

ONTOLOGY, TRANSCENDENCE, AND IMMANENCE IN EMMANUEL LEVINAS' PHILOSOPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

This essay studies the unfolding of Levinas' concept of transcendence from 1935 to his 1984 talk entitled "Transcendence and Intelligibility." I discuss how Levinas frames transcendence in light of enjoyment, shame, and nausea in his youthful project of a counter-ontology to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In Levinas' essay, transcendence is the human urge to get out of being. I show the ways in which Levinas' early ontology is conditioned by historical circumstances, but I argue that its primary aim is formal and phenomenological; it adumbrates formal structures of human existence. Levinas' 1940s ontology accentuates the dualism in being, between what amount to a light and a dark principle. This shift in emphasis ushers in a new focus for transcendence, which is now both sensuous *and* temporal, thanks to the promise of fecundity. *Totality and Infinity* (1961) pursues a similar onto-logic, while shifting the locus of transcendence to a non-sexuate other. The final great work, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* (1974) offers a hermeneutic phenomenology of transcendence-in-immanence. It rethinks Husserl's focus on the transcendence of intentionality and its condition of possibility in the passive synthesis of complex temporality. If the 1974 strategy 'burrows beneath' the classical phenomenological syntheses, it also incorporates unsuspected influences from French psychology and phenomenology. This allows Levinas to develop a philosophical conception of transcendence that is neither Husserl's intentionality nor Heidegger's temporal ecstases, in what amounts to an original contribution to a phenomenology both hermeneutic and descriptive.

I. Introduction¹

The modern insight, that every object supposes a subject, and that subjectivity is "a movement of developing itself . . . surpassing itself, reflecting itself,"² is certainly true of Levinas. It suggests that a rational psychology (in addition to an empirical one) is one dimension of epistemological projects concerning modes of *knowing*. Kant's 'completion' of psychology, turning on his demonstration that the soul cannot be a substance and affectivity cannot be attributes of a soul-substance, did not finish rational psychology. Subsequent Idealist philosophies

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from Hegel to Fichte, and beyond, preserved rational psychology as a moment of philosophy of mind and ground of the real.

Heidegger's innovation was to have reduced *Dasein* to a site for the question of Being, which is universal, soul-free, and relates to its environment through attunements (*Stimmungen*). This innovation comes in relation to Husserl, who had sufficient Idealism remaining in his thought that his 1913 *Ideas I* spoke of the persistence of a universal structure of consciousness, even in the wake of the destruction of all cultural and historical givens around it. For Husserl, the subject-pole, in its universality, precedes and makes possible any discussion of the nature of its existence or that of the world. The implication of this egology is that all transcendence, whether worldly or embodied by an *alter ego*, is immanent to the reduced, transcendental ego—immanent, if it is given to us at all. This was not the case for Heidegger, clearly.

Whether Husserl intended a strong egology or vacillated on the nature of the transcendental ego is not our concern here.³ His noetico-noematic structure is and remains a unity. And because it gives rise to historic, scientific operations like geometry, this unity is not merely psychological, it is gnoseological, that is, intrinsic to the structure of reason itself. Yet, Husserl's noetico-noematic unity was modeled on the medieval *adequatio* between things and the soul, and noetico-noematic activity is always tied to subject poles. Thus, the unity is *for* a transcendental subject, however minimal its structure. To think past subjectivism, to free the thinking of Being from this subject-anchorage is part of Heidegger's project, particularly evident after his so-called Turn [*Kehre*].

These remarks are apposite, because Levinas was profoundly inspired by the way Heidegger's philosophy addressed problems of transcendence and existence. He wrote as much in his 1930 doctoral thesis: "Only M. Heidegger dares to confront deliberately this problem, considered impossible by all of traditional philosophy, the problem that has for its object the meaning of the existence of Being . . . and we believe we are entitled to take our inspiration from him."⁴

Despite this, Levinas consistently laid claim to his Husserlian ground in the concepts of intentionality, passive synthesis, and above all, in the presentable or describable nature of what takes place in the 'theater' of a phenomenologically reduced consciousness. Moreover, Levinas will return to Husserl's notion of transcendence-in-immanence in his 1974 work, *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*. We can say that, for Levinas, transcendence is a movement by, or toward, something that

is not-me, whether it is outside me in a world, or discovered in me as an affective disruption. This strange negotiation of otherness and the Husserlian heritage of an irreducible 'self' together imply that there is a minimal subjective leaning in Levinas as he develops his ontology—in deliberate contrast to the ontology of Heidegger. And, as we will see, transcendence proves to be an enigma in Levinas.

One last thing merits mentioning about the formalist subjective tendency that Levinas receives from Husserl's transcendental egology. In the 1920s, at the University of Strasbourg, Levinas studied psychology extensively. It is harder to see in his work the influence of his Strasbourg *maîtres*, like Maurice Pradines.⁵ But I will show, in this essay, where these influences arise. Indeed, they persist despite Levinas' disavowal of psychology and its central error—at least, what Levinas took for psychoanalysis' fundamental error: to posit an unconscious and proceed as though that 'instance' were functionally comparable to consciousness and its contents. For Levinas, that meant that the unconscious had 'thoughts', 'affects', and memories much the way consciousness did, which was absurd. It also meant that the unconscious, like consciousness, is posited according to a logic of a hidden container with its contained things. The contained things are the affects and thoughts; the container is the fact of the unconscious itself, existing as a mirror of consciousness. This putative positing of the unconscious seemed to Levinas to be the category error of psychology. How could one determine the function of a lack, of a hidden structure (which is unconscious), on the basis of a more or less visible one (consciousness)? How could the 'economy' of consciousness provide a key to an 'economy' that, so far as it existed at all, was less acquiescent to exploration in the 'laboratory' of the analyst's couch?

As a truncated reading of Freud,⁶ Levinas' objection holds good. Yet, when he criticizes psychology extensively, as he does in *Existence and Existents* (written between 1938 and 1944), he makes this point about the blind spot in the psychology of the unconscious *precisely because he was influenced by psychology* and because, using Pradines against Heidegger in the thirties and forties, Levinas maintains that everyday affectivity and the basic facts of embodied consciousness (like falling asleep and waking up, like his phenomenological descriptions of fatigue and indolence, shame and nausea) afford us the means with which to describe subjective life as a continuum from waking consciousness all the way to unconsciousness.⁷ In characterizing living consciousness as a spectrum, Levinas follows a French school of psychology that was deeply

suspicious of the (scabrous) elements in Freud's *voie royale* to the unconscious: parapraxes, fantasies, dreams, and neuroses. For all that, Levinas required *an* unconscious, not to think Being, but for his conception of transcendence. Thus, his work in rational psychology, like the influence of Husserl on him, pulls Levinas in a certain 'subjectivist' direction even as he works out an ontology structurally comparable to Heidegger's, but materially, hyletically divergent from it. Moreover, Levinas' conscious-unconscious pair actually grounds his early projects of hermeneutic ontology in 1935 and 1947.⁸ Without this pair, his transcendence-in-immanence would be unthinkable.

Although Levinas was influenced all his life by psychology, as by Husserl's phenomenology, the subjectivity and transcendence he describes is neither simply Husserlian nor merely psychological. For, it was Heidegger's fundamental ontology that awakened him with the greatest challenge to subjectivist orientations. This awakening must have been a shake up, because Levinas speaks readily of the strong emotions he felt in Heidegger's seminars.⁹ In 1930, his praise of Heidegger is strong, and it drops, suddenly, into the "conclusion" of his dissertation on Husserl's theory of intuition. There suddenly is Heidegger, whose philosophy "allows us to approach concerns of existence" like no other thought could do at that time.

Heidegger shakes up Levinas' philosophical heritage to the point of inducing him to rethink and continuously rework Heidegger's notions of ontology and transcendence. The reworking project begins with Levinas' 1935 essay, *On Escape*. It continues through *Existence and Existents* (1947), *Totality and Infinity* (1961), and culminates in *Otherwise than Being* (1974). I will concentrate on those works, taking them as path marks in the development of Levinas' thought on transcendence and immanence. I am *not* saying that Levinas required a full-blown ontology in order to think transcendence or even that he wanted one. But his ethics is built from the transcendence of the other, whether as external face or as immanence, and it requires a consistent conception of Being. That conception unfolded as the counterpoint to Heidegger's ontology and his project of *thinking* after metaphysics. I will discuss three aspects of Levinas' critique of Heidegger: (1) the relationship between Being and *Dasein*, in light of transcendence; (2) the relationship between Being and temporality, and (3) the relationship between Being, transcendence, and language. If we want to understand Levinas' conception of transcendence, we must understand how he conceives Being, but also what the "subject" and the "self" mean in his thought.

Let us turn to the first motif: the relationship between existence and transcendence. Heidegger conceived transcendence in light of the Being that was always out-ahead-of-itself, toward its own-most possibility. Yet, Being and the Being that is ec-static *Dasein* are, in a sense, one. Against this, Levinas suspected that a gap persisted, in the early Heidegger, between Being as such (even so far as Being is immanent, as call) and the being for whom it is a question, *Dasein*. Whether he judged Heidegger rightly on this or not is secondary. What is important is that Levinas will reject this gap in 1935, and he will do so in an original essay that looks for an affective access to Being that would be different from Heidegger's anxiety (or even Heidegger's 1929 "attunements" of boredom and joy). In that 1935 essay, *On Escape*, the affects that revealed Being most decisively were pleasure, shame, and nausea. Now, the sensation of nausea provided the most extreme expression of what Levinas conceived as the fundamental condition of our existing 'in' Being: that of being *trapped* within Being; trapped to the point of being suffocated by it, and yearning to transcend it. Jacques Rolland, who introduced *On Escape*, has argued that political circumstances in Germany may well account for Levinas' interpretation of this 'condition' of nausea and entrapment within Being. Levinas was writing after all at a time when being Jewish in Germany or France meant being trapped in a violent existence. All this is quite right. However, Levinas was approaching Being and our attunement to it within a philosophical framework. His was an exploration of embodied modes of transcendence, where European actuality was but one index of the desire for transcendence among other, more structural ones.

