, simply other, the provisional retreat of alterity, which psychoanalysis knows how to unfold in the world.

The idea that transcendence would be the unjustifiable whose concrete event

would be the malignancy of evil is perhaps all the meaning of the derisive theodicy of Job's friends. Their idea of justice would proceed from a morality of recompense and punishment, a certain already technological order of the world. And is not every attempt at theodicy a way of conceiving God as a reality of the world?

Does not the evil in which Philippe Nemo discerns anxiety have its signification as excess and transcendence independently of theodicy? Does it not receive this meaning through the unjustifiable which is the malignancy of evil, the resistance it opposes to theodicy, rather than its being-for-death which anxiety anticipates? We have already wondered about that. But is it after all certain that the essence of death which is brought forth in anxiety has to be conceived, as in the description of *Being and Time*, as nothingness? Is not the secret about death phenomenologically inherent in death, and is not the anxiety of dying a modality – the anticipated acumination – of suffering, and not the solution of the dilemma: to be or not to be?⁶

4. The You

But the content of evil is not exhausted by the notion of excess. Guided by the exegesis – which, however, claims to have an intrinsic meaningfulness – the analysis, in a second moment, discovers in it an “intention”: evil reaches me as though it sought me out; evil strikes me as though there were an aim behind the ill lot that pursues me, as though someone were set against me, as though there were malice, as though there were someone. Evil, of itself, would be an “aiming at me.” It would reach me in a wounding in which there arises a meaning, and is articulated in a saying which recognizes this someone that is thus revealed. “Why are you making me suffer; why are you not rather reserving for me an eternal beatitude?” A first saying, a first question, first lamentation or first prayer. In any case, it is an interpellation of a you, and a glimpse at the Good behind evil. A first “intentionality” of transcendence: someone is seeking me out. A God that does evil, but God as a you. And, through the evil in me, my awakening to myself. “Awakening of the soul in the excess of evil,” Nemo says. From its state of subjectivity in the world, its being-in-the-world, the ego is awakened to the condition of the soul that calls upon God. This idea of suffering as persecution, and of election in persecution, of a setting apart and a distinction in pain, does not, to be sure, issue from a phenomenology as communicable or as universal as that of the excess in evil; we have reasons to think that it is not only inspired by the particularities of the book of Job.

That the original “intentionality” of the relationship between beings is a relationship with God, that it comes from God, that this relation is not to be described in a neutral and formal way, that it is from the first qualified as a “doing

⁶ Cf. our attempt at phenomenology in this direction in *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), pp. 55–61.

evil to me,” as a malice, in the somber paradox of the wickedness of God, that the original, the principle is neither the general nor the formal, but the concrete and the determinate (not to be taken in an empirical sense), is quite striking here, and remains conformed to the spirit of the analysis which was able to discover transcendence and excess in the concreteness of evil. But then the “element” in which “first philosophy” moves is no longer the impersonal, the anonymous, the indifferent, the neutral unfolding of being approached, even in the humanity it encompasses, as a world of things and laws or as a world of stones, a world supporting every intervention and as it were susceptible of *satisfying* any desire via technology. Technology presupposes only the law-abidingness of things, their being equal to our desires, and the cunning of thought. The first metaphysical question is no longer Leibniz’s question “why is there something rather than nothing?” but “why is there evil rather than good?”⁷ It is the de-neutralization of being, or the beyond being. The ontological difference is preceded by the difference between good and evil. Difference itself is this latter; it is the origin of the meaningful: “what concerns the alternative of good and extreme evil for the expectation of a soul has meaning.”⁸ Meaning then begins in the relationship of the soul with God, and begins with its awakening by evil. God does evil to me to tear me out of the world, as unique and ex-ceptional – as a soul. Meaning implies this transcendent relation, “the alterity of the other scene,” which is no longer a negative concept. “The meaning of the alterity of the other scene,” Nemo writes, “is good and evil inasmuch as they exceed the world and orient it. The ‘difference’ there between one scene and the other is the difference between good and evil. Every other ‘difference’ is within the world.”⁹

There is priority then, we might say, of the ethical over the ontological, even though Philippe Nemo should not like this formula for qualifying his way. Indeed, despite a notion of difference which is not ontological, the discovery of the you interpellated in evil is interpreted by resorting to being: “God who appears in the you has for his being to be a you.” The you in God is not an “otherwise than being,” but a “being otherwise.” The reflection on the you does not venture so far as to conceive in him a beyond being. It is subordinated to ontology, pulling back from the supreme infidelity to the philosophy which has been handed down to us, for which the beings and the being of beings are the ultimate sources of the meaningful. To maintain oneself in a relationship with the you which in God *eclipses* being would be pejoratively interpreted as a way to be complacent in illusion. One will not go so far as to think¹⁰ that the human psyche in its relationship

⁷ P. Nemo, *Job et l'excès du Mal*, p. 155.

