

Beyond Intentionality?: Levinas's Concept of *Ethical Sinngebung*

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ABSTRACT: In one of the sections of *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas expressly mentions the need to go “beyond intentionality” as far as the description of the ethical rapport goes. Such language on the part of Levinas has compelled certain commentators to maintain that Levinas “has gone beyond the notion of intentionality.” This abandonment of phenomenological description brings to the fore, however, a number of problems. Indeed, if the other does not allow herself to be reduced to a phenomenological description, how then are we to account for that other? This essay will attempt to respond to these questions and show that, while Levinas does rework phenomenological conceptuality, he does not abandon phenomenological discourse in his descriptions of the ethical encounter. Our demonstration will focus more precisely on the concept of intentionality which, we shall show, is never abandoned by Levinas. Rather, it is reworked by Levinas in order to account for the other in a way that respects her alterity, thereby allowing for an ethical *Sinngebung* to take place.

KEY WORDS: Levinas, intentionality, *Sinngebung*, phenomenology, alterity

In one of the sections of *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas expressly mentions the need to go “beyond intentionality” as far as the description of the ethical rapport goes.¹ In the paragraphs that follow this statement, Levinas exposes the fact that the Husserlian account of intentionality—as an act of representation on the part of a subject—cannot account for the “proximity of the face to face,”² that is to say, for the alterity of the human other. The Husserlian version of intentionality is one where the alterity of the other is essentially recuperated by consciousness. The human other, however, necessarily “resists the indiscretion of intentionality,”³ according to Levinas, and refuses any attempt to grasp or master her alterity. Thus, it would seem that, according to Levinas, the phenomenological language of description must be abandoned in order to ac-

count for an encounter with the human other. As far as ethical discourse, it seems necessary, from these passages, to go “beyond intentionality” and resort to other means of description as far as the human face is concerned.

It is such language on the part of Levinas that has compelled certain commentators such as Vasey to maintain that Levinas “has gone beyond the notion of intentionality.”⁴ This abandonment of phenomenological description brings to the fore, however, a number of problems. Indeed, if the other does not allow herself to be reduced to a phenomenological description, how then are we to account for that other? How can a discourse be possible about that other if there is no phenomenalization possible of that other. This is also Drabinski’s question to Levinas: “How can alterity signify without the constitutional apparatus? How can appearance be thought without the structures of the subject to whom something appears?”⁵ Other commentators have also objected to this seeming abandonment of phenomenology on the part of Levinas. DeGreef, for instance, wonders how Levinas can maintain a discourse on the other while transgressing all phenomenological conceptuality.⁶

This essay will attempt to respond to these questions and show that, while Levinas does rework phenomenological conceptuality, he does not abandon phenomenological discourse in his descriptions of the ethical encounter. Our demonstration will focus more precisely on the concept of intentionality which, we shall show, is never abandoned by Levinas. Rather, it is reworked by Levinas in order to account for the other in a way that respects her alterity. It is thus for an “intentionality of a wholly different type”⁷ that Levinas strives, and our work will attempt to articulate the structure of that intentionality in Levinas. Interestingly, we shall find that in the development of this intentionality Levinas never abandons the hyletico-noetic structure described in Husserl but adopts that very same structure, albeit in a profoundly different sense, in his own descriptions of the “intentionality of transcendence.”⁸ Thus, our interpretation rejoins that of Colette who maintains that it is in deepening the transcendental question, and not abandoning it, that Levinas finds ethics.⁹

Our essay will endeavor, first, to outline the structure of intentionality as presented in Husserl’s work and as commented upon by Levinas in his *Theory of Intuition*. We shall first examine the dual hyletico-noetic structure of intentionality as exposed by Husserl, only to find that this structure is not adapted, according to Levinas, to the dimension of the face. We shall then address Levinas’s seeming desire to depart from the field of phenomenology and to abandon the concept *intentionality* as expressed in several of his works. Finally, we shall argue that, although Levinas remains critical of the Husserlian intentional structure, he nevertheless draws precisely on that structure and remains profoundly faithful to Husserlian analyses in his descriptions of the encounter with the face.