Levinas' attunements of shame and nausea 'give' us Being as seamless, untranscendable, and neuter. We may glimpse these characteristics through what Heidegger called *existentiell* (factual, derived) experiences of a world falling apart in violence.¹⁰ Yet, Levinas abandoned his 1935 project of approaching Being and transcendence through shame and nausea. Why? I believe it is precisely because he wanted it to be a study of transcendence in immanence that was *more* than circumstantial. That is, Levinas was working toward universal attunements other than Heidegger's anxiety and boredom. These different attunements—of pleasure, shame, nausea—would have required considerable development to become a counter-ontology to Heidegger's. It might even be said that the affective states Levinas explored later on, in *Existence and Existents*, enlarged his counter-ontology. In that 1947 work, however, Being is interpreted differently; this time as light, not impotence

and suffocation. Transcendence is also interpreted differently, through *eros* and the promise of procreation, by which a subject transcends itself in history. “The world is light in its existence,”¹¹ writes Levinas in 1947. Being, then, is light *as well as* the dark chaos that one tries to transcend. Thus Levinas revisits Being in 1947 in a Schellingian-Heideggerian (but also a Jewish mystical) reading of it as light—growing this time out of a foundation in darkness—where a hypostatic and obscure element grounds all of Being. But this obscurity, for Levinas, corresponds to our vigilance and falling asleep after a bout of disturbed wakefulness. There, the neutrality of Being surrounds and horrifies us. Suffice it to say that Being, by 1947, is explored for itself but in a different relation to an existent, *Dasein*, than it was for Heidegger. Transcendence now seems less tied to the body and more to the alterity of the other person, notably the other as feminine. Moreover, the light-dark motif is *not* directly paralleled to Heidegger’s disclosure and withdrawal of Being. Levinas’ world as light begins with a minimal embodied self quite different from Heidegger’s.

In about ten years’ time, Levinas worked out two experimental ontologies and two transcendences. The first ontology and transcendence seems elementary and characterized by Being as *full*, “impotent,” and nauseated. This Being is *our* own existence: we are revolted by *our* Being most patently in bouts of nausea, where the gap between Being and our being vanishes. The second ontology and transcendence, that of *Existence and Existents*, is more markedly dualistic. It is characterized by light (precisely as active consciousness, in what is a Husserlian inspiration) and again by an impotent darkness. In both cases, Levinas is rethinking Being and transcendence with attention to certain moral and aesthetic qualities that we do not find in Heidegger. His debt to Heidegger has gone through significant changes. As Jacques Rolland remarks in his Introduction to *On Escape*:

That which is firstly taken up without debate from Heidegger is a certain comprehension of philosophy, by virtue of which a problem will be considered philosophical par excellence inasmuch as it confronts us with the ‘ancient problem of being *qua* being’.¹²

Two things should be noted here: first, that in “leading us to the heart of philosophy” (*DE*, 74; *OE*, 56), the problem of Being brings us to a question that for Levinas is neither spatial nor temporal. That is, if Being—which arises as a question *only* because it is a question for *Dasein* in its transcendence—is finite (i.e., in relation to finite *Dasein*),

then is Being “sufficient” unto itself? For Levinas, the fact that Being requires *Dasein* poses the question of transcendence in light of the notions of the finite and the infinite. The “infinite” may be just a signifier. Being’s finiteness may just be the result of Being’s becoming a question in relation to the mortal being concerned about its Being, again *Dasein*. Yet, already in Levinas’ thinking the question of the infinite and of transcendence has arisen, even before these enter a religious register. Levinas tells us that transcendence and the infinite suggest themselves in literary *and* actual attempts to get out of Being. We find a foiled transcendence in escapist literature and in philosophy. This youthful essay of 1935 argued that “escape” means getting out of the Being that is social reality, to be sure. But we attempt escape, most notably, from the Being that we call ourselves, since for Levinas it is not a matter of getting one’s being “into view as a whole,” as it was for Heidegger when he framed his concept of authenticity in 1927. Transcendence, as getting out of being, points to our urge or our need to get away from ourselves. And this points to a self that cannot get itself into view as a whole, but feels suffocated by Being, internally and externally.

I mentioned that Levinas’ conception of Being tried to collapse Heidegger’s hiatus between inside and outside, self and world—and that was its radicality. About the urge to get out of Being, Levinas writes: “the impossibility of getting out of the game [*de sortir du jeu*] and of giving things back their toylike uselessness announces the precise moment where childhood ends, and defines the very notion of seriousness. What counts, then, in all this experience of Being, is not the discovery of a new characteristic of our existence, but by its very fact, that of the permanent quality itself of our presence” (*DE*, 70; *OE*, 52). The notion of the seriousness of Being and the near impossibility of transcending it, spans Levinas’ entire philosophical career.

To this Levinas adds, “the being of the I [*moi*], which war and war’s aftermath have *allowed* us to know, leaves us with no further games. The need to be right, or justified, in this game can only be a need for escape” (*DE*, 71; *OE*, 53). Beyond collapsing the hiatus between Being and the *Dasein* we are, it is clear that *two* readings—a factual and a foundational one—are indispensable to understanding this text. The reference to “war’s aftermath” recalls the German rhetoric of the *Dolchstoß* or Jewish “stab in the back,” to Weimar, and all its consequences.

Levinas' first original essay thus presented a surprising, somewhat Husserlian (given its hyletic, 'embodied' character) critique of Heidegger's conception of ontology and transcendence. However, *On Escape* also presented Being as having two implicit levels of 'historicity', just as it did in the early Heidegger. Being has a social and political, even a 'world-historical', level,¹³ and it has a deeper level that is almost an 'existential'; therein lies the urge for transcendence. Levinas seems to hesitate over Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic historicity. He describes general events by which we are led to the desire for transcendence. Yet he always refers these back to their condition of possibility, which is a particular embodied self. Moreover, he ignores Heidegger's "resoluteness" and his "loyalty to self," by which the latter described our authentic historicity.¹⁴ Instead, Levinas keeps the authentic-inauthentic distinction troubled and unstable: "loyalty to self" becomes imprisonment in self. Further, the Being by which we are surrounded is not explicitly governed by spatial binaries like inside-outside: what is *in* us *is* precisely us, and it is Being as well.¹⁵ Of course, that is not really so far from Heidegger himself, when he writes, "*Dasein* is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue. The phrase 'is an issue' has been made plain in the state-of-Being of understanding . . . as self-projective Being toward its own-most potentiality-for-Being. This potentiality is that for the sake of which any *Dasein* is as it is."¹⁶

This is also why, for Heidegger, as for Levinas, "existing is always factual. Existentiality is essentially determined by facticity."¹⁷

Heidegger's *Dasein* had two levels of historicity, as does Being conceived as that which is in question for the *Dasein* that inquires about it. This being, *Dasein*, also finds itself in the world, in Being, uncanny and "not-being-at-home." Almost like Levinas' phenomenology of shame, *Dasein* is always on the verge of "being brought back from its absorption in the 'world'" through anxiety.¹⁸

Although Levinas preserves the formally different modes of historicity and of being-in-the-world that he learned from Heidegger, he does not preserve anxiety or Heidegger's imperative of "being brought back from our absorption in the 'world,'" an absorption that amounted to a fallen mode of being.¹⁹ Instead, Levinas *inflects* these themes toward a different specificity of being-there. For Heidegger, being-in-the-world is experienced as fallen and as fleeing from oneself and one's mortality into things and groups. The affects of "wishing," "worry," "hankering" as we fall, and even our "urge" to live, are all derivative from

Care (*Sorge*), in Heidegger, and from our existence, which is being ahead-of-itself and being always “already-in-the-world” (*BT*, 237). For the latter, the *derivative* qualities of wishing, worrying, and urge are revealed thanks to anxiety.

Levinas virtually inverts this schema. In 1935, wishes and the urge to live or to transcend Being are, for him, more definitive of our being than were Heidegger’s “Care” and “concern.” Levinas writes:

A quest for the way out [of Being], this is in no sense nostalgia for death, because death is not an exit . . . The ground of this theme is constituted [instead] by the *need* for excedence. Thus, to the need for escape, Being appears not only as an obstacle that free thought would have to surmount, nor even as the rigidity that, by inviting us to routine, demands an effort toward originality. Rather [Being] appears as an imprisonment from which one must get out. (*DE*, 73; *OE*, 55)

We see the two levels of historicity set down here in Levinas’ insistence that a need for “excedence”—as getting out of being or non-metaphysical transcendence—is not reducible to “nostalgia for death”—his pitiless translation of Heidegger’s authenticity. As need or urge, “excedence” is fundamental. And it is existential, not spiritual, transcendence. It is neither reducible to a creative urge (*élan créateur*, *DE*, 72; *OE*, 54) nor equivalent to “that need for ‘innumerable lives’, which is an analogous motif,” he says, “in modern literature, albeit totally different in its intent” (*DE*, 73; *OE*, 55).

For Levinas, the creative urge and the need for innumerable lives are themselves derivative in regard to our existential wish to transcend Being, or escape it, though he does not say this explicitly. What is clear is that Levinas will read *Dasein*’s temporality, its out-ahead-of-itself, against Heidegger, as a “need for a universal or infinite.” And he will criticize Heidegger’s *Dasein* for “supposing a peace become real at the depths of the I [*moi*], that is, as the acceptance of Being” (*DE*, 74; *OE*, 55). For Levinas in 1935, factual existence presented neither peace within nor peace without. He will attempt to show that the acceptance of Being need not be existentially primary for humans—perhaps not even structurally possible for us.

There is no debate that Levinas’ 1935 project must be read in light of events around him. What interests me is that he takes seriously Heidegger’s characterization of inauthentic historicity as our preoccupation with the time and history of things “ready-to-hand and present-at-hand.” Levinas works deliberately at a fundamental ontological

level. This is why we must read *On Escape* through two lenses, not overlooking what survivor Jean Améry wrote, recalling the anxiety of the period 1933–45.

