

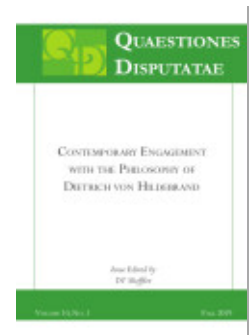


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Toward the Name of the Other

A Hildebrandian Approach to Levinasian Alterity

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In recent decades, Western philosophy, including personalism, has had to face the question of how to respect the otherness of the personal Other, a challenge issued most famously by Emmanuel Levinas. In his *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas's conclusions about alterity are stark. The Other is beyond all conceptualization and precedes my activity as a subject. It is the Other who founds my own independent subjectivity as an "I."¹ These are indeed radical conclusions, but they raise the question, Does the very term *Other* itself fully capture the alterity Levinas wishes to do justice to? The term *Other* (*autrui*) has a certain unavoidable generality and abstractness to it.² Any person who is not myself, the world's population minus one, can be referred to by this term. Yet the Other is always richly distinguished in each case, for each Other is unique. I will argue that the personalist philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand reveals that the alterity of the Other rests on the more fundamental uniqueness of the content of our personhood. This content, which is a value, is disclosed in love, and it is indicated in the personal name.³ It is the name that, better than the term *Other*, captures the alterity of the personal Other.

To argue this, I will first present Levinas's conclusions about alterity in the first three sections of *Totality and Infinity* before proceeding to outline how the personhood of the Other is revealed in love for Hildebrand. Then, I will respond to objections a Levinasian might raise to my thesis. Finally, I will set up a contrast between the term *Other* and the personal name. This contrast

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 42–47.

² French has two words that in English can be translated as "other": *autre*, which can refer to anything that is other than me, be it a rock, animal, or person, and *autrui*, which refers only to a personal Other. Following Lingis's translation of *Totality and Infinity*, I am using "Other" with a capital "O" to refer to the personal Other of *autrui* and "other" with a lowercase "o" for *autre*. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 24ff., translator's footnote.

³ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby and John Henry Crosby (Notre Dame, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2009), 49.

will reveal the name to be a sign of the fundamentality of personhood for a philosophy of alterity.

Section 1: The Alterity of the “Other”

Levinas’s philosophy of the Other requires careful exploration, as his philosophy both invents and gives new meaning to many technical terms. Levinas sees this as necessary to do justice to alterity because, for him, alterity is radical precisely in the sense that my relationship to the Other precedes and founds any activity of myself as a subject. Moreover, the majority of Western philosophy has failed to see this crucial feature of our own subjectivity.⁴ For Levinas, Western philosophy has been engaged in a long betrayal of its own root: metaphysical Desire. Metaphysical Desire is the Desire for the Infinite, a Desire for something absolutely Other. This Desire is therefore absolutely transcendent.⁵ It is a Desire that, as it seeks the Other as Other, is without return to the self or what Levinas calls “the same.”⁶ For Levinas, “the same” denotes that which is comprehended or possessed by the subject in which “alterity is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or possessor.”⁷

The relations of need and intentionality are instances of a return to “the same.” For Levinas, intentionality implies that I grasp and comprehend the Other as the intentional object of my cognition. Intentionality involves conceptualization: “Conceptualization is the first generalization and the condition for objectivity.”⁸ Citing Husserl, Levinas critiques intentionality because it involves a moment of passive *Sinngebung* (sense-giving) in which the object, which is other than me, is made sense of and comprehended.⁹ Such comprehension, literally a cognitive grasping of the object by the cognizing subject, is always a reduction to the same. I see a poor Other and make sense of him *as* a beggar. Implicitly, I comprehend this Other. I can recognize him under a genus and concept “beggar.” In this intentional relation, Levinas says, “thought remains an adequation with the object.”¹⁰ The Other becomes “the same” as my thought of him. But I have lost precisely his exteriority from me and his Otherness. Similarly, in the relating via need, there

⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47.

⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33–35.

⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 76.

⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 123.