I. HUSSERL'S INTENTIONALITY

The concept of intentionality is not, of course, the intellectual property of Husserl. It existed already in the middle ages and is a term originally coined by Brentano. In Brentano's case, however, intentionality was no more than a property of consciousness: The property for a given consciousness to transcend itself and open itself up to exteriority. However, consciousness retained, in Brentano's time, a largely substantial connotation, that is to say, a nature of its own, distinct from materiality and estranged to it. As such, however, consciousness could only artificially transcend itself towards materiality and never, as a distinct substance, genuinely engage with it. Indeed, how can a spiritual substance ever truly reach and grasp materiality? The problem of the possibility for consciousness to genuinely transcend itself and reach exteriority remains insoluble in Brentano's time, and this in spite of his novel concept of intentionality.

We are indebted to Husserl for his reworking of Brentano's concept of intentionality in order to allow for a more genuine self-transcendence on the part of consciousness. For Husserl, intentionality is not a mere property of a consciousness pre-existing its movement of transcendence as a substance distinct from materiality, but rather constitutes the very essence of consciousness. Consciousness *is* intentional, it *is* precisely this movement of transcendence. Commenting on this character of consciousness in his commentary on Husserl's thought, Levinas explains: "A characteristic aspect of the existence of consciousness as it is then given to us is intentionality: the fact that all consciousness is not only consciousness but also consciousness *of* something."¹⁰ Consciousness is in this context no longer defined as substance, but as subject. Consciousness is not another being among beings, albeit of a profoundly different nature than material being: It is a verb, a movement of transcendence. And as such, it is essentially contact with exteriority, with otherness.

It is precisely this redefinition of consciousness that will constitute, according to Levinas, Husserl's main contribution, the ramifications of which will be further explored by Levinas in his own work on the ethical encounter with the other. The concept of intentionality must then be seen as a central concept in the subsequent philosophy of Levinas. But the structure of this movement towards exteriority must be further explored. For Husserl, this movement is two-fold. There is a hyletic moment which describes the sensible moment whereby consciousness comes into its first contact with exteriority. And there is a noetic moment, whereby consciousness gives a signification to the sensible given and constitutes a transcendent object. By transcendent, however, Husserl does not mean an object distinct and absolute from consciousness. Just as consciousness is essentially contact with exteriority, likewise, exteriority is essentially relative to a consciousness. The transcendent object remains, for Husserl, relative to the

consciousness that constitutes it, and transcends it only inasmuch as this constitution is, according to Husserl, infinite—the infinite facets or *Abschattungen* of the object ever exceeding the constitution process of consciousness.¹¹ We will see Levinas's reservations regarding this definition of transcendence as relative below.

Coming back to the structure of intentionality, we must then first turn to the hyletic moment. Husserl will reveal a certain ambiguity with regards to this first moment of transcendence. In the *Ideas*, the hyletic moment is no more than a mere content of consciousness serving as matter for the noetic constitution. As such, it would appear then that the genuine moment of transcendence is reserved for the noetic moment whereby a transcendent object is constituted. Later Husserlian texts, however, revise this view of the hyletic moment as a mere *given*, describing the hyletic instead as actually *giving* a sense to consciousness, that is to say, as *acting upon* consciousness, awakening it to exteriority, rather than being merely *acted upon*. In the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, Husserl goes as far as to say that the hyletic moment is the source of all consciousness, and constitutes the primordial point of awakening of consciousness to transcendence.¹²

Levinas will comment on precisely this text when he speaks of a “deeper intentionality proper to consciousness.”¹³ The sensible is not merely a matter for the noetic moment, but is actually itself apprehended by an intentionality of a wholly different sort than that of the noetic moment. The intentionality of the sensible is, however, not active but receptive and as such, effectuates a different structure than the noetic/theoretical intentionality described by Husserl. Such an intentionality has a retentive structure rather than a constitutive structure and will come to play an important role in Levinas's working out of the intentionality of the face. Suffice it to say at this point that it is the second sense of the hyletic as a source-point of consciousness, as the moment of awakening of consciousness, that Levinas will retain in his own recuperation of the Husserlian concept of intentionality. The moment of transcendence occurs then already at the level of the hyletic moment and has its own specific intentional structure.