“In the end, nothing else differentiated me from the people among whom I pass my days than a vague, sometimes more, sometimes less perceptible restiveness. But it is a *social* unrest, not a metaphysical one,” Améry protests. “It is not Being that oppresses me, or Nothingness, or God, or the absence of God, only society. . . . In my . . . effort to explore the basic condition of being a victim—in conflict with the necessity to be a Jew and the impossibility of being one—I . . . have recognized that the *most extreme expectations and demands directed at us are of a physical and social nature.*”²⁰

Jean Améry took the path of a secular Jew—a task possible and impossible, as he says. On the other hand, a religious dimension was always present obliquely in Levinas’ thought, though never as a credo.²¹ And, of course, Améry’s words were written retrospectively, at the time of the first Auschwitz trials. The point is that in 1935, Levinas, still deeply impressed by Heidegger’s project, seemed to be excavating the structures of “excendence” and escape, whose two modes of expression—factual and historical—he integrated into the project.²² In our dual reading, tensions between society and ontology, historicity and facticity, are already there. The upshot is a counter-project to Heidegger’s, which rejects the acceptance of Being, perhaps because it understands Being more intensively (and otherwise politically) than Heidegger did. In developing his *urge* to escape, his first transcendence, against Heidegger’s anxiety—not to mention the affect of shame and the physical experience of nausea as *ontological* events—Levinas turned inward to the Being that Heidegger called *Dasein*, and virtually psychologized its experiences. He also acknowledged what Améry called his “most extreme demands.” Is this the inevitable first response of a universalistic consciousness to an existence reduced to traumatized immanence? Levinas writes,

In the I [*moi*], the identity of Being reveals its nature as enchainment, for it appears in the form of suffering and invites us to escape. Thus escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and most unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I is the oneself [*soi-même*]. (*DE*, 73; *OE*, 55)

This approach to Being as suffering can only pass through a being that is consciously and unconsciously tied to its *physical* self, which is

why need, shame, and nausea—well before Heidegger’s anxiety—are its modalities of predilection. “Nausea,” Levinas writes, “reveals to us the presence of being in all its impotence, which constitutes it as such. Nausea is the impotence of Being in all its nakedness” (*DE*, 92; *OE*, 68).

We might suppose that pulling Being toward a psychology or a physiology of the being that we are defeats strategies guided by an ontological difference. Formally, that may be so. But this inflection reveals something new about Being as such, which is hard to gainsay. If we glimpse Being through the being that we are, concerned as we are about our being, then it is not its finiteness that we flee or anticipate resolutely, it is Being’s self-entrapment. And this entrapment must be both within itself, as well as in the Being that is outside us. Levinas’ merging of the inside and the outside highlights affectivity and suffering. If that ‘psychologizes’ Being, then that is the consequence of seeking a site that is prior to Heidegger’s being-in-the-world alongside of things, a move Heidegger himself almost makes when he argues that anxiety volatilizes beings around us. This merging notwithstanding, in 1935 Levinas does not find his site. He circumvents being-in-the-world while briefly acknowledging it. By 1947, he will have found his site. But two years into Hitler’s Germany, Being reveals itself in nausea as impotence. And Levinas adds, “thereby . . . does nausea appear also as an *exceptional fact* of consciousness. If, in every psychological fact, the [*de facto*] being of consciousness is confused with its knowledge . . . its nature is confused with its presence. The nature of nausea, on the contrary, is nothing other than its presence” (*DE*, 92; *OE*, 68).

Since it cannot become an object for consciousness, much less a representation, nausea—similar to anxiety but intensified physiologically and affectively—reveals the impotence of Being uniquely, as that to which we are permanently riveted.²³

As if he anticipated the charge of psychologism, Levinas’ discussion of nausea leads him to a striking question: “What is the structure of this pure Being?” (*DE*, 74; *OE*, 56). And he will move toward Améry, asking: Is it really so universal? Or is pure Being, “on the contrary nothing other than the mark of a certain civilization, installed in the *fait accompli* of Being?” (*DE*, 74; *OE*, 56). Therein lies his most radical and perplexing move, and the moment when he comes closest to Jean Améry. Rather than situate history in light of epochs of Being as Heidegger did, Levinas subjects Being, even as *the* question for philosophy, precisely to the question of historical and social contexts, what Heidegger had called pejoratively the world-historical context.

Between the everyday urge to get out, with its intensifications in nausea and shame, and what these reveal about historical Being, the tension remains like a rich play of forces. If Heidegger's ontological difference moves, in Levinas, toward the difference between the transcending *moi* and the impotent materiality of the *soi-même*, then a tension persists there too. This is the tension predictable in the merging of exterior and interior; consequent on the *impossibility* of holding that merger together consistently. These two tensions persist throughout *On Escape*. Indeed, such tensions characterize Levinas' attitude toward Being as *the* question for philosophy (at least such as Heidegger thought it through), as opposed to Being's representing a "mere mark of a secularized civilization"—that same civilization for which disclosure and the call of alterity are admissible as ontological formalisms alone.

Levinas knew well that Heidegger's formalist hermeneutics gave him his existential structure of time, as awaiting and announcement, when the latter evacuated the structure of St. Paul's *kairos* of its content (i.e., the life of the early Christian community expressed in St. Paul's letters). I will come back to the question of constructivist formalisms.²⁴ What is remarkable here is that Levinas *accepted* Heidegger's question of Being and time *for* philosophy, while also suggesting that this question had taken shape through the secularization (or evacuation) of an older content (viz., the "Old Testament"). This is why Levinas conceived transcendence in a way different than Heidegger did. He started from the embodied self as *soi-même*, and described transcendence as ex-cendence, an urge to create distance between self and ego (*moi*). What is more, he recognized, in a way different than the young Heidegger did, that the ontological difference is never just dualist and that the form-content opposition must be problematized again, phenomenologically.

What is important for us therefore are Levinas' inflections. "Would infinite Being need to get out of itself?" he asks, without exploring here what infinite Being might mean (that will come later, when he introduces the alterity of the other human being in 1961). But from 1935 through 1974 this question traverses his presentation of ontology and his conception of getting out of Being. So too does Being conceived as impotence, disorder, *gravitas*, and even "bourgeois," as he quips. The emphasis on Being as the particular immanence he calls *soi-même* becomes important when it adumbrates a series of partial transcendences, occurring prior to intentional consciousness and taking the forms of enjoyment, eroticism, or striving against fatigue.

Tensions of levels within Being (minimally, a formal level, a more factual-sensuous one, and an historical level) also entail their respective transcendences. These are more than tension of opposites, like the universal or the particular. Enjoyment and eroticism, for example, represent a rethinking of Heidegger's ecstatic being-in-the-world. On the other hand, the drama of suffering and nausea, which motivates the ego's urge to get out of itself or to transcend its own immanence, is an overbid on Heidegger's *Angst* and boredom and a reworking of his fleeing in the face of death. We do not flee death so much as we find ourselves struggling to transcend our corporeal condition. Thus, Heidegger's being-alongside-things moves toward entrapment amongst them and enclosure within a fleshy self. Yet no one would doubt that Levinas also presupposed "care" (even Heidegger's *Sorge*) for things, even for others, in his analyses of urges and shame: one must care about those from whom one wants to hide one's nakedness, which is an early definition of shame, for Levinas.²⁵

One might ask: If it were not 1935 and Levinas were not a Lithuanian Jew, could we read the tensions in this text so 'knowingly'? If we read it simply as opening a conception of Being (as oppressive immanence and transcendence) as firstly a movement made by a *moi* relative to the bodily *soi* that sticks to it (such that transcendence is not temporal ec-stasis, but a process of opening gaps in our immanence), could we take it seriously as a counter-project to Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*?

This question concerns the implications of extending finite and circumstantial facticity within philosophical formalism. The sense of facticity has been questioned in light of charges of psychologism arising from the replication of everyday structures at a supposedly formal transcendental-phenomenological level. In Levinas' case, I propose to suspend the question as over-determined, while holding on to the fact that Levinas began, then abandoned, and then began anew his counter-ontology, which was to unfold prior to distinctions of inside and outside, origin and end—and, to a certain extent, even finite and infinite. He writes, in 1935:

But how to consider, the finite and the infinite in the fact of positing [*se poser*]? Is there a more or less perfect way of positing? What is, is. That there be birth and death in no way affects the absolute character of an affirmation that refers only to itself. (*DE*, 76; *OE*, 57)

This affirmation, whose temporality goes unexplored but cannot be futural like *Dasein's*, is elucidated by the inescapable *now* of nausea. Nausea represents a privileged instance of the urge to excedence, because it is the most oppressive case of physiological self-enclosure. If this curious excedence proves to be only an urge, just as the transcendence promised by sensuous pleasure proved a disappointment (i.e., the flesh believed it was going 'somewhere', only to fall back into itself when pleasure dissipated), it is nonetheless an original structure of an all-too-human transcendence. The lack of a temporal (futural) correlative is explained by Levinas' privileging of the now. But this now is not precisely Bergson's *durée* without a subject, nor is it strictly punctual.²⁶ It is closer to Husserl's complex, fleeting now-moments with their complement of passive associations, horizons, and the position [*Stellungaufnahme*] that the self takes up before them. Because, in 1935, Levinas constructs transcendence in immanence on the oppressive 'now' of nausea, pleasure, and shame, as he will do later on with fatigue and awakening; because he lays his philosophical emphasis on the now of suffering and effort, not on a more formal moment as such, we are inclined to ponder *his* now and *his* particularity: more so, perhaps, than we do Heidegger's particularity. But I suspended that question; it goes all the way back to Husserl's 'tautological' phenomenology (i.e., transcendental ego is mirrored by the psychological ego). Above all, I suspended it because Levinas' project, despite its emphasis on facticity, is also a formal, if fragmentary, counter-ontology.

II. *Ontology and Transcendence in Existence and Existents (1947)*

The essays contained in this thin volume make a number of important reversals in Levinas' critique of Heidegger as well as in the themes Levinas introduced in *On Escape*. These reversals include being-in-the-world, now interpreted as Desire, and ecstatic intentionality, defined now by a host of physical states and affectivities. Finally, a different conception of the world and of actuality has arisen: the world now seems more ethical, more concerned with justice. It is the "world itself, where there can be confession" (*EE*, 36; *DEAE*, 68). The critique of Heidegger's ontology is also more sure of itself. It even ventures irony: "There are only things behind their objects in ages of poverty," he declares (*EE*, 36–37; *DEAE*, 68).

Before examining this prison camp writing further, I want to recall something that may be familiar to Levinas' readers already. It con-

cerns the possibility of the question: Why is there Being instead of simply nothingness?

Some have suggested that this is a non-question. Sometimes that suggestion is a bad reading of Heidegger. At other times the skeptic reminds us that the question of being and nothingness is meaningful only within a specific culture, as Levinas did in 1935. The skeptic is thinking not of Leibniz, but of the Christian supposition of creation *ex nihilo*. This is not the place to go into Heidegger's complex relation to and forgetting of Christianity. But it is important for our look at Levinas that, in Judaism, God does not create out of nothingness. He extracts light from darkness. And darkness has its being too. The Tanakh's version of Bereshit, or Genesis, reads: "When God began to create heaven and earth, the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the face of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water." Later, the stars are called "signs for the set times." The stars separate the *being* of the light from the *being* of the darkness, just as they demarcate a proto-historicity.