¹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27.

is a loss of otherness. In the relation of need, I seek something I lack that, once I have obtained that thing, will be absorbed into relation with me.¹¹ For instance, in nourishment, what is initially other than myself is appropriated by me in need, and this other becomes my energy and my strength.¹² Both the relation of intentionality and of need therefore cannot be Desire, for they are a return to “the same,” where alterity is lost. In this sense, the experience of the Other that Desire refers to is “infinite”; this Other is always more than, other than, my idea of him. The Desire for the Other can never be satiated: “The Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it.”¹³

Thus any philosophy characterized by an attempt to place the Other into a theoretical system or “totality” does “violence” to the Other according to Levinas.¹⁴ In a totality, the Other is placed beside other existents and comprehended by means of a third term.¹⁵ Understood in reference to this third term, exteriority is lost. It is rather the very relationship to the Other that must come first for Levinas. The point of departure for this investigation is the recognition that both the “I” and the Other are separate and independent.¹⁶

So how should one understand the independence of the I? For Levinas, it will not suffice for the individuality of the “I” to be a merely formal individuality in the sense of “being found in one sample only.”¹⁷ Material things can have this formal individuality. It is the way the *Mona Lisa* or the Eiffel Tower is individual. However, the “I” is so radically unique it exists “without having a genus, without being the individuation of a concept.”¹⁸ Being the mere individuation of a genus or concept would be a suppression of the full uniqueness and individuality of the “I.” It would suggest the person is in principle generalizable, just as Leonardo could have painted two *Mona Lisas*. The person would fail to be individual in the way that the “I” actually is individual. Instead, Levinas understands the “I” as unique in possessing its own inner “personal life.”¹⁹ The life of the “I” consists in its “sojourn” in the

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 111.

¹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.

¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42–47. Levinas’s target here is largely Heidegger who, according to Levinas’s reading, affirms “the priority of Being over existents,” as it is Being which allows existents to become intelligible and comprehended. For Levinas, this inverts the correct order; it should be the relation to someone, a particular concrete Other, that must come before universal knowing.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 102–5.

¹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 117.

¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 118.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 115–18.

world where the ego identifies itself and appropriates the otherness of the beings it encounters in lack and need and converts them into its own strength and energy.²⁰ I enjoy the very otherness of this food, its taste and substance that I lacked, but in this process the otherness of the food is abolished as it becomes my own energy. The “I” is individuated in dynamic processes of self-identification that constitute its very “personal life.” This interior life of the “I” consists in going out to things that are other than “I” in the world and appropriating them to serve the needs of the “I,” leading to affective enjoyment.²¹ What is other than me becomes “my energy, my strength.”²² The “I” is also individuated and identified in its thought. I am surprised that I am dogmatic on a particular philosophical matter, yet in this very surprise where I am foreign to myself, I recognize it as *my* surprise and thus merge back with myself.²³ In both of these ways, the “I” is individuated in its active life. Its thought and enjoyment *is* its very subjectivity and individuation. Here Levinas ascribes what I term a “thick” subjectivity to the personal “I.” It is one that is more than what one could call a “thin” formal notion of subjectivity, but instead this subjectivity is the very life and enjoyment of the personal “I.” In a thin notion of subjectivity, the “I” is considered formally and without content—for example, the pure ego of Husserl’s *Ideas I* who intends objects in the world.²⁴ By contrast, Levinas’s thick notion of subjectivity involves an “I” that is constituted by its affective enjoyment. The enjoyment is the very life and content of the “I.” As we shall see later on, Hildebrand analogously understands the person as having a rich, thick subjectivity constituted in part by enjoyment. It is precisely a being that is already independent and happy that can seek truth about the Other, for Desire transcends the happiness of enjoyment.²⁵

If the “I” is characterized by interiority, the Other is characterized by an exteriority so radical that we can never comprehend it. For Levinas, “the concept Other has, to be sure, no new content with respect to the concept

²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37, 111.

²¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37, 119.

²² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 111.

²³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36.

²⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), §80, 161: “[The pure ego] has no explicable content whatsoever, it is in and for itself indescribable: pure ego and nothing further.” It should be noted that, under Scheler’s influence, Husserl came to add personal content and “habituallities” to the ego in his later published and unpublished works, moving from a thin to a thicker notion of subjectivity. See Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 168–79; and Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* (New York: Continuum, 2012), e-book, entries on ego and person.

²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62.

of the I.”²⁶ Like the “I,” the Other possesses freedom, an inner personal life and is “without genus.”²⁷ Yet these mark the Other completely distinct from me.²⁸ Indeed, this alterity is “constitutive of the very content of the Other.”²⁹ So otherness of the Other, like the individuality of the “I,” is not a formal notion. It is not the reversal of identity. Rather, the Other has a “positive reality” that always exceeds my grasp. Indeed, the Other must come before every initiative and activity of the subject if it is to be truly Other. If the Other were somehow grasped in activity or intention of the subject, it would fail to be Other—it would be comprehended and constituted by the subject. This means that the Other cannot be given or at least not given in the way phenomenology has traditionally understood the term *given*—that is, disclosed, intuited, suspended. To view the Other as disclosed, say as beautiful or valuable, is to consider the Other as *disclosed to me*, as being a kind of intentional object I can comprehend. Precisely what is missed here is the exteriority and alterity of the Other. If the Other is a phenomenon in this way, then the Other is comprehended by me and thus not exterior to me. So for Levinas, the Other always absents himself from my grasp.