The hyletic must however be compounded with the noetic moment if the object is to find itself constituted as such. And so, to the hyletic, Husserl adds a noetic component whereby the sensations are given an objective meaning in an act of signification on the part of consciousness (*Sinngebung*). The object thereby finds itself constituted in all of its visible and intelligible properties during the noetic act of constitution. Levinas explains: “The flow of consciousness does not however consist only of the hyletic level. We can distinguish in consciousness an animating act which gives to the hyletic phenomena a transcendent meaning: they signify something from the external world. . . . [T]he act is an element which has a mode of existing identical to that of hyletic data . . . yet it gives a meaning to the flow of consciousness. It intends something other than itself; it transcends itself.”¹⁴ The exteriority of the object thus remains, as aforementioned, relative to an act of

constitution. The moment of awakening whereby consciousness originally finds itself in contact with an exteriority that precedes it, is here recuperated in the act of constitution into a visible and graspable entity entirely relative to consciousness.

One can already anticipate the problems that such a definition of transcendence will bring to the fore. Indeed, this is where traditionally Levinas is seen as parting ways with Husserl. For Levinas, the reduction of transcendence to the constitutive action on the part of consciousness reduces its alterity to the work of a consciousness: "Where all *Sinngebung* was the work of a sovereign ego, the other could in fact only be absorbed in a representation."¹⁵ Reducing the meaning of a given exteriority to the work of a sovereign consciousness amounts to absorbing the other into a product of consciousness. Commenting further on this problem, Levinas explains: "Intentionality in the aiming at and thematizing of being—that is, in presence—is a return to self as much as an issuing forth from self. In thought understood as vision, knowledge, and intentionality, intelligibility thus signifies the reduction of the Other to the Same."¹⁶ Far from really transcending itself, consciousness in the Husserlian sense remains entrenched within immanence and within its own categories of thought. It never really discovers exteriority; rather, it reduces it to its own representations. Thus, according to MacAvoy, "this implies that there is effectively no meaning which *in principle* outstrips consciousness; nothing lies beyond consciousness. From Levinas's perspective this is problematic, for it indicates that there is no beyond, there is no infinite, there is no alterity."¹⁷

II. BEYOND INTENTIONALITY

And so, it is possible at this point of the Husserlian account to imagine a parting of ways between Levinas and Husserl. Although the concept of intentionality constituted an interesting breakthrough as to a possible genuine rapport with transcendence—with all of the possibilities opened by the moment of sensibility—it remained entrenched in the Same; consciousness retains the last word and exteriority remains relative to the activities of this consciousness. Although intentionality opened up some interesting possibilities as far as the structure of the movement towards the human other, it cannot be retained as such in the description of the face. In a section entitled "Beyond Intentionality" Levinas explains his refusal to maintain the concept of intentionality as thematized by Husserl: "This awakening must not be interpreted immediately as intentionality. . . . [T]he irreducible alterity of the other man, in his face, is strong enough to resist the synchronization of the noetic-noematic correlation and to signify the immemorial and the infinite."¹⁸

In other words, according to Levinas, the face of the other is such that it resists any attempt at elucidation and comprehension on the part of consciousness. Husserl's theoretical intentionality, whereby the object is comprehended and

grasped in its intelligibility by consciousness, is ill adapted here to the enigma of the face. The noetic moment of the intentional movement fails to account for the alterity of the face, and as such, never really intends it. As such, the face “disconcerts intentionality,”¹⁹ it resists its attempts to grasp it and to give it meaning. The other, in her otherness and transcendence, resists the “indiscretion of intentionality.”²⁰ While the concept of intentionality succeeds as far as material objects are concerned, its structure remains, according to Levinas, profoundly inadequate to the dimension of the face. It would then seem that Levinas is aiming at doing away with phenomenological conceptuality and discourse. When the phenomenological discourse reveals itself as incompetent to describe the ethical dimension of the face, we must then go “beyond intentionality.”²¹ But can Levinas leave phenomenology behind without destroying the very possibility of speaking of the face and of its alterity?