This heritage of a Being that is full survives in non-Jewish philosophers like Schelling, who, thanks to influences from Protestant mysticism, recognized a "dark principle" as preceding the light and making it possible for light to be raised out of it. "So there must be," Schelling writes in the *Essence of Human Freedom*, "another basis for the birth of Spirit."²⁷

There are parallels between this other basis for the birth of Spirit and Levinas' conception of transcendence. Rather than situating the dark principle as coeval with creation, Levinas will reframe it ontologically. Thus, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas introduces the "there-is" (*il y a*) as the neutral ground of Being and the reason why the question: Why is there Being instead of nothing? ultimately has little sense. What was the impressive intensity of nausea, as the experience of mere Being and positive impotence, not to mention our urge to escape it, becomes the horror of the "there-is" and our apprehension about the dissolution of our *moi* in "an atmosphere of presence" (*EE*, 59; *DEAE*, 104).

In both writings, this "atmosphere" is not nothing. And it does not withdraw. The "there-is," or *il y a*, is "a field without master," and it does not just pass over us when we are in anxiety. Rather, for Levinas, we emerge from it by waking up. Or again, we escape from it by falling asleep. Our encounter with the ground that is Being, is bordered by consciousness, on one side, and by a preconscious, on the

other. So, though it is there, as “there-is,” as neutral Being, and consciousness emerges from it like light out of darkness, consciousness nevertheless *emerges from itself* by fully waking up, out of insomnia. Or consciousness dissolves by falling into a deep sleep. Thus consciousness suspends the ground of Being, the “there-is,” by sleeping, when it can do so. Levinas’ *Da* is a ‘there’, certainly. But it is different from Heidegger’s ‘there’. One might say the ‘there’ has become a ‘here’, from which I rise or into which I fall. That ‘here’ is *my* body or my self, condition of my transcendence and of my suspending the ‘there’ of the “there is.” The basis of my world, then, is me, a comet’s tail of consciousness and bodily states. My first ‘where’—which precedes any “being-alongside-things-in-the-world” (*EE*, 39; *DEAE*, 122)—is thus the base that makes transcendence possible.

Brute Being exists as the moiling darkness of the there-is. This is Being before we can call it the being of things or of world: neutral being. What was the Being of oneself trapped in nausea in 1935 has become the “hypostasis” that awakens or sleeps, and a neutral, threatening plenitude in 1947. This is why, in the later work, parallels with Husserl’s *Ideas I*, §49, are unmistakable.²⁸ Though §49 speaks of the irreducibility of the ego in epistemological terms, Levinas sets this irreducibility on an existential level, such that the primacy of embodied consciousness is our first existential ground. With this comes the co-belonging, or correlation, between consciousness and a nonpsychological unconscious. At a level higher than that of the *il y a*, which is chaos and darkness, we find the *moi* arising from itself. Consciousness comes out of unconsciousness as transcendence. Now we find consciousness equated with Being, which itself is equated with a world of light. Being as light and consciousness thus stands contrasted with Being as darkness and unconsciousness. Instead of Being ‘eventing’ or withdrawing, we have Being in its materiality (the dark *il y a* is material [*EE*, 55; *DEAE*, 98]) and Being as light and consciousness, which is already “a certain mastery of Being” (*ibid.*). Therein lies the roots of transcendence in immanence, conceived in a Husserlian fashion, minus his epistemological ambition.

While this ontology appears to move back behind Heidegger’s hermeneutic of *Dasein*, Levinas’ 1947 project also appears to be a struggle between dark Being and the collapse of transcendence, and light Being as the incipience of transcendence. The reassertion of a Husserlian ego is presented with little mention of Husserl’s usual, constructivist intentionality. In 1935, the *Stimmungen* of need, shame, and nausea

formed the basis of an array of transcendences or excedences. In 1947, with the struggle that is our waking up, beginning again, and labor, the temporality of the present is reaffirmed as a new *degré zéro* of transcendence. In addition, with the preeminence of the present, Levinas can assert the specificity of sensation. Here, we see the influence of Maurice Pradines's work *La philosophie de la sensation* on Levinas.²⁹ This influence will grow to the point where it becomes quite important, in 1974, to *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence*. Indispensable to that work is the analytic of the self's sensuous vulnerability to world and other. In 1947, however, the present is, above all, light and Being:

"The antithesis of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* is overcome by light," writes Levinas (*EE*, 41; *DEAE*, 76). Light, really the very heart of phenomenological intuition, is awakened consciousness, whose intentionality Levinas rethinks, following Heidegger, as "lived affectivity" (*DEAE*, 56). In 1947, the affect characteristic of being-in-the-world is desire. It is sincere; it enjoys. No longer conceived as disappointment before its waning, "enjoyment and sincerity, like sensation itself, precede care." In this sense, enjoyment has become a positive, partial transcendence, differently meaningful now, because it is equated with, even stabilized by, sincerity. "All the rest is biology," he concludes, with a rhetorical arabesque (*EE*, 28; *DEAE*, 56).

Let us not go into the ontological meaning of that "rest" that is biology. Let us just emphasize that like Maurice Pradines, perhaps like Heidegger, for whom a science like biology concerns simply a region of Being, the Being that is consciousness in 1947 is a being that begins and ends with itself. It falls asleep, it awakens, it keeps watch. In this, transcendence is circumscribed and amenable to certain ec-stases, provided we do not forget that its unfolding gives preeminence to a dense now, over futural projections. Most interesting, the being that is light, enjoyment, and comes *prior* to care, also overcomes a *priori-a posteriori* distinctions, as well as the *existential-existenciell* pair characteristic of Heidegger's being-in-the-world.

Does Levinas' strategy work? As 'subjectivist', it appears more Husserlian than the project he began in 1935. Inasmuch as it does work, it does so by supposing two things. First, that we can speak of the materiality of Being as darkness and as an embodied, *ontological* unconscious-conscious continuum (*EE*, 28–29; *DEAE*, 57). Note, moreover, that a non-psychoanalytic unconscious is every bit as important to Levinas as it is to analysis, except that psychoanalysis *missed* the *ontological* function of the unconscious, as he says, which is to be the ground for

transcendence. Second, if Levinas' strategy works, then this is thanks to the *intelligence* of sensation, or thanks to sensation's *spirituality*. "Sensation is always already knowledge and apprehension," he writes in 1947 (*EE*, 42; *DEAE*, 77). That means sensation is always shot through with incipient transcendence. Onto the Cartesian luminosity of consciousness, Levinas grafts the "permeability of *esprit*"—Maurice Pradines's formula—which becomes the proper of sensation itself. In 1947, we are no longer driven to *escape* Being (even though it is *our* Being). For, the luminosity of consciousness and the spirituality of sensation make the subject into an "infinite power of recoil" and transcendence (*EE*, 42; *DEAE*, 78). We do not require Heidegger's anxiety to recoil from things. One could almost say it is we who glimmer, in awakening, *not* some event called Being; or better: *we*—understood as primordial light and intelligent sensation—are that Being that glimmers or withdraws. Levinas' neo-Husserlian *rapprochement* of inside and outside continues here. Not so surprising a strategy, if we recall his 1935 experiment. Insofar as this is his Husserlian "option," Levinas radicalizes Husserl by introducing his approach to consciousness into more existentialized structures. In another sense, by 1947, neither Heidegger nor Husserl is patly recognizable in Levinas' project. Transcendence is neither intentionality nor ec-stasis. As though Levinas were bringing together three distinct lines of thought, a Husserlian transcendental subjectivity provides him a ground, which he will make more corporeal; Heidegger's *existentialia* will be transposed and new sensuous attunements found to highlight attempts at transcendence; finally, a certain Talmudic approach to existence as enjoyment and sacralization is beginning to be sketched.³⁰

It may also be the case that in stark contrast to survivor Jean Améry's witness, the prison camp essays of Levinas are unfolding a philosophy of particularity, light, and a new conception of what might be called the 'Jewish condition'. The outcome may be more than phenomenology can describe so far as its context would here deny its possibility. I mean this in Améry's sense when he writes, "metaphysical distress is a fashionable concern of the highest standing. Let it remain a matter for those who have always known who and what they are. . . . And that they are permitted to remain so" (*AML*, 101). For Améry—and this was perhaps the perverse triumph of the epoch in which both Heidegger and Levinas grew up—"physical and social demands" make metaphysics or first philosophy otiose or simply ideological. "The most extreme expectations and demands directed at us are of a physical and social nature," said Améry. Of these expectations we can only

bear witness, he would say, but not write metaphysics. Levinas would in no way reject Améry's observation. Instead, by *Otherwise than Being* (1974), Levinas has not only said "yes" to his own impossible thinking of transcendence, he has combined philosophy *and* witnessing in a single effort of thinking.

III. *Ontology, Language, and Transcendence in Totality and Infinity (1961)*

The innovation of *Totality and Infinity* in regard to the explorations of the 1940s, lies in its revisions of earlier conceptions of transcendence and ontology. The Preface to the work, written after the principal text, frames the project in a tension between Being and "Eschatology." The latter is Levinas' term for a utopia that unfolds on a human, inter-subjective level. Now, already in 1947, the encounter with another human being led Levinas to a discussion of radical difference in "Time and the Other." In that work, the impenetrability and unsurpassable quality of the other person's difference was analogous to that of death, a kind of opacity and foreclosure placed on our knowledge and intentional aiming. Nevertheless, the 1947 work took one step further; viz., it argued that feminine alterity had a radical quality to it that surpassed the difference between a phenomenologically reduced "self" and an ostensibly unsexed (or masculine) other.³¹

The gendered distinction of the 1947 work suggests an ambition whose influences may have included reflection on discussions of Simone de Beauvoir's work in progress, *The Second Sex* (1949). If sexuate existence had eluded Husserl's phenomenological constructivism, it was unavoidable to full-blown descriptions of everyday facticity. Yet the radical alterity of 'the feminine' gives way, in *Totality and Infinity*, to a larger conception of the "other," whose alterity is rooted in the human face (and bodily postures) conceived as expression and expressiveness. In the later work, 'the feminine', like the figures of 'the orphan' or 'the widow', is a term that moves between metaphors of defenselessness and indigence and essential aspects of the human condition. Let us trace this alterity through three citations.

"Expression does not impose itself as a true representation or as an action. . . . The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by *arousing my goodness*."³²

“The fact that the face maintains a relation with me by discourse does not range it in the same; it remains absolute within the relation. The solipsist dialectic of consciousness always suspicious of being in captivity in the same breaks off. For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is *not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I*; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other” (*TI*, 195/169; emphasis added).

“To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique ‘matter’ possible for total negation” (*TI*, 198/172).