Yet, of course, the Other is somehow given to us, specifically for Levinas in the manifestation of the face, *le visage d'autrui*. Here Levinas's thought becomes paradoxical and apparently self-contradictory. The Other is not manifested by its qualities, for qualities are something at least potentially shared by many individuals (e.g., of a species). Instead the Other is expressed in the face, and in this expression “the existent [i.e., the Other] breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its ‘form’ the totality of its ‘content.’”³⁰ It is the very alterity of the Other that constitutes this content of the Other, as we have just seen. Moreover, later in the work, Levinas claims that the face of the Other signifies “an always positive value.”³¹ Indeed, the Other for Levinas strikes me as being “rich” in the sense that the Other possesses what I do not have and “poor” in that the Other does not possess what I have.³² This would suggest that the Other has a kind of content and value that is expressed in the face, which would parallel Hildebrand.

However, Levinas's denial that the Other is given in intentionality, which is Hildebrand's position, problematizes recognizing the Other as having a

²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 261.

²⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

²⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73–74.

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 51.

³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 74.

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251.

specific realizable and accessible value and content.³³ For Husserl, value, like objecthood, is founded in the process of *Sinngebung*, an active and constituting process of “making sense of” the object. Because this *Sinngebung* entails that the subject’s activity precedes the Other, Levinas claims that the Other “does not radiate as a splendor that spreads unbeknown to the radiating being—which is perhaps the definition of beauty.”³⁴ By contrast, for Hildebrand, the very value of the Other as this precious person radiates a beauty apprehended in love.³⁵ Further, no content for the Other can be posited in an intentional relation. One cannot ask, “Who is it?” without having encountered the Other: “He to whom the question [‘Who is it?'] is put has *already presented himself* without being a content.”³⁶ Paradoxically, for Levinas, the Other both is a content and yet cannot be assigned a content. The Other has an “always positive value” and yet does not radiate a beauty. The Other somehow becomes manifest and yet precedes the very relation of intentionality.

These paradoxical claims are all possible, Levinas holds, when we recognize that the relationship to the Other is not primarily intentionality but rather is *language*, which expresses but never discloses the Other. For Levinas, language has two components: the saying and the said.³⁷ The said carries the content of the words spoken—for example, the cat has four legs. Such content is in principle generalizable. But there is another aspect to language, the saying, which is the directionality of the words over and above their content. The saying is the very directionality of the words coming from the Other to me or vice versa. In speaking, I do not comprehend the Other as under some concept but rather speak toward him or her precisely as Other.³⁸ Thus in the process of speaking, either I to the Other or the Other to me, “the Other has no quiddity”—that is, no essence that I could grasp and comprehend.³⁹ In this experience of the Other via language, he or she stands before me as one who possesses freedom and an inner life, which indeed I also have in common with the Other, and yet it is this freedom that makes the Other completely distinct from me.⁴⁰ We enter into a relationship but do not

³³ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 23–24; Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), 229.

³⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200.

³⁵ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 24.

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 177.

³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 204–12.

³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

form a totality because we “absolve” ourselves from the relation in the sense that we remain separated and independent.⁴¹

Thus as the first word of language, the face of the Other has, or rather is, a “content” and “value,” precisely as Other, that is immune to conceptualization and always recedes from me. In this sense, Levinas speaks of the face as a “trace.” By “trace” Levinas means a sign that signifies without disclosing itself; a sign that erases itself.⁴² A trace is like the fingerprint a criminal has smudged that both testifies to his presence and yet absents him or her.⁴³ The face is such a “trace.”⁴⁴ The face manifests the Other, yet it always recedes from my grasp as other than my comprehension of the Other. Moreover, this face, the *visage*, is always a particular Other who is *hic et nunc* given to me. My responsibility to the Other is issued to me from these defenseless eyes that look at me.⁴⁵ Even identical twins have different faces. The saying that issues forth from each is distinct.⁴⁶ So it is the face, in a quite literal sense for Levinas, that speaks *this* Other to me.