This is precisely Derrida’s critique of Levinas when Levinas distances himself from phenomenology. According to Derrida, by distancing himself from the phenomenological discourse and conceptuality, Levinas is depriving himself of any possibility of discourse and, as such, of speaking about the face and the structure of its approach: “The philosopher . . . must speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is by risking the worst violence.”²² Levinas himself recognizes the dangers of abandoning phenomenological discourse. Indeed, to abandon the possibility of describing the other and the mode of her encounter is to abandon the very prerequisite of any concern for that other. To evade the question of the other is nothing less than to fall into indifference: “In what sense then does the absolutely other concern me? Must we with the—from the first unthinkable—contact with transcendence and alterity renounce philosophy?”²³ Were we to continue to do philosophy, however, “can there be something as strange as an experience of the absolutely exterior?”²⁴ Were we to attempt this very endeavor, would we still be able to retain the concept of intentionality?

This is precisely Drabinski’s question: “Is intentionality genuinely adequate to the radical non-adequation of the thought of alterity? How can intentional analysis legitimately be ascribed to the language of alterity?”²⁵ Yet, Drabinski allows, with Levinas, that such a description is unavoidable: “The question of how to articulate transcendence outside the boundaries of the transcendental ego must first ask this question: How can alterity signify without the constitutional apparatus? How can appearance be thought without the structures of the subject to whom something appears?”²⁶ This is incidentally Levinas’s own interrogation: “What can then be this relationship with an absence radically withdrawn from disclosure and from dissimulation? And what is this absence that renders visitation possible,

an absence not reducible to hiddenness, since it involves a signifyingness—a signifyingness in which the Other is not converted into the Same?²⁷

Interestingly, this last quote retains phenomenological language, all the while seeking to go beyond it. It is this back and forth movement—at times retaining and at times rejecting phenomenological discourse—that will constitute the ambiguity of Levinas's stance before phenomenology. There is then not so much a rejection of phenomenology as a desire on the part of the philosopher to expand and rework the phenomenological concepts in order to account for the otherness of the other. Thus, according to Levinas, there is a need to articulate an “ethical *Sinngebung*”²⁸ that remains respectful of the other, where there is a genuine act of transcendence of the self towards the other, where the self does not remain locked up in its idealist position. There is need for the “the subject [to] no longer remain locked in the immobility of the idealist subject, but [to] find itself drawn into situations that cannot be broken down into the representations it could make for itself of these representations.”²⁹

The question remains, however, as to the possibility of such a reworking of phenomenological discourse. Levinas himself wonders at this: “Can there be something as strange as an experience of the absolutely exterior,” inasmuch as “this experience would still remain a movement of the Same, the movement of an I”?³⁰ Such an experience, if it is to be described, must account for the alterity of the other, and this in spite of its originating in the experience of a self! This is then the challenge that Levinas has set himself: To describe the encounter with the transcendent face, without discarding the role of the intentional self, yet, all the while preserving the alterity of the other! And this, without ever doing away with the concept of intentionality—albeit profoundly transformed! Thus, Levinas does not do away with phenomenology, but rather inserts himself in its line of thinking. It is then out of the question for Levinas to renounce the idea of intentionality. In the words of Dastur, what must be found is another sense of intentionality:³¹ “In his rejection of the rules of Husserl's method and the parameters set by the Husserlian conception of the transcendental, Levinas will nevertheless retain the methodological work of intentional analysis.”³² We now turn to the how of this ambiguity.

III. AN INCARNATE SINNGEBUNG

It is obvious at this point that the intentionality of the face will not take place on a theoretical level as in Husserl. Rather, we shall see that, for Levinas, the intentional movement towards the human other will take place on a sensible level—both at the hyletic and noetic levels—through a very specific type of intentionality, an “intentionality of a wholly different type.”³³ We have seen in the analyses above how the face escapes all theoretical attempts to grasp or elucidate it, thereby marking

the impossibility of a rapport, that is to say, of a cognitive rapport. For Husserl, however, any relationship presupposes a prior comprehension and objectification of its object. To say then that there can be no cognitive rapport would imply, for Husserl, that there can be no rapport at all, whether ethical, erotic, and so forth. This is where Levinas differs from Husserl. According to Levinas, a rapport is possible with the other even though there is no prior theoretical comprehension of the latter. Indeed, such a comprehension of the other would in fact, for Levinas, amount to an occultation of the other qua other. The other as intelligible would be missed in her alterity and therefore never genuinely encountered. There must be then another level of encounter: This level, we shall see, will be the sensible level.