⁸ Ibid., p. 212.

⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁰ This “boldness” also is missing in Buber, to whom the discovery of the I-You relation immediately appears as a new mode of being – the You of God being only a more intense way of being. The divinity of God thus loses itself in its mode of existence, which would be the final meaning of its epiphany, as it is of the disclosed world.

with God ventures into significations beyond being and nothingness, beyond reality and illusion, into dis-inter-*estedness*.¹¹

5. Theophany

Evil as an excess, evil as an intention; there is also a third moment in this phenomenology: evil as hatred of evil. This is a last turn in the analysis: evil strikes me in my horror of evil, and thus reveals – or is already – my association with the Good. The excess of evil by which it is a surplus in the world is also our impossibility of accepting it. The experience of evil would then be also our waiting on the good – the love of God.

This reversal of evil and of the horror of evil into an expectation of the Good, of God and of a beatitude to the measure, or the inordinateness, of the excess of evil, set forth in the final pages of this so fine and suggestive book, raises many questions. Is this horror of evil in which, paradoxically, it is given, the Good? There can here be no question of a passage from Evil to the Good through the attraction of contraries; that would make but one more theodicy. Does not the philosophical contribution of all this Biblical exegesis consist in making it possible to go as it were beyond the reciprocal appeal of terms that negate one another, beyond dialectics? Precisely evil is not any kind of negation. It signifies ex-cess, refusing any synthesis in which the wholly-otherness of God would become visible. To Nemo there is also present the Nietzschean warning against the spirit of resentment. He does not want, at the term of his hermeneutics, a good that would signify only a repayment for evil or a vengeance, which would moreover be also equivalent to a return of the technological spirit within the suffering of evil. Whence, in the description of the expectation of the Good, the formulation, which seems to us very profound, of a thought that would think more than it thinks: “the soul,” writes Nemo, “knows henceforth that the end it aims at, the beatific encounter with God, infinitely surpasses what it aims at.”¹² The soul which, awakened by evil, is found to be in a relationship with the beyond of the world does not amount to the make-up of a being-in-the-world, an empirical or transcendental consciousness equal to its objects, adequate to being, equal to the world in its desires promised to *satisfaction*. The soul beyond satisfaction and recompense expects an awaited that infinitely

¹¹ Nemo would not like the formula “ethics precedes ontology” for still another reason. He, like almost all philosophical literature today, identifies the ethical with the Law (which is a consequence of it), whereas evil which awakens us to the You of God would be precisely the contestation of the Law and of the technological spirit which, for Nemo, is bound to it: the morality of Law would be for him but a technique to attract to oneself recompenses and avoid punishments. We think that ethics primarily signifies obligation toward the other, that it leads to the Law and to gratuitous service, which is not a principle of technique.

¹² Ibid., p. 231.

surpasses expectancy. That is no doubt the “psychic modality” of transcendence, and the very definition of the religious soul, which would not be a simple specification of consciousness. The notion of “play,” which, by opposition to technology, designates for our author the relation of the soul with God, is, however, not deducible from this disproportion between the expectation and the expected. “The excess of beatitude alone,” he writes, “will answer to the excess of evil.” But it is not clear that excess is meant in the two members of this proposition in the same sense. The excess of evil does not mean an excessive evil, whereas the excess of beatitude remains a superlative notion. For if it were necessary to already see in beatitude, as such, an excess, evil would not have had the privileged signification about which Nemo’s whole book is constructed. Transcendence could take less tortuous paths.

The movement leading from the “horror of evil” to the discovery of the Good thus completes in a theophany the transcendence opened in the totality of the world by the concrete “content” of evil. Does it not lead to but the opposite of evil, and to a goodness of simple pleasure, however great it be? Does not the Good that is awaited in this “awaiting which aims at infinitely more than this awaited” maintain a relationship less remote with the evil which suggests it, while differing from it with a difference more different than opposition? In reading this commentary on the book of Job, so careful with the texts and with what is left to be understood in them, with the said and the non-said, so fine in its ear and its intelligence, one is surprised that there never appears on the foreground the problem of the relationship between the suffering of the self and the suffering which a self can experience over the suffering of the other man. Even to suppose that in this Biblical text itself there never is any question of that, would there not be in this very silence some secret indication? And is there in fact no question of it? The “Where were you when I founded the earth?” of Job 38:4, at the beginning of the discourse attributed to God, reminds Job of his absence at the hour of creation. But does it only upbraid the impudence of a creature who allows himself to judge the Creator? Does it only set forth a theodicy in which the economy of a harmonious and wisely arranged whole harbors evil only for a look limited to a part of this whole? Might one not understand in this “Where were you?” a denunciation of being wanting, which can have meaning only if the humanity of man is fraternally solidary with creation, that is, is responsible for what was neither one’s self nor one’s work, and if this solidarity and this responsibility for everything and for all, which cannot occur without pain, is the spirit itself?