Essential aspects of the ‘human condition’ thus include the passive resistance, which we find in the exposure, virtually the *ef-frontery*, of the naked face and eyes. By contrast with Heidegger’s ontology, *this* ‘event’ speaks. For Levinas, that opens *otherwise than solipsistically* Husserl’s ground of *sense (Bedeutung)*. If, for Husserl, sense was grounded in the immediacy of the inner voice, which spoke spontaneously to itself within the predictable transparency of the I-self relationship, then Levinas will reject this origin in favor of a dialogical source for sense. It is that dialogical source, described in a phenomenology of encounter and welcome in 1961, that explains why the incipience of sense is also the incipience of ethics. Here, ‘ethics’ amounts to a non-agonistic limitation of the ego’s appetites and a summons to responsibility grounded in the self.

Despite its peaceable exposure, facial and discursive expression undermines phenomenology’s Cyclops gaze and its plethora of horizons. Speaking-to the self, the other has no horizon, no condition of possibility: “Speech cuts across vision. . . . [It] contests the meaning I ascribe to my interlocutor” (*TI*, 195/169). In the midst of an event without a phenomenological or epistemological ground, and reduced to dialogue in its birth (as the silent imperative expressed by the face: “Do not kill me”), the onset of the other person, in 1961, is the event that cannot be *er-eignet*, appropriated. It bestrides an ethical injunction and, in its unexpectedness and cut off, absolute quality, elicits an urge to annihilation. “I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely” (*TI*, 198/172).

For the first time, Levinas works out a conception of transcendence in dialogue that is complete and not subject to the disappointments of

fleshy, partial transcendences. He can insist that the transcendence of the face-to-face ‘situation’ is complete because, as an order refractory to simple phenomenological (i.e., bracketed *perceptual*) constitution, the incipience of dialogue and sense has a sort of micro-time structure to it that refuses integration into three, better known temporalities: first, Husserl’s passive synthesis of flowing consciousness;³³ second, the selfless upsurge of radical novelty in Bergson’s *durée*;³⁴ third, any out-ahead-of-oneself or ecstatic temporalities such as what we find in the early Heidegger.

Now, if the possibility of murder is in no way the primary concern of what Derrida has called this “treatise on hospitality,”³⁵ violence motivates *Totality and Infinity* as a question for ontology and transcendence.

I noted earlier that the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* draws a stark threefold equation between Being as struggle and conflict, and politics as the human art of triumphing in these conflicts. Being first revealed itself as the impotence we experience directly in and as our (nauseated) bodies in 1935. Thereafter, it was light emerging from a dark principle (1947). The Being we discover in *Totality and Infinity*, on the other hand, uncompromisingly characterizes the world revealed by the War and the Final Solution. Indeed, Levinas’ prefatory remarks on ontology have recourse to a dramatic language disconcertingly reminiscent of what Adorno called the “jargon of authenticity,” including that of Carl Schmitt and Heidegger. Levinas writes:

Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality; it divests eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity. . . . War is not only one of the ordeals—the greatest—of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means—politics—is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. . . . Harsh reality (this sounds like a pleonasm!), harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its fulguration when the drappings of illusion burn, war is produced as the *pure experience of pure being*. . . . The trial by force is the test of the real. (*TI*, 21/ix; emphasis added)³⁶

Within discourses governed by truth and reason, Levinas insists, Being is Heraclitean flux and conflict (*TI*, 21/ix). The order of truth and reason is a human order, certainly. Yet reason discovers it as a ‘cosmism’, encompassing the social and the natural. If we do not recognize the breadth of this order, then we may be motivated to conceive Levinas’ language as a dramatization. If we do recognize war as the permanent possibility of nature and culture, then we are hard put to

receive other discourses as more, or other, than utopianism or strong messianism, like “a revelation without evidences” (*TI*, 22/x).

It is in order to think through utopia toward facing and conversation that Levinas reconceives transcendence, here, as movement-toward, or again, an irrecoverable loss of ego or consciousness, in the moment of an “interruption” of Being so slight that we would hardly notice its particular temporality. Now, the effort to rethink transcendence is not what is unique to Levinas. Already in 1927, Heidegger was rethinking the traditional senses of the notion in light of Kant’s philosophy and of his own existential structures. Thus, Heidegger argues in the investigations published as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1926–1927):

Self and world belong together . . . to the unity of the constitution of the Dasein and, with equal originality, they determine the ‘subject’. In other words, the being that we ourselves in each case are, the Dasein, is the *transcendent*. . . . *Transcendere* signifies literally to step over, pass over, go through, and occasionally also to surpass. . . . It is from the ontological concept of transcendence properly understood that an understanding can first of all be gained of what Kant was seeking . . . when transcendence moved for him into the center of philosophical inquiry. . . . In delineating the transcendence concept, we have to keep in view the basic structures already exhibited of the constitution of the Dasein’s being. . . . The world is transcendent because, belonging to the structure of being-in-the-world [which is our structure as Dasein], it constitutes stepping-over-to . . . as such. The Dasein itself oversteps in its being and thus is exactly *not the immanent*.³⁷

One could almost trace Levinas’ *own* development using this citation. World, and the being we are, determine the ‘subject’, because they belong together. Levinas took a comparable position in 1935, diverging from it in 1947. The being we are is transcendent because it alone can “step over, pass over, go through”; this will always be the case for Levinas, *although this sort of passing over* proves insufficiently transcendent. If we pass over or through our world, we nevertheless return to ourselves. We remain the same in the same. Now, if remaining the same in the same is not precisely “the immanent” for Heidegger, this is only in the sense that *Dasein* is not in itself the way an object—or an animal that is “world poor”—is immanent, in itself in its temporal and spatial existence. Levinas’ strategy in *Totality and Infinity* will consist in integrating this conception of our being-there. In *Totality and Infinity* he prolongs *Existence and Existents*’ conception of existence as light in his descriptions of “love of life” and enjoyment. Yet these sen-

suous dimensions of existence are invariably threatened by the characteristic of Being itself, which remains more Heraclitean than Heideggerian. Being is sustenance, anchoring or *gravitas*—yet as force it moves between excess and penury. The sunlight that warms us can readily burn. The waters in which we bathe overflow and drown us. Refuge and storage is only possible through a dwelling that is *not* particularly ‘of the earth’ but of the hearth. Interiority is not simply immanence; it is the possibility of welcome. And this interiority is factual, too, in much the way that Shmuel Trigano reminds us that the political and juridical space, for Jews, was never the Greek *Agora*,³⁸ but the interiority of the rabbinic court or Sanhedrin. It is no accident that Levinas cites Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, commenting on the Mishnaic Treatise “Sanhedrin,” in *Totality and Infinity* (TI, 201/176).

Heidegger’s transcendence lacks radicality, above all because “stepping over to . . . as such” is, as Levinas will put it later on, “an incarnate practice of grasping [*mainmise*] and of appropriation and of satisfaction.”³⁹ It is certainly more than that in Heidegger. However, so far as it comes from an ‘other’, that other is my ‘own-most possibility’: the possibility of impossibility that is my death. That much, Levinas embraced in 1947. *If he attempted*, in *Time and the Other*, to bring his own thinking of the other human being into a correlation with the limit of mortality, he was also striving to outstrip this correlation. Hence the searching reflection on the feminine in 1947; it filled a new category that would come to structure *Totality and Infinity*: radical alterity.

The world is home and menace; Being is elemental and good. Yet it represents a danger. What is lacking in Being, as described in *Totality and Infinity*, is something to interrupt its flux and excess. For Jewish thought that is ‘unnatural’ Law. Speaking of Isaiah, Armand Abécassis, remarks: “He [Isaiah] thought that the law that should guide the behavior of the people of YeHouDah [Judah], individually and collectively, should not be drawn from the model of nature, but from elsewhere. It is in this sense that it should be considered holy. Man is superior to nature, though he is also part of it. He is at once immanent and transcendent in its regard. He must not submit to nature but, on the contrary, organize and develop it . . . share it, according to the laws of ethics.”⁴⁰

The strategy of *Totality and Infinity* will consist in tracing the law back to its condition of possibility, the coming-on-the-scene of the other, or the face. Accepting what Abécassis expresses as humans’ immanence to nature and their transcendence of it, in light of the interruption

of nature that is the Law (in its ethical entelechy, made possible by the other human being), Levinas speaks not of “transcendence,” which could be confused with Heidegger’s conception, but of “transascendence,” a term he borrows from Jean Wahl. It is not *Dasein*, but the *encounter* with the other, called “Eschatology” in the Preface, that passes through Being. It carries a temporality of instantaneousness *and* of repetition. This ‘moment’ recurs. The responsibility an I [*moi*] experiences before another can be re-cognized *after the fact*, almost like Freud’s *Nachträglich* structure of new events, enriching or unleashing lost meanings in past events. Nevertheless, such a recognition is secondary to the fact of the immediate summons that the other’s face represents for us. The elaborate work on language and temporality; the experimentation with space relations, from the home’s interiority to the intersubjective curvature of space upward-to-the-other—these are the mature project unfolded. There, Being is both what Heidegger conceived ‘being-in-the-world’ to be *and* something more decisively rapacious and threatening—an understanding of ontology that, albeit pre-Heideggerian in character, takes account of a century of unparalleled, engineered, and bureaucratized annihilation.

Through this Being cuts what he calls the “good,” which proves too fragile to constitute something like an ‘other order’ to Being. Given this schema, Levinas ventures that Being can actually be conceived as pluralistic in quality (*TI*, 220–23/195–98). Suffice it to say, here, that the passage of eschatology into human *history*, sketched through the family with its paternal election of the son and the son’s service to his brothers—all of these, figures drawn from biblical experience and described as the upsurge of *ethical meaning*—is the final part of Levinas’ 1961 project. All of it drops out of his last great work of 1974. The ontological language in the 1961 work, as Adriaan Peperzak has pointed out, was designed to avoid charges Husserl heard often enough: phenomenology cannot really be distinguished from psychology, at least from a transcendental style of psychology. Yet this ontological language created difficulties of grounding, pluralization, and hierarchies (levels of time and space). The difficulties—along with Hegelian critiques like that of Jacques Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics”—motivated a closer focus on the incipience of meaning, the alterity and spontaneous ‘event’ of the other, and the self as site (if not ground) of transcendence in immanence. *Otherwise than Being* deepened these themes. Ontology is not so significant a focus in the later work. If Being remains dualistic, it is no longer a question of *Totality and Infinity*’s

pluralistic Being, but rather of a subject fissioned into self-‘I’ or self and other-in-the-same. One might say that it is the ‘placement’ of the other, as transcendence-in-immanence (a theme Husserl inaugurated) *and* as radical transcendence, that stands center-stage in the works from 1974 through 1984.