For Levinas, this unique relationship to the Other is the “ethical relation,” which is characterized by responsibility. Levinas insists this relationship is not equal. The Other is not a Thou equal to and codefined by my “I.”⁴⁷ Rather, the Other is a magisterial He (*Ille*) at a “height” who teaches me my responsibility but remains independent of me. Height and teaching here refer to the fact that the Other gives me responsibility, which for Levinas is the very subjectivity of the subject. Language, and with it our ability to think and act as linguistic beings, is given to us by the Other as teacher. The face of the Other is the first word. The Other speaks first before any subsequent activity on the part of the subject. In this way, Levinas in his later work, *Otherwise than Being*, claims that there is a passivity prior to all activity in the subject.⁴⁸ All subsequent speaking, all subsequent free activity of my mind and will, is a response to the Other. Once I have seen the face of this beggar, I recognize that I, not anyone else, am called to feed him from the food in my mouth. I can deliberately refuse to consider it to be my task to feed

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

⁴² Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 102–5.

⁴³ Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 102–5.

⁴⁴ Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 102–5.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199–200.

⁴⁶ Special thanks to Professor Josef Seifert for pointing out this particularity of the *visage*, even in twins, to me in a conversation at the Hildebrand Residency at Franciscan University of Steubenville in summer 2019.

⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 68–69.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1997), 9–11, 50.

him, but in so doing I still implicitly recognize my obligation. In this sense, the Other is the teacher of my responsibility; he gives me my obligation. The Other allows and requires me to be a subject of actions; in that sense, the Other founds my subjectivity. But I am a subject in a second sense: I am subjected in justice to my responsibility to the Other. Before I cognize the Other, before constituting him as an intentional object, I am aware of my responsibility, even if I reject it. I have already become responsible to this unique Other. This responsibility to the Other, this pre-existing relationship of being bound in justice, thus precedes the active cognition of truth and the activity of freedom. It is in this sense, for Levinas, that goodness is before truth and freedom.⁴⁹

To close, I wish to note along with Derrida in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics” how Levinas’s use of the term *Other* (*autrui*) so well captures the alterity he has illustrated for us. Derrida notes that the word *Other* is a very particular kind of noun.⁵⁰ Derrida recognizes that the word *Other* cannot be conceptualized for the very same reason that the actual Other before me cannot be conceptualized. One can add that the very word *Other* is a trace. The otherness indicated by the word *Other* exceeds and recedes from every concept of that otherness. In this way, the word *Other* is a “trace,” a sign that effaces itself because the otherness of the word *Other* exceeds the capacity of any word to express it. Derrida also notes that *Other* is a substantive that cannot take the plural and is indeclinable because the word is vocative.⁵¹ As Levinas himself notes, the vocative testifies to the saying and cannot be subsumed under a category or a concept.⁵² Finally, Derrida notes that as a

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47, 90. This priority of goodness over truth is one of the more controversial aspects of Levinas’s philosophy, for how could I know what to do in my responsibility to the Other without a standard of truth? However, Levinas’s meaning here is that the relationship to the Other comes prior to cognizing about the Other. The Other, in a certain sense, is the standard by which my system of cognizing the Other is revealed as always incomplete and even “violent” if I forget this incompleteness. On Levinas’s account, Western philosophy’s prioritization of truth over goodness has led to totalizing systems that do violence to the Other, a priority of the cognizing I over the goodness that is the relationship of responsibility to the Other. It is not my purpose in this paper to decide whether criticisms of Levinas’s priority of goodness to truth do or do not succeed. I merely note later how Hildebrand avoids the prioritization of truth *over* goodness that Levinas wishes to avoid by having a priority of truth *and* goodness together in his notion of a receptive apprehension of value.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 104–5.

⁵¹ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 104–5.

⁵² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

third-person noun, the word *Other* has an “illeity” to it that marks the Other not as an equal Thou who is in some equal relationship to me but is rather a magisterial *He (Ille)* who founds my responsibility.⁵³ The otherness of the Other is not opposed to me as simply not being me—rather, that Other has a separation and independence of its being; the Other is its own unique existent. It is precisely this uniqueness that forms the point of contact between Levinas and Hildebrand.

Section 2: The Unique Person Found in Love

Hildebrand’s philosophy focuses on the person. The person is revealed first and foremost in the relationship of love, and so it is in Hildebrand’s phenomenology of love that we get a truly rich description of what it is to be a person. The person is an “unrepeatable individual” who possess a unique subjectivity and selfhood.⁵⁴ Much as it is in Levinas’s work, enjoyment and happiness play a role in the very subjectivity of the person. A healthy looking after the sphere of one’s own concern—what Hildebrand terms *Eigenleben*—is essential to being a fully realized and independent subject who recognizes his or her own personhood.⁵⁵ *Eigenleben* could be literally translated as “proper life” or “one’s own life.” John Crosby translates *Eigenleben*, imperfectly by his own admission, as “subjectivity” because *Subjektivität* is often used where Hildebrand could have used the word *Eigenleben* instead.⁵⁶ In recognizing something as concerning my personal center, I “experience the uniqueness of myself.”⁵⁷ Thus as in Levinas’s work, subjectivity and selfhood is bound with the seeking of affective happiness for Hildebrand. His is a “thick” conception of subjectivity.