We shall not propose “improvements” to Philippe Nemo, whose thought is so personal, new, and mature. It is rather that in the context of his thought there is singularly illuminated an idea which is familiar and dear to us and often repeated, and to which we would like to associate what this book contributes by way of light on the ways of transcendence, and the way it does so. It does so by turning to a “material datum” of consciousness, a “concrete content,” rather than by reflection

of some “formal structure.” Thus there is signified a “beyond” of the closed dimensions which the judicatory operations of the intellect outline, and which the forms of logic reflect.¹³ And it is indeed in that way that transcendence appeared to us to shine forth in the face of the other man: an alterity of the non-integratable, of what cannot be assembled into a totality, or of what in the assembly remains in society, and enters into it as a fact – unless it undergo violence and powers. This is no longer a transcendence absorbed by my knowing. The face puts into question the sufficiency of my identity as an ego; it binds to an infinite responsibility with regard to the other. The original transcendence signifies in the concreteness, from the first ethical, of the face. That in the evil that pursues me the evil suffered by the other man afflicts me, that it touches me, as though from the first the other was calling to me, putting into question my resting on myself and my *conatus essendi*, as though before lamenting over my evil here below, I had to answer for the other – is not this a breakthrough of the Good in the “intention” of which I am in my woe so exclusively aimed at? Is it not theophany, and revelation? The horror of the evil that aims at me becomes horror over the evil in the other man. Here is a breakthrough of the Good which is not a simple inversion of Evil, but an elevation. This Good does not please, but commands and prescribes. The obedience to ~~prescription~~ – and already that of listening and understanding, which are the first obedience – implies no other recompense than this very elevation of the dignity of the soul; and disobedience implies no punishment but that of the very break with the Good. Such a service is indifferent to remuneration! No failure could free one from this responsibility for the woe of the other man; it remains meaningful despite the failure. It is quite the contrary of technological thoughts which, to believe Nemo, evil takes us outside of, and recalls us to our life as a human soul.

6. The Ambiguity

But the knowledge of the world, thematization, does not give up its efforts. It tries to reduce the disturbance of the Same by the Other, and succeeds. It reestablishes the order troubled by Evil and by the Other, through the history in which it accepts to enter. But cracks reappear in the established order. Our modernity seems then not only to rest on the certainties of history and nature, but on an alternation:

¹³ These dimensions, according to Husserl’s teaching reproduced in *Experience and Judgment*, start with the position of an individual substrate extracted from the background of the world, a substrate exposed to the “passive syntheses” of ex-plication and “modalization” of belief in which this position takes place. These syntheses are then taken up again in the categorical activity of judgment properly so-called. They are dimensions of the affirmation of an entity in its being and in its properties, assembled into syntheses and into a system: a coherent universe without background worlds, reign of the Same without any “other scene.”

recuperation and rupture, knowing and sociality. In this alternation the moment of recuperation is not more true than that of the break-up, the laws do not have more meaning than the face-to-face relationship with the neighbor. This does not attest simply to a lack of synthesis, but would define time itself, time in its enigmatic diachrony: a tendency without issue, an aim without coincidence. It would signify the ambiguity of an incessant adjournment, of the progression of prayer and possession. But also the approach of an infinite God, an approach which is his proximity.

This volume collects 11 of the most important articles written by Emmanuel Levinas since 1948. They mark stages in the development of the thought of one of the most important philosophers of the phenomenological-existential tradition. Included are studies of the ontological status of art, the relationship, the vocative and imperative dimensions of language, the structure of ipseity, and the axis of infinity that breaks through the totalizing of beings. The most recent studies concern the ethical locus of God, and evil. Some of these writings introduce, in a very accessible way, the ethical metaphysics Levinas set up in the great treatises *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*; other writings illuminate and further develop the central theses of these works.

PHAE 100

ISBN 90-247-3272-7 (hardback)
ISBN 90-247-3395-2 (paperback)