IV. *Ontology and Transcendence in Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence (1974)*

It is there, in the priority of the other man over me that . . . God comes to mind.

Levinas, Interview with Roger-Pol Droit⁴¹

But one question arises: did onto-theo-logy’s mistake consist in taking being for God or rather in taking God for being?

Levinas, “Lecture on Heidegger” (7 November 1975)⁴²

This juxtaposition of quotes from the 1970s is possible because of the way in which Levinas deepened his analysis of the relationship between language, Being, and transcendence in *Otherwise than Being*. It seems hard to contest, now, that there can be a secular and a religious reading of Levinas. Jacques Rolland has drawn the dividing line between these along the axis of the “third party” in Levinas’ logic. For Rolland, that means that the face-to-face can be read as an experience of affective and secular transcendence with a unique temporal dimension to it. From that experience flows our use, or thought, of the signifier “God.” “This is the extroversion of the interiority of the subject: he would make himself visible before making himself a seer! The infinite is not ‘in front of’ me, it is I who express it, but I do so precisely in giving a sign of the giving of signs: here I am [*me voici*]. A marvelous accusative: here I am under your gaze, obliged to you, your servant in the name of God. Without thematization, the sentence in which God comes to be involved in words is not ‘I believe in God’ . . . It is the ‘here I am’, said to the neighbor to whom I am given over. . . . That is my responsibility for the other.”⁴³ If Rolland is right—and the preceding quote from *Otherwise than Being* (1974) bears him out—then, grasped in its particularity, the face-to-face may be read secularly, so long as we do not ask what accounts for the transcendence of the other, but take it instead as an event. Following this logic, to take the

effect of the face-to-face relationship for Being—as the second quotation above suggests—means that traditional onto-theology loses the significance both of Being *and* the other. What we lose is the notion of infinity, in the sense of ethics and transcendence, a notion Levinas already began to approach in 1935. In the religious reading, transcendence will be tied to holiness. However, holiness, in the rationalist Jewish tradition, concerns the *justice* of the God of the prophets.⁴⁴

One of the signal contributions of *Otherwise than Being* is the turn it makes toward that which resonates *unsaid* within language; the adverbial, as it were. This turn requires Heidegger's later work on Being, resonating in the Greek of the pre-Socratics and later in the German of Hölderlin's poetry. We see in *Otherwise than Being* that Levinas *does* read Heidegger after the *Kehre*. He puts it succinctly in a 1975 lecture: "the most extraordinary thing that Heidegger brings [us] is a new *sonority of the verb 'to be'*: precisely its *verbal* sonority. To be: not that which is, but the verb, the 'act' of being."⁴⁵ This is why language becomes the "house of Being"⁴⁶ over the course of Heidegger's thought and why it is the site in which what remains of the ontological difference (conceived non-foundationally, where Being is not a condition of possibility of beings) glimmers. Indeed, the sonority of language—especially in poets like Hölderlin—in some cases allows Being to disclose itself fully. As Heidegger says, in 1935, of Hölderlin's "The Rhine": "In this poetry about the Being of the demigods, that is to say about the *milieu* of Being between Gods and men, Being in its integrality must disclose itself to us."⁴⁷ Or again, in 1957, "what is called 'Being' addresses us from out of this self-revealing and as this self-revealing. . . . What 'Being' means is harbored in the bidding [*Geheiss*] that speaks in the basic words of Greek thinking. . . . We either hear it or don't hear it."⁴⁸

A similar listening to the sonority of language allows Levinas to pose a new question. He wonders whether something could resonate in language other than as a verb (like the infinitive Being) or a noun. Could something resonate in language that would be close to a verb but not reducible to the verb's 'act' or activity; something like an adverbial resonance? That is the question behind his "otherwise," *autrement*, which is literally "*otherly*."

Now transcendence will be conceived as a non-thematizable signification *and* as other-in-the-same:

Otherwise than Being. It is a matter of stating the breaking apart of a destiny that reigns in essence whose fragments and modalities—despite their diversity—belong the ones to the others, that is, . . . do not escape Order, as though the ends of the thread cut by the Parque were tied up again after being cut. . . . It is a matter of thinking the possibility of being torn out of essence. To go where? To go into what region? To stand on what ontological plane? But to be torn out of essence contests the unconditional privilege of the question: *where?* . . . [This is a] uniqueness. . . . for which the out-of-self, the difference relative to self, is non-indifference itself in the extra-ordinary recurrence of the pronominal.”⁴⁹

Outside the regimes of phenomenological intentionality or of the understanding of Being, transcendence gets expressed as extra-ordinary, as other-wise, or as a strange immanence. This is because transcendence, understood outside of time and representation, is a matter of sensibility and a subtle inflection of Being not so unlike Heidegger’s “bidding”: “We either hear it or don’t hear it.”⁵⁰ That too is Levinas’ wager, effected this time at a more rarefied level called transcendence and signification.

Levinas pushes Heidegger’s ambiguity toward sensibility, because he maintains that there is no essence behind the said. Thus, “Apophansis—the red reddens or A is A—does not double up the real. In predication, the essence of the red or the reddening as an essence becomes audible for the first time. The nominalized adjective [*or* adverb] is first understood in predication as an essence, and a temporalization properly so called. *Essence* is not only conveyed in the Said. . . . *There is no essence or entity behind the Said, behind the Logos.*”⁵¹

Here the debt to Heidegger is evident, but the attempt to radicalize his conception of entities and essence may be less so. But compare this statement of Levinas with his 1947 remark: “There are only things behind their objects in ages of poverty.” If the active quality of Being as essence resonates as what is said, we still have not glimpsed why it is—or to whom—we say anything. Transcendence, as an inflection of essence, as the slightest change in its unfolding, answers this question that admits no simple predicative answer. Thus transcendence, in the late work, synthesizes the corporeal with the conditions of possibility of spoken meaning, the latter made possible by alterity.

In light of this, bearing witness as a spectacle or as pro-phetism, which comes into Levinas’ philosophy performatively, here, is the way he lets the “otherwise than being” and extra-ontological responsibility for the other person *resonate*. “Poetry,” Levinas says, “is productive of

song, of resonance, and sonority, which are the verbalness of verb or essence" (*OBBE*, 40). But what is true of poetry is more radically the case in psalms, prophetism, or even, speaking to another in sincerity.

Yet Levinas' concept of the "amphibology" of saying suggests something else here. If Heidegger's Being withdraws even as it resonates in language, and requires a thinking altogether different from that which constructed metaphysics, thinking responsibility and the divided self that Levinas now calls "substitution" also require a change in thinking. And these are, like Heidegger's Being understood as resonance, open to philosophical doubt. Levinas' "substitution" also "glimmers" and withdraws when we intend it like an object. Levinas' "amphibology"—that is, his reciprocal indication—is like a wavering of meaning, inside and outside of conceptual constructions, with the fit we usually presume is ingredient in ordinary identification and predication.

Levinas borrows the notions of resonance, of what overflows substantives as a modality; he even borrows the idea that something could suggest itself while it concealed itself, and thereby be simply forgotten—all this and more he borrows from Heidegger.

Marlène Zarader, who explored Heidegger's originary language and wrote a long essay on his "unthought debt" to the "Hebraic heritage" in 1990, argues that Levinas not only borrowed structures from Heidegger's ontology, he did so fully aware of his choices. However, Levinas made his formal borrowings only to reinsert into Heidegger's structures a factual content that Heidegger had left behind, resulting in his "philosophy of the neuter," where, as Levinas puts it, Being is the neuter. The evacuated contents were partly biblical (Neo-testamentary, for Heidegger) and structures found in older mysticism and in a specifically Jewish way of reading biblical and Talmudic texts.⁵² What Levinas realized, Zarader argues, is that these contents—minimally, the Gospels and Pauline Epistles—themselves referred back to older writings, whose core was devoted to ethics and witnessing and to justice. In short, Levinas realized clearly what he intended to do in placing ethics as "first philosophy" there, where the thinking of Being is found in Heidegger's formal ontology.⁵³

Zarader also makes a cogent argument that Levinas could at times be a violent reader of Heidegger:

We might well say that Levinas 'forgets' everything that in Being, in Heidegger's sense, might be liable to bring [Heidegger] close to the Other . . . but this forgetting . . . is a decision. A reasoned decision that

takes the *exact measure* of [both men's] distance . . . 'to count' only 'the essential'. Now, the essential, in the heritage that comes [to Levinas] from Jerusalem . . . is precisely *not* pure structures but the Other, who is embodied or incarnate in them.⁵⁴

Levinas' last work thus becomes a labor of reinsertion, a "process of deneutralization" (*DI*, 161), because, for him, Heidegger's thinking of Being is a philosophy of the neuter, not the human. It is a formal ontology of donation without a face; of a call lacking concrete message, and a philosophy of Being that listens to a language, which "in a sense says effectively nothing other than itself" (*DI*, 161).

To deneutralize Heidegger's ontology, Levinas rethinks his conception of Being and transcendence, having recourse to Kant, Husserl, and even to Maurice Pradines (and, with Pradines, Merleau-Ponty is also in the wings). Levinas explores what resonates in language and what overflows language differently than Heidegger did. Against Heidegger's futurity, his themes of awaiting and passivity; against his transcendence as "stepping-over-to . . ."; against Heidegger's concept of "epochs" configuring the way in which Being shows itself historically⁵⁵—against all these, Levinas returns to Husserl's "so little explored manuscripts concerning the 'living present'" (*OBBE*, 33). Levinas argues for the initial "non-intentionality of the primal impression" (*OBBE*, 33), which, he says, "surprises us" even after it has been "synthesized"—whether by a Kantian "synthesis of apprehension" (*OBBE*, 34) or by a "passive synthesis" of flowing time-consciousness, understood here as the unreflective work of "retention."

"Kant caught sight of the diverse syntheses of the imagination," Levinas writes, "*before* every idealization of the sensible" (*OBBE*, 35).