Most crucially for Hildebrand, the person is always a unique value that cannot be substituted for the value of any other person. Values are a category of importance that motivate affective and volitional responses—namely, those that are grasped to be important-in-themselves and not merely important because it is subjectively satisfying for me or because it objectively suits my nature.⁵⁸ Love is a response to such a value—namely, the value of the beloved person. John Crosby and Metropolitan John Zizioulas note a problem

⁵³ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 104–5.

⁵⁴ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 203.

⁵⁵ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 200–203.

⁵⁶ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 200ff., translator’s footnote.

⁵⁷ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 206.

⁵⁸ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 34–50.

that arises with determining the value toward which love is responding.⁵⁹ If I love only the qualities of my beloved, and then if I found another person who has more of those qualities, I would abandon the first and go on to “love” the second person. Yet this betrayal of my original beloved shows that in fact I never loved him or her, nor this new person, but rather I loved only the qualities. In true love, the beloved embodies those qualities in a unique, personal way, but he or she also possesses a value as this person beyond and more than those qualities as this *unique* beloved. This value, I argue, is more than even the person’s own subjectivity, freedom, or any other aspect of her personhood that all other persons have in their own unique way. I do not love the freedom of my beloved but rather the beloved who has that freedom. This value of the person is so unique that it is necessarily inexpressible, for our language, as Edith Stein notes in her *Finite and Eternal Being*, “knows no proper names.”⁶⁰ Whenever I am forced to “explain” what I love, I may fall into only mentioning the general qualities of the person, but those qualities are not the proper object of love. Instead, what I love is the other person; I must say “I love *her*.”

For Hildebrand, love is part of a complex process of intentional acts starting from value-perception in the look of love, to being affected by the value of the beloved, to the value-response that is love. Here there are both great contrasts with Levinas but, as I will point out in the next section, also points of convergence. When I initially encounter a value—say, that I stumble upon a scene where a person is forgiving another—I perceive the value cognitively. This is a *sui generis* form of perception that is a purely receptive cognitive act whereby I gain knowledge of the value.⁶¹ As Hildebrand himself phrases it, “Cognitive acts are first of all characterized by the fact that they are a consciousness of something, that is to say, of the object. We are, as it were, *void*; *the whole content is on the object side*.”⁶² When I intuit a “call of value,” I intuit that the value imposes on me an obligation to give the proper value-response.⁶³

⁵⁹ John F. Crosby, “Personal Individuality: Dietrich von Hildebrand in Debate with Harry Frankfurt,” in *Ethical Personalism* (Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt, Germany: Ontos Verlag, 2011); John Zizioulas, “An Ontology of Love: A Patristic Reading of Dietrich von Hildebrand’s *The Nature of Love*,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 3, no. 2 (2013): 14–27.

⁶⁰ Edith Stein (Saint Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Assent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2002), 505.

⁶¹ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 197.

⁶² Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 196 (emphasis added).

⁶³ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 38, 184.

Two features of this intuition are crucial. First, in it the intentionality goes from the object to the subject, not from the subject out toward the object to adequate it.⁶⁴ Hildebrand adopts the metaphor of language: the object speaks its “word” (*Wort*) to me in this intuition. All value-responses necessarily presuppose this initial cognitive intuition of value. I cannot respond or be aware of a value without knowing it. Second, this intuition is purely receptive. Hildebrand finds Husserl’s notion of constitution to be problematic, as he makes clear in his *What Is Philosophy?*⁶⁵ The only activity of the subject present in this intuition according to Hildebrand is a spiritual “going-with” the object or re-echoing of the object that executes the intentional participation in the object.⁶⁶ It is by no means a constitution of the object or a *Sinngebung*, sense-giving in Husserl’s idealist sense. It is simply a “concerting” with the object, an “active accomplishing of the receiving.”⁶⁷ The intuition is purely receptive and wholly determined by the object. The presence of the going-with does not prevent the subject from being wholly void and receptive in this intuition.