Such an account of the sensible will necessitate however a profound reworking of the Husserlian account of the sensible. Up until now, we have seen that the sensible held a secondary role for Husserl, as the support for the primordial act of transcendence on the part of the self—the noetic movement. The sensible was no more, in the *Ideas*, than an inert given and material for intentional constitution. This understanding of the sensible, however, misses the essence of the sensible, for Levinas, that is to say, its transcendent signification. According to Levinas, the sensible has a much deeper significance than to constitute mere matter for intentional analysis. This, incidentally, was already intuited by Husserl who came to see, in the later work of the *Lessons*, the sensible as the primordial point of awakening of consciousness to exteriority. For Levinas, this is precisely the significance and role of the sensible: To jolt a heretofore self-enclosed consciousness into the presence of an exteriority.

Thus, for Levinas, the sensible has a much more profound meaning than to constitute mere matter for intentionality: “The intentionality involved in disclosure . . . would not constitute the sole or even the dominant signification of the sensible. The dominant meaning of sensibility should indeed enable us to account for its secondary signification as a sensation . . . [but] the dominant signification of sensibility is already caught sight of in vulnerability, and it will be shown in the characteristic of proximity.”³⁴ In other words, although the sensible does play a role in the comprehension of being, it signifies primordially as a vulnerability of the self to exteriority. The sensible signifies essentially inasmuch as it points to an essential characteristic of the self: its vulnerability and exposition to otherness. More than constituting the matter of intentional analysis, the sensible constitutes the very *lieu* of metaphysics, of a first awareness of otherness. As such, the sensible can be said to have primordially an ethical significance, rather than a merely epistemological one.

Ethics is then at the very origin of any encounter with the world, be it that of objects or of the face. It is in this sense, incidentally, that Levinas meant the words “metaphysics precedes ontology.”³⁵ At the point of origin of any encounter with exteriority lies the ethical moment of awakening to otherness which takes

place at the sensible moment. We shall see that the ethical awakening to the face of the other will likewise take place on the level of the sensible, but that, unlike other objects of the world, the face will not allow itself to be subsumed under the noetic movement but rather will profoundly disrupt the self's categories to the point of rendering impossible any attempt at intelligibility. Indeed, as any object of the world, the face as expression "summons me, asks for me, lays claim to me."³⁶ This summons, however, is no longer for the self's comprehension and grasp, but shakes the very foundations of the theoretical self, the very conditions of possibility of grasping and comprehending. The summons of the face differs from the summons of other objects in that it puts into question the very prerogative of the self to grasp and comprehend the world, summoning it rather to release and be dispossessed of this world! While the other objects of the world merely summon the self to turn towards them and grasp them, the face undoes precisely this heretofore unquestioned stance of the self as "master and possessor of the universe."

The sensible moment of the face thus does not merely jolt or awaken the self, it undoes its very core and center. Levinas speaks to this effect of a "breakup of identity" brought about by the sensible encounter with the other: "The breakup of essence is ethics. . . . [T]his breakup of identity, this changing of being into signification, that is into substitution, is the subject's subjectivity, or its subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility."³⁷ The sensible moment of the face thus no more awakens the self to its powers—as is the case of the common object—but, on the contrary, dispossesses it precisely of these powers of grasping and comprehending. Levinas speak of this stripping of the self's powers by the sensible solicitation of the face as a "putting into question of this wild and naïve freedom"³⁸ whereby the self sees its heretofore unlimited theoretical stance limited by the enigma of the face. Far from awakening the self's powers, the face interrupts those powers in an "overturning of the egoism of the Same."³⁹