These syntheses of the imagination could be said to make it possible that we re-cognize the repetition of responsibility and transcendence; they account for the discomfiture of the "other-in-the-same," as Levinas characterized transcendence in 1974. Further on, Levinas makes the arresting remark:

To speak of time in terms of flowing is to speak of time in terms of time, and not in terms of temporal events. The temporalization of time [clearly a Heideggerian notion]⁵⁶—as the openness by which sensation manifests itself, is effectively felt, modifies without altering the identity of the self, in doubling itself by a sort of diastasis [or a stretching out] of the punctual, and putting itself out of phase with itself—[all this temporalization] is neither an attribute nor a predicate expressing a causality

‘sensed’ as sensation. The temporal modification [occasioning transcendence] is not an event, not an action, nor the effect of a cause. (*OBBE*, 34; translation modified)

In this temporal diastasis, or stretching out—which, in Levinas, is proper to sensation *even before* sensation is synthesized and represented (that is, in the diastasis of sensation *before* it becomes an “experience” in Kant’s sense)—Levinas discovers the way past the authentic-inauthentic duality of the Being of the self that is *Dasein*. He sets this down as a *question* addressed to Heidegger’s ontology. In the temporalization of time as flow—Husserl’s locus of identification—Levinas asks: is sensation not other, or *more*, than the words by which we thematize it (whether it resonates in verbs or in nouns)? He asks: does this *more*, or this other-than, not point toward the ‘how’ mode, which is proper to sensation, rather than pointing to the ‘that’ mode, which is simply the fact *that* sensation happens? If what Levinas asks is fair, that is, if sensation in its lived immediacy resonates in language, but overflows or cannot fully enter into language, then how could we avoid accepting the idea of an adverbial quality, an otherwise, as intrinsic to sensation? Can we not see in this adverbial quality Levinas’ ontological unconscious, which attaches to Heidegger’s verbal quality of Being, but without changing Being *qua* Being? This adverbial and prereflective quality of sensation—Maurice Pradines’s “intelligence of sensation”—inflects, but does not alter, Being itself. Here, then, is a path out of Being. Here is a transcendence grounded on the vulnerability to the other and on a certain synthesis of memory. This time, Levinas’ transcendence is more modest than in 1961. It is as though he had dug his way around Being.

If, in 1935, pleasure and nausea were the modalities of Being, in which the being we *are* was disappointed in its transcendence or suffocated by its own existing and driven to exceed it repeatedly, then the 1974 temporalization of time within language, that “house of Being” in which we dwell, has opened a different way out. Language proves to have different levels. Its incipience lays in exposure, in making oneself a signifier even before consciously intending to speak. Exposure of this sort belongs to the intersubjective and sensuous interconnection that precedes ‘concepts’ of fraternity, for Levinas. The ultimate path ‘out of Being’ unfolds thanks to what Pradines called the “spirituality of sensation,” or sensibility, thus preceding Merleau-Ponty by about two decades. It unfolds thanks to Levinas’ search for the conditions of possibility of biblical prophetism, as ethical call *to the others*. In *Otherwise*

than Being, we see the final confluence of the phenomenological, the Talmudic, the existential (Heidegger), and psychological (Pradines) influences on Levinas. The last transcendence ventures a way around ontology. It offers no substantial exit, because it inflects the order of Being without denying it or returning to older conceptions of transcendence. If the path has changed, we must admit that the intent of Levinas' project evinces a remarkable constancy.

V. *After* Otherwise than Being

The two possible readings of Levinas, secular and religious, may be seen to give way, in the post 1974 essays, to a bolder language that does not hesitate to mention the "non-signifier," the "ambiguity" one calls God.⁵⁷ This is a shift in inflection, in my view, not an alteration of Levinas' philosophical stance. At no time does "God" become a being, even the highest of beings. At no point can transcendence and exposure to the other person be other than fragility and a wager, "the blinking and the dia-chrony of the enigma,"⁵⁸ *not* the "mystery" venerated by ecclesiastics. Everything said about this transcendence must be submitted promptly to Levinas' 'critique': words said thematize and hypostatize. This is as much a peril to Levinas as it was to Nietzsche ("the lightning" does *not* "flash"), words said must be unsaid or deconstructed, lest we take grammar as our god.

Part of three traditions—Jewish, phenomenological, and what we could call a post-Nietzschean French *élan*—the later works unfold a logic of traces and intensities. Like *Otherwise than Being*, many of them extend the Kantian critical impetus to values, indeed to the origin of meaning itself. In a brief essay entitled "Transcendence and Intelligibility" (1984), Levinas asks rhetorically whether the "intelligibility . . . of transcendence [might] not call to another phenomenology, though this were the destruction of the phenomenology of appearing and knowing [*de l'apparaître et du savoir*]."⁵⁹

This 'call', for all its Heideggerian redolence, is crucial. It turns around a "spiritual intrigue" in which the ambiguity of reference—human other? "God"?—remains undecidable. Thanks to this ambiguity, we cannot speak of "gods," Nietzschean or Heideggerian, even if they simply denote concrescences of value in human cultures and history. We also cannot designate the other as expression or gaze in the final writings. The other person—as obsession, per-secution or following nigh, proximity, recurrence into self—remains 'real', if you will,

in an order where consciousness still *identifies*. But the other person as moral 'force' and scission of self has a translation, if inadequate, in sensible-affective language as well. The figures of *Otherwise than Being* and subsequent writings denote this pre-intentional, sensuous 'thereness' of the other in 'me'. Kenosis, psychosis, substitution—the fluidity of linguistic and conceptual registers accommodates predication that is required to undo itself upon setting itself down. That, too, would be a transcendence that one could not integrate into a knowledge project, whether secular or theological. Investigations into the phenomenology of the sensuous excess of an icon's gaze, or of the presence of a resplendent light—inspired by, but subsequent to Levinas' innovations—move in a direction that does *not* belong to Levinas' fundamental intuition. The late writings work deconstructively, provocatively: if a phenomenology that gives up perception and intentionality is not possible, then so be it! "Not to philosophize," after all, "is still to philosophize," he reminds us.⁶⁰ The late writings come about once all has been said. They are often enactments, affairs of *style*, because style is a perspective, an optic, before it is a vehicle for some message. The theme of transcendence radiates through the later works until identification *gives way* before 'repetition' (understood as recurrence *and* the emergence of the new, as Deleuze argued). In the '70s and '80s, Levinas writes as if freed from his own project, and meaning takes on the rich texture of his enigma, or 'amphibology', which points simultaneously to the signifier "God" *and* to "the other"; it points to openness, vulnerability, action *and* to transcendence, dis-inter-estedness (i.e., not being caught up in the order of Being). These are Levinas' final explorations, in ordinary signification. They are not unlike the explorations of language attempted by Franz Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption* (1921).⁶¹ Writes Levinas in 1977:

The transcendence toward God is neither linear like the focus of intentionality nor teleological so as to end at the punctuality of a pole and thus stop at beings and substantives. Neither is it even initially dialogical, naming a 'you' [*tu*]. Is this transcendence toward God not already produced by ethical transcendence, so that desire and love might be made more perfect than satisfaction? It would be advisable nevertheless to ask here whether it is a question of transcendence toward God or a transcendence out of which a word such as 'God' alone reveals its meaning.⁶²

NOTES

1. This essay was made possible by the work and questions of Gabriel Malenfant, Université de Montréal.
2. This formulation of the subject in modern empiricism comes from Gilles Deleuze in his insightful *Empirisme et subjectivité: Essai sur la nature humaine chez Hume* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 90.
3. For a discussion of Husserl's own vacillation between a transcendental ego that was virtually an absence and a stronger conception of this, see Rudolf Bernet, *La vie du sujet: Recherches sur l'interprétation de Husserl dans la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 307–8.
4. Emmanuel Levinas, *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Vrin, 1963), 218; translated by André Orianne under the title *Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1985).
5. Maurice Pradines of Strasbourg is thanked in Levinas' dissertation, *La théorie de l'intuition*, for his "remarks on the philosophy of Husserl in his work on sensation," op. cit., 7. It was Pradines who urged Levinas to go to Freiburg to study with Husserl.
6. That is, it is a reading that eschews Freud's royal road to the unconscious as "primary process": dreams. It is impervious to the other 'clues' to the unconscious such as parapraxes and neuroses. Part of the explanation of Levinas' 'short' reading of Freud can be found in the influence of Pradines himself, who in teaching psychoanalysis (course of 1924), criticized it as making man "a *cochon triste*" with its "obscénité *promue scientifique*." See M.-A. Lescourret, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 56–63.
7. This metaphor comes from Husserl when he speaks of the internal consciousness of time as flow (containing fixed temporal positions in that flow) of ever-passing moments, all filled with immediate retention, anticipative protention, and associations—all of this 'flowing back' continuously.
8. A structural, cognitive 'subjectivity' and the noumenon represent the heritage of twentieth-century philosophy and psychology. And they come to represent the dilemma for twentieth-century philosophy. Kant's thing-in-itself remained a perversely abiding concern for his successors, from Schopenhauer and his noumenal Will, to Freud's teacher of cerebral anatomy Josef Meynert with his noumenal "force." It is less well known that Freud himself hoped to set his unconscious in the place of the Kantian noumenon. See L. Binswanger, *Sigmund Freud: Reminiscences of a Friendship*, trans. N. Guterman (New York: Gune and Stratton, 1957), 7–8.
9. In 1937, Levinas writes to his friend and mentor Jean Wahl that Heidegger's thought is of a "radicalism that is without precedent in the history of philosophy." In a 1992 interview with Roger-Pol Droit, Levinas said he would "always recall his studies with Heidegger with the greatest emotion." See Levinas, *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, ed. Pierre Hayat (Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1994), 13 and 208, respectively.
10. Already in 1933, many Jews and non-Jews realized that being or existence had changed perhaps forever. Leo Baeck, chief Rabbi of Berlin, recognized the meaning of Hitler's election on 30 January 1933: "das Ende des deutschen Judentums ist gekommen" [The end of German Jewry has come], see L. Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 145. What Levinas saw included the dozens of laws about *Rassenschänder* (race-defilers) that began even prior to Hitler's election.
11. Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 76; translated by Alphonso Lingis under the title *Existence and Existents* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2001). Hereafter cited as *EE* and *DEAE*, respectively with my translations.