In the case of love, this value-perception is almost immediately followed by a nonvoluntary “being affected” by the value. I see a man forgive an enemy and immediately feel “touched,” and I am in joy over this action. There is an intelligible relation of the value to the affection. Here there is a content on the side of the subject. I am the one touched.⁶⁸ But the intention, as with intuition, is “centripetal”; the object is affecting me.⁶⁹ Being affected is thus distinguished from a third component of the process: the affective value-response or “answer” (*Antwort*). Here I go out to the object and respond to it with a personal “word” (*Wort*) of my own.⁷⁰ For Hildebrand, love is an affective value-response. It is initially, like the being affected, not volitional. Romeo’s response of love at the sight of Juliet wells up within him without

⁶⁴ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 196. Centripetal or reverse intentionality where the object comes to me is present in Levinas’s dissertation *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl*. However, by *Totality and Infinity* and Levinas’s other mature works, reverse intentionality is absent. In these works, the active subject goes out to, grasps, and constitutes objects but is not itself constituted by those objects but stands independent of them. Unlike Hildebrand, Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* does not see an analogue of language and of being spoken to in intentionality itself. See Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology: Studies in Existential Phenomenology*, trans. Andre Orianne (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

⁶⁵ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *What Is Philosophy? Studies in Phenomenological and Classical Realism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 24.

⁶⁶ Hildebrand, *What Is Philosophy?*, 24.

⁶⁷ Hildebrand, *What Is Philosophy?*, 24.

⁶⁸ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 209.

⁶⁹ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 209.

⁷⁰ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 202.

his free conscious choice. However, it does not fully become love until the will has come in and given its “sanction” to the affective love. When this sanction occurs, one does not have two value-responses, the affect and the will, but rather the two merge into a single thrust of the person toward the object of love.⁷¹ The will takes the affect and transforms its character, making the initial love to be love in the fullest sense of the word, a “word” of “self-donation” (*Hingabe*).⁷² The lover gives him or herself: mind, heart, and will and, in some forms of love, body and soul.

In this love, Hildebrand discerns two distinct but interpenetrating “intentions”: *intentio benevolentiae* and *intentio unionis*.⁷³ The first, *intentio benevolentiae*, is a desire to give to the other what is objectively good for the other, to see the Other fulfilled as a person. *Intentio unionis* is a desire for union with the beloved. This is not a desire for a kind of “fusion,” where both the lover and the beloved would lose their individuality and separateness in some kind of more impersonal system. Nor is it a desire for the assimilation of the beloved Other. Only two persons, independent, can enter into union far deeper than any fusion, the very union of love. The intimacy of this union respects and presupposes the distinctiveness of both lover and beloved.⁷⁴

Included in this *intentio unionis* and *intentio benevolentiae* is a care for my own happiness that the union will bring, a care for my *Eigenleben*. An objector might worry that this adds a selfish element to love. Does love not involve self-denial, and is this not an attempt to possess the other, at least in part, for one’s own egoist enjoyment and happiness? No, for part of the very self-donation of myself to the Other includes making the beloved Other my own concern, part of my *Eigenleben*. When my beloved suffers, her suffering becomes an objective evil for me, and conversely, what makes her happy becomes, indirectly, an objective good for me. Love requires one to recognize oneself as separate and as having happiness—precisely, happiness in the Other. It requires a recognition of a sphere of one’s own concern for what is objectively good for oneself. Only then can one make the Other the condition of one’s own happiness. Only then can the beloved become an objective good for one, and the happiness and misfortunes of the beloved can become one’s own happiness and misfortunes. It is when this is done that the self-donation to the other becomes complete. So in the *intentio benevolentiae* I must care for myself, but I do so in part because as I wish to give *myself*—my subjectivity, including my enjoyment—to the beloved Other.

⁷¹ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 324; *The Nature of Love*, 54–55.

⁷² Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 220.

⁷³ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 50–52. See also chapter 6 for Hildebrand’s main exposition of the *intentio unionis* and chapter 7 for the *intentio benevolentiae*.

⁷⁴ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 125.

To close, what does Hildebrand's account of love require about the alterity of the Other—in this case, a beloved Other? It turns out there is commonality with Levinas's work, despite their significant divergence on topics such as intentionality. One might be concerned that because Hildebrand has chosen to focus on personhood, which both I and the Other have, he would lose sight of the alterity of the Other. Instead, it is precisely the uniqueness of myself and the Other that makes the Other other to me. The Other has a unique value, a content, that is entirely his or her own and that marks his or her distinctness and separation from me. This uniqueness can never be fully comprehended, for I can always come to greater and greater appreciation of the Other's value. The Other's value cannot be exhausted. It exceeds any grasp and is other than me. It overflows and exceeds any concept or even cognition I may have of it. Indeed, the Other is not conceptualizable for Hildebrand for this same reason, just as the Other exceeds any concept for Levinas.

Finally, the Other awakens my conscious subjectivity and brings me to ever greater realization of my uniqueness.⁷⁵ Indeed, at each stage of love, the Other discloses both my own uniqueness and the uniqueness of the beloved Other in tandem. In the perception of value, I am void and intuit a call to responsibility, to give of myself. I perceive that I am “made for the other.”⁷⁶ As I experience both “being affected” by the value of the beloved and also the affective love within me, I recognize my own “content” as the one who is in joy over this Other. In giving love as a value-response, I become more humble and yet more free.⁷⁷ Finally, in requital, in the “mutual interpenetration of looks,” the beloved gives me his or her *Eigenleben* and returns me to mine.⁷⁸ By doing so, the beloved discloses even more of her personhood to me, and I also come to an experience of my own uniqueness and the meaning of my life.⁷⁹ The lover loved and the beloved loving, face to

⁷⁵ For Hildebrand, the person from conception stands ontologically and substantially as a full human person. In that sense, Levinas's assertion that the Other ontologically *founds* my subjectivity could be too strong for Hildebrand. However, it is appropriate to say, as I argue later, that the Other *awakens* me to my full conscious subjectivity. Absent the Other, the development of my subjectivity would be stunted, perhaps even to an almost nonpersonal level (e.g., in the case of a child who is without human contact and who has lost all ability to develop language). Special thanks to the participants of the Summer 2019 Hildebrand Residency for pointing this distinction between founding and awakening out to me.

⁷⁶ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 52 and 122.

⁷⁷ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 313.

⁷⁸ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 234.

⁷⁹ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 234.

face with each other, are in dialogue where the words are not the words of any spoken tongue but their very selves as gifts.

Section 3: Levinasian Objections and Hildebrandian Replies

At this point, like Socrates in the *Republic*, the reader has likely already anticipated a wave of Levinasian objections based on what I have just mentioned. First, Hildebrand and Levinas are clearly at odds on intentionality. Hildebrand is claiming that the Other is disclosed in an intentional relation. In his *Nature of Love*, Hildebrand even gives an express defense of the notion that the beloved Other is, formally speaking, an intentional object in an I-Thou relation to me as a subject. He asserts that this formalized sense of “object” as intentional object does not objectify the other in a problematic way—for example, being objectified into a thing.⁸⁰ Yet such a formalized sense of object as intentional object is precisely the problematic sense of object for Levinas. Even if the Other is not objectified as a thing, an intentional object is always one that is made sense of, comprehended, and reduced to the same. By regarding the Other as an intentional object, the Levinasian would worry that the alterity of the Other is in danger of being lost. Further, Levinas worries that intentionality places the activity of the subject, even if that is only the passive activity of Husserl’s *Sinnggebung*, before the expression of the Other. If intentionality is prioritized, then my cognition of truth comes before goodness and justice. Indeed, Hildebrand might seem to be asserting just that when he claims that a cognitive perception of a value that gives knowledge must come first. Cognition of truth comes first, so is it before the relationship of justice and goodness? That would be unacceptable for Levinas.

Further, affectivity is suspect for Levinas in three ways, which he outlines most clearly in his *Existence and the Existents*. According to Levinas, in the phenomenological works of Scheler and Heidegger, affectivity “keep[s] something of the character of comprehension.”⁸¹ Second, affectivity is active valuation. This affectivity, then, seems to be actively characterizing and constituting the Other as valuable in my subjectivity. This is why, for Levinas, the concept of the Other as beautiful is so troubling. A focus on the beauty of the Other or other affective values risks sublimating the Other into his or her qualities. Further, beauty by itself may exist as the intentional correlate of the active constituting sense-giving (*Sinnggebung*) activity of the ego-subject and

⁸⁰ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 145–46.

⁸¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and the Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 2017), 68.

thus precisely exclude alterity. Finally, emotions can overwhelm us. Levinas states, “[They] put into question not the existence, but the subjectivity of the subject, it prevents the subject from gathering itself up, reacting, being someone.”⁸² So Hildebrand’s identification of love with an affective value-response would be problematic for Levinas.

These objections all ultimately hinge on a single point: the necessity for the Other to be prior to the subject. Yet, I argue, Hildebrand has discovered a way in which the intentional relation can maintain this priority. Recall that for Hildebrand, in the initial process of perceiving a value, “the subject is void as the content is on the object side of the relation.”⁸³ This perception is not comprehension. It is wholly passive, save for the spiritual going-with the object, and that going-with is itself a mere opening of the subject to receptivity to the Other. It does not prevent the subject from being wholly void and receptive in the way that arguably Husserl’s *Sinnegebung* does. Further, while there is an intentional “having,” what is grasped here is precisely a person so radically unique that one could never comprehend or conceptualize the person.