The question of course, at this point, is how a noetic movement can possibly be enacted in the context of such an undoing of the self. Inasmuch as the self has just been stripped of its noetic and theoretical capabilities, how is a response of the self possible? How do we not end up with an invasion of the self's domain by the other and arrive at a genuine ethical rapport wherein the self is no more neutralized by the other than the other is by the self? These are precisely Haar's questions to the Levinassian descriptions of the undoing of the self in the sensible moment of the face's solicitation: "If the ego is herself deprived of every center, possessed by the other, from which place or from which absence of place can she answer to and for the other . . . can she or he bring something to the other if the other has been traumatized to the nuclear fusion of her or his own psychism?"⁴⁰ In other words, inasmuch as the self finds itself undone by the other, what resources

does it have left to respond to the other inasmuch as the self finds itself deposited by the other? How can it still constitute the point of origin of an intentional act?

We shall see, however, that it is precisely this putting into question of the self that will constitute the intentional structure of a possible experience of the other. Indeed, Levinas himself observes that the “putting into question”⁴¹ of the self is “not reduced to this negative movement.”⁴² In other words, the putting into question does not constitute the end of the possibility of a rapport, but precisely its condition! Levinas says this more clearly in another passage: “The putting into question of the self is precisely the welcome of the absolutely other.”⁴³ In other words, the putting into question of the self constitutes precisely the moment whereby the possibility presents itself for the other to be apprehended in the world of the self. And indeed, in a world heretofore entirely revolving around the self and entirely submitted to its masterful and comprehending grasp, only a loss of the powers of the self, a contraction of the self, a de-centeredness of the self can open up a space for the other within the world of the self, thereby making possible a ‘presentation’ or ‘manifestation’ of the other within that world.

But this loss of the powers of the self does not constitute yet as such an intentional movement. For there to be intentionality, there must be a response on the part of the self, an action, an initiative on the part of the self. For Levinas, however, the loss of powers on the part of the self does not neutralize its capacity to act, or its initiative, but on the contrary summons it: “The putting into question of the Same by the Other is a summons to respond.”⁴⁴ In other words, the undoing of the self, far from incapacitating it to respond, in fact constitutes a sollicitation for the self to respond to the other. The putting into question of the self’s central and possessive stance by the other’s claim on that very world, constitutes in fact an invitation to generosity, an invitation for the self to share its heretofore sole possession of the world with another: “The presence before a face, my orientation toward the other, can lose the avidity proper to the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands.”⁴⁵ That is to say, while the face cannot be encountered on the level of the theoretical gaze, it can be approached through the generous response of the self whereby it opens up a space for the other within its world.

Thus, the undoing of the self is not enough for a space to be opened for the other in the world. The sensible moment of undoing the self constitutes a rupture of the self’s categories, but it does not yet enact a welcome by the self of the other. For there to be such a welcome, the self must acknowledge the other’s claim on its world and open itself up to it in a stance of generosity, thereby responding to the summons of the other. Only when there is such a response on the part of the self to the other can we properly speak of an intentional movement on the part of the self. But we will have to speak here of a radically different intentional movement than the one described by Husserl. Indeed, “the intentionality of transcendence

is unique in its kind.”⁴⁶ Such an intentionality no longer takes its point of origin in a central and masterful self, but rather sees itself inspired by the solicitation of the other.

This revision of intentionality stems of course from a renewed look at the sensible as having its own intentionality, its own significance apart from the noetic moment. The face signifies already before any noetic movement on the part of the self. As such, the sensible moment of the face’s solicitation is not here *animated* by an intentional act, but, on the contrary, the sensible moment of the face is itself *animating*, that is to say, it animates the self’s generosity: “The animation, the very pneuma of the psyche, alterity in identity is the identity of a body exposed to the other, becoming for the other, the possibility of giving.”⁴⁷ What characterizes the essence of consciousness, what constitutes its very impulse is thus no longer a spontaneous initiative on the part of the self to give meaning to the objects around it, but rather its capacity to receive inspiration, or movement from another. As such, for Levinas, “signification precedes *Sinngebung*.”⁴⁸ There is a meaning, a sense, more ancient than that which is bestowed by consciousness on its objects: The ethical sense, or orientation, inspired by the other’s solicitation of the self and without which the self would have remained in its dogmatic and solipsistic slumber.