12. J. Rolland, preface to *On Escape/De l'Évasion*, by E. Levinas, trans. B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); originally published as Levinas, *De l'Évasion*, ed. J. Rolland (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982). Hereafter cited as *OE* and *DE*, respectively, followed by page number.
13. In Heidegger's sense of both the "historizing of the world in its essential existent unity with Dasein" and "the 'historizing' within-the-world of what is ready-to-hand and present-at-hand" (things we discover in the already existing world) (cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], 440–41, ¶ 75). Hereafter cited as *BT*, followed by page number.
14. What he might do with Heidegger's conception of authentic historicity as "anticipatory repetition," that repetition that "deprives the 'today' of its [lost] character as present and weans one from the conventionalities of the 'they,'" seems to have to wait for its answer until repetition is reconceptualized in Levinas' *Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Publishers, 1974); hereafter cited as *OBBE*, followed by page number. See *BT*, 443–44.
15. Heidegger's use of binary distinctions is not the end of the story in his ontology; he recognizes the limitations of spatialized binaries as well.
16. *BT*, 236.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 233.
19. Recall Heidegger's remarkable claim that "[o]nly because Dasein is anxious in the very depths of its being, does it become possible for anxiety to be elicited physiologically," *BT*, 234.
20. Jean Améry, "On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew," in *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella Rosenfeld (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 100–101. Hereafter cited as *AML*.
21. See Levinas' 1977 essay "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," first published in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), esp. 199ff. Also published later in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary Mole (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); originally published as *L'au-delà du verset* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1982).
22. Indeed, Levinas' rejoinder to Améry might well be this, "A religious age or an atomic age—these characterizations of the modern world . . . hide a deeper trend. In spite of the violence and madness we see every day, we live in the age of philosophy. . . . Beyond the progress of science, which uncovers the predictable play of forces within matter, human freedoms themselves . . . are regulated by a rational order" (see Levinas, "Judaism and the Present," in *The Levinas Reader*, 253).
23. This resonates with something Levinas points out elsewhere, that one cannot "desert Judaism," despite prosperity, assimilation, national sympathies.
24. For an elaborate discussion of this debt, see Marlène Zarader, *La Dette impensée: Heidegger et l'héritage hébraïque* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), 163–83. Hereafter cited as *DI*.
25. *In fine*, Heidegger's existential "care" is implicitly present in Levinas' analyses, but it is obscured by the primacy of the desire to get out of, or lighten the weight of, Being.
26. Levinas' discussions of Bergson are numerous. A revealing one can be found in his 1984 essay, *Transcendance et intelligibilité* (Geneva: Éditions Labor et Fidès, 1984), 20. There, Levinas argues that Bergson has given us a new mode of access to transcendence, and to a certain spirituality *not* borrowed from knowledge, in his concept of *durée*. However, *durée* proves paradoxical so far as it entails pure change within consciousness without any foundation in a self. "Duration . . . is pure change

without our having to seek out an identical substrate beneath this change. An upsurge in oneself of incessant novelty. The absolute novelty of the new. The spirituality of transcendence that does not come back to an assimilative act of consciousness. The uninterrupted upsurge of novelties would make sense, precisely beyond knowledge, by way of its absolute . . . novelty" (ibid.). Clearly, the notion of transcendence adumbrated here is close to that of Levinas. But it lacks his *soi* shadow from which transcendence arises.

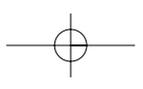
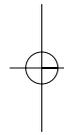
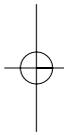
27. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutman (La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 1936), 54; originally published as *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1997), 377. And this was something a Christian writer, like Kierkegaard, could not fathom. In his 1844 work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, he exclaims that he cannot make the slightest sense of the presence of a speaking serpent in the Garden.
28. See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book I, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1982), 109–12. Husserl writes there, "all of that does not imply that there *must* be some world. . . . It is instead quite conceivable . . . that there might no longer be any world."
29. Maurice Pradines, *Philosophie de la Sensation*, vol. 1, *Le Problème de la sensation* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928); vol. 2, *La Sensibilité élémentaire* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1932).
30. In his *La Pensée juive*, vol. 2, *De l'État politique à l'éclat prophétique* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1987), 155–73. Armand Abécassis speaks of the prophetic utopia sketched by Isaiah. He points out that for a long time, but especially in Isaiah, the holiness of YHWH should be read in light of justice. But this justice is distinguished from natural justice, just as the law of the Torah must be "distinguished from the natural law." This utopia, part of the Talmudic readings of the prophets, is present in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. In this reading, transcendence is aligned with ethics and even more so with justice.
31. This duality of alterities may be explained by the influence of Husserl's Fifth Meditation in the *Cartesian Meditations*, wherein the other was perceptually constituted by a phenomenologically reduced ego as *alter*, but *alter* with sufficient perceivable similarity to the self that this *alter* presented itself first as an *alter ego*, an other 'me'. If this constitution of the other, starting from a common world, held plausibility for Levinas, then the other who confronts the self in conversation, will evince an additional characteristic: it will prove unassimilable to intentional constitution by virtue of its unpredictable behavior and communication.
32. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 200; originally published as *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 175. Hereafter cited as *TI*, with English pagination followed by the French.
33. It also includes a spatiality that is 'experiential' in this sense: if 'I *feel* the arrival of the other, and her facing me, as responsibility, it is as though the interval between us entailed a "curvature" (upward) "of intersubjective space," a curvature that demarcates the face-to-face as not firstly horizontal exchange, *even if the curvature* involves a singling out sometimes so harrowing that I may wish to be wholly rid of it, strike it, etc.
34. See Levinas' discussion of *durée* in *Transcendence et intelligibilité*, 19–21.
35. See J. Derrida, "Le mot d' accueil," in *Adieu, à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997); translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass under the title *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
36. The notion of decision [about what conflict summons war] and the *doctrine* of decisionism in politics are central to Schmitt's *Politische Theologie* (München: Duncker

and Humblot, 1979); translated by George Schwab under the title *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); translated by Jean-Louis Schlegel under the title *Théologie politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 16. The first chapter of that work defines sovereignty thus: "Is sovereign, he who decides in the exceptional situation. Only this definition can satisfy the notion of sovereignty as a limit notion . . . a notion of the extreme sphere" (*Théologie politique*, 16). The extreme sphere—understood as the consummation of the friend-enemy distinction—is politics itself. Here, it is "a general notion of the theory of the State, and not some proclaimed emergency" (*ibid.*).

The notion of a 'decision' about all "ontology" in light of the "weak critiques" offered by neo-Kantianism and with a view to an authentic unfolding of ontology from its beginning is also found in Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol. 65 of Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1989), 90–103; 203–6, §§44–49; 104–6. Such a decision—the term is central to the *Beiträge*—is necessitated by the end of metaphysics itself, as completed by Nietzsche (p. 206). These provide glimpses into the *context* in which Levinas locates his prefatory remarks about Being and violence.

37. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, translated with an introduction by Albert Hofstadter, rev. ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 298–99, §20, "Temporality." This volume was worked out between 1926 and 1927 and conceived originally as part of the plan for *Being and Time*, specifically the intended division 3 of part 1 supposed to be entitled "Time and Being." Along with *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1925–1926), this work sketches Heidegger's early departure from Husserl's phenomenology, though it retains, for transcendence, the priority of Dasein's being-in-the-world.
38. Schmuël Trigano, "Levinas et le projet de la philosophie-juive," *Rue Descartes* (Paris), vol. 19, Emmanuel Levinas, ed. Danièle Cohen-Levinas (1998).
39. Levinas, *Transcendance et intelligibilité*, 15.
40. Armand Abécassis is professor emeritus at the Université de Bordeaux. Among numerous publications is the remarkable four-volume *La pensée juive*. I am citing from vol. 2, *De l'état politique à l'éclat prophétique* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1987), 156.
41. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Les imprévus de l'histoire*, edited with introduction by Paul Hayat (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1994), 201.
42. Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), 124; translated by B. Bergo under the title *God, Death and Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
43. Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 75.
44. As Abécassis remarks about Isaiah, "the spiritual qualities of the coming king will distinguish him from all kings past and present, and these qualities will be given definitively. He will exercise, thanks to these his primordial function: justice. The latter is a gift of YHWH" (*De l'état politique à l'éclat prophétique*, 159). This is the king of prophetic utopianism. It is also the structure that emerges in Levinas with the transition from responsibility for the other to the weighing of responsibilities in intersubjectivity.
45. Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, 138 (first emphasis added).
46. See Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 214.
47. Martin Heidegger, "Le Rhin," in *Les Hymnes de Hölderlin: "la Germanie et le Rhin,"* trans. François Fédiér et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 219, section 18.
48. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, vol. 10 of Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1997); translated by Reginald Lilly under the title *The Principle of Reason* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 69, Lecture 9.

49. Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 9–10 (my translation). *OBBE*, 8.
50. See note 48 above.
51. *OBBE*, 39.
52. See Zarader, *DI*, 105–6.
 Levinas thinks that by concentrating on the silent language (of Being) “without knowing it, Heidegger would have ‘Judaized’ the Greeks” (*Dieu, la mort et le temps*, 173).
 Compare the above with Levinas’ uncontroversial remark that “[t]he Revelation is this continual process of hermeneutics, discovering new landscapes in the written or oral Word” (see “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” in *The Levinas Reader*, 199).
 Of the ancient heritage of the Gospels and especially the language and conceptuality of the Pauline letters, see Zarader, “Le Problème de la transmission” (*DI*, 163–83). She writes there, “It is remarkable that Heidegger treats the New Testamentary text as a univocal point of departure, which should have no *background*” (*DI*, 174). But the biblical text as a whole constitutes the background of the New Testament, as the German theologians (cf. Bultmann) and biblicists of Heidegger’s time realized. More surprising is that Heidegger would elide this ground, given “the attention constantly devoted by him, from his early years of training, to the dimension of the *original*” (ibid.). Zarader’s discussion of the heritage is richer than I could begin to show in a footnote.
53. Zarader, *DI*, 158.
54. Ibid., 159.
55. Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, 137–38.
56. See *BT*, chap. 5, “Temporality and Historicality,” 427ff.; 374–75. Heidegger writes, “The movement [*Bewegtheit*] of existence is not the motion [*Bewegung*] of something present-at-hand. It is definable in terms of the way Dasein stretches along. The specific movement in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along, we call ‘*historizing*.’” Further, the Self or “who” of Dasein consists of Self-constancy, which is “grounded in a specific temporalizing of temporality” (*BT*, 427, 375). This is original historicality, as opposed to history as the object of a science. And this Self, unlike Levinas’ *soi-même*, is inauthentically dispersed but authentically constant to self in a way that the later Levinas would not accept.
57. See his “God and Philosophy,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 56, 78. The talk “God and Philosophy” was presented first at the Université de Lille in March 1973, prior to the publication of *Otherwise than Being*.
58. Ibid., 78.
59. Levinas, *Transcendance et intelligibilité*, 18 (my translation).
60. Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 55.
61. For an elegant discussion of responsibility in Rosenzweig and of his anti-Idealist conceptual reconfigurations, see Bernhard Casper, “Responsibility Rescued,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988), 89–105.
62. Levinas, “Hermeneutics and Beyond,” in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 108; originally published in the proceedings of a colloquium held in Rome, *Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre international des études humanistes* (Paris: Aubier, 1977).



ARTICLES