Because of this, something parallel to Levinas’s understanding of response-ability can be found in Hildebrand. Recall that for Levinas my very ability to act is always an ability to respond to the Other who has come before my action, and thus ethical responsibility is just that, a response-ability. Similarly, for Hildebrand, every activity of the subject, from the value-response, to being affected, to even the activity of the spiritual going-with the object in intuition relies on a prior passivity to what is other than the person. Whereas Levinas contrasts the intentional relation with language and discourse, for Hildebrand the intentional relation *is* language and discourse. Hildebrand’s German is instructive here, as the word translated as *response* in his originally German works is *Antwort*, which can also be translated as *answer*. Thus in a value-response, the subject receives a word (*Wort*) from the Other in the intuition, is affected by the Other, and responds (*Antwort*) with a word (*Wort*) to the Other of the subject’s own. Further, for both thinkers it is the Other who speaks first—the Other is the first word. All subsequent activity, whether cognitive, affective, or volitional, is in response to this first word of the Other. These responses do not, at least ideally, “overwhelm” the subject because they have their own intelligible relation to value. Precisely because they have the character of “apprehending,” these affections do not hinder the subjectivity of the subject but rather *are* the subject’s responses to the value. This reply to the Levinasian objection is not meant to criticize the full implications of Levinas’s critique of intentionality. Perhaps there must be a

⁸² Levinas, *Existence and the Existents*, 68.

⁸³ Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 196.

passivity prior to any intentional relation. What this reply does show is that the intentional relation can apprehend the Other as Other without reduction to the same. The beloved Other may be a Thou for Hildebrand, but that does not mean the beloved Other is not on a height awakening me to my own subjectivity, which is a response-ability to the Other.

While this grasp and perception of the value of the Other in Hildebrand's philosophy does place truth first, it does not do so at the expense of goodness. The call to responsibility, which for Levinas is goodness, is the very truth that is apprehended. For what is grasped is precisely what is due to the Other—namely, that I am made for this person and should love this person. Truth does not so much precede goodness as truth is identified with goodness; to know the truth of a value is to feel the call of justice. To grasp the truth is to already recognize response-ability.

However, even if intentionality is cleared, a careful reader of Levinas may still wonder whether love is the relation in which the Other is given to me because love contains an “ambiguous” interpenetration of Desire and need in enjoyment.⁸⁴ The penultimate section of *Totality and Infinity* deals with love, specifically *eros*, which Levinas claims has a fundamentally “ambiguous” and “equivocal” character.⁸⁵ Whereas Hildebrand's method is to find the ideal essence of romantic love between man and woman, Levinas is in a certain sense more realistic and aware of the constant threat of concupiscence.⁸⁶ Levinas is especially concerned with the sexual aspect in *eros*. Levinas considers *eros* to be enjoyment of the Other as Other. Need, considered as egoic and seeking satisfaction, and Desire beyond all satisfaction, which Levinas has carefully distinguished up until now, come together in *eros*. As Raoul Moati comments, “Love . . . is at the point of the paradoxical meeting of desire and need, where the desire for the transcendent, beyond need, transforms into enjoyment of the transcendent.”⁸⁷

In love the Other still retains alterity. Love must happen after the revelation of the face, for love has an intersubjective structure and requires that the beloved Other be separated from me.⁸⁸ Yet the Other has become an object of need in enjoyment.⁸⁹ For Levinas, the beloved Other in *eros* is always a femi-

⁸⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 255.

⁸⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 255.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 255.

⁸⁷ Raoul Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being: A Guide to Totality and Infinity*, trans. Daniel Wyche (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 164.

⁸⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 262.

⁸⁹ Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 164.

nine Other who “presides over a regime of tenderness.”⁹⁰ In this tenderness she is frail and vulnerable precisely because as Other, she recedes from presence, and yet she is manifested in a bodily “exorbitant” and “ultramaterial” presence to the enjoyment of *eros*.⁹¹ In an almost contradictory fashion, *eros* seeks a secret as a secret.⁹² This secret remains “essentially hidden” even in its manifestation.⁹³ So the beloved unfolds as an essentially hidden “being-not-yet” rather than as an existent person.⁹⁴ In contrast to the ethical relation, where the face signifies and expresses the Other univocally, the beloved’s face expresses only the refusal to express.⁹⁵ Thus in his book *Levinas and the Night of Being*