But the structure of the response on the part of the self to this sensible solicitation will also radically differ from the Husserlian noetic moment. Rather than constituting a merely theoretical sense bestowed from a self as origin or foundation of all meaning—a *Sinngebung*—we witness here an incarnate *Sinngebung*⁴⁹ or, more precisely a *Selbstgebung*: An incarnate response which is no longer a mere gift of meaning (*Sinngebung*) but a gift of self (*Selbstgebung*). The response is no longer on a merely accidental level—the theoretical level—but on an essential level—an incarnate level which involves the self’s very being and stance in the world. While the self retained its essential central stance in the world in its theoretical *Sinngebung*, the response that is solicited by the face undoes this centrality, de-centers the self, constitutes an essential and profound undoing of the self’s categories and structures. Indeed, the response solicited here by the face enacts the very inversion of the self’s stance—hitherto characterized by centrality, possession and mastery—into one of exile, dispossession and abdication of its powers of comprehension.

But this abdication of the self’s powers in no way paralyze it. Rather it opens up new possibilities of action and transcendence in the world: “The idea of infinity in consciousness is an overflowing of a consciousness whose incarnation offers new powers onto a soul no longer paralytic—powers of welcome, of gift, of full hands, of hospitality.”⁵⁰ Up until the encounter with the other, the self never experienced genuine transcendence, inasmuch as its objects remained essentially relative to the intentional act. For the first time, however, the self finds itself not

only awakened by an other, but, inasmuch as it loses its very position in the world and finds its solipsistic bubble burst open by that other, genuinely transcends itself. Levinas describes this first act of genuine transcendence as follows: “The relation with an other is only possible as an entering into the other than oneself, transitivity. The ego does not remain in itself absorbing every other in representation; it truly transcends itself. Here intentionality in the strong and perhaps original sense of the term, is an act and a transitivity, the act and transitivity par excellence, that which first makes any act possible. Intentionality is here the union of body and soul.”⁵¹

Thus, far from abandoning the concept of intentionality, Levinas recovers its original sense as an act of transcendence of the self towards another. In fact, one can argue that Levinas radicalizes the concept of intentionality to mean much more than a merely theoretical transcending of the self towards objects. It means a profound, almost exilic act of self-transcendence, whereby the self loses its very position in the world. Indeed, it is only at the price of such a rupture of the self’s comfort zone and stance in the world that an other finds a space within that world. In Peperzak’s words: “Another comes to the fore as *other*, only if his or her ‘appearance’ breaks, pierces, destroys the horizon of my egocentric monism, i.e., when the other’s invasion of my world destroys the empire in which all phenomena are, from the outset, a priori condemned to function as moments of my universe.”⁵² Only when the self accepts to relinquish its heretofore sole possessiveness of the world—thereby losing its central stance in the world—and offers it to the other in an act of generosity, is a space opened up for another, is the other, as such, and for the first time, genuinely phenomenalized and manifest. Generosity is thus not just an andyne moment whereby the self is good to the other; it is the original manifestation of that other qua other.

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NOTES

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 159.
2. *Ibid.*, 160.
3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 16.
4. Craig Vasey, “Emmanuel Levinas: From Intentionality to Proximity,” *Philosophy Today* 25 (Fall 1981): 188.

5. John Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 100.
6. Jan Degreef, "Lévinas et la phénoménologie," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 76(4) (1971): 461.
7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 23.
8. *Ibid.*, 49.
9. Jacques Colette, "Lévinas et la phénoménologie husserliennein," in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Cahiers de la nuit surveillée*, ed. J. Rolland (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1984), 32.
10. Levinas, *Theory of Intuition*, trans. Andre Orianne (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 37.
11. *Ibid.*, 5.
12. Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. John Barnett Brough (New York: Springer, 2008), 30–33.
13. Levinas, *Theory of Intuition*, 47.
14. *Ibid.*, 39.
15. Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 121.
16. Levinas, *Entre Nous* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 161.
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35. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.
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49. We are borrowing this concept from Vasey, "From Intentionality to Proximity," 180–81.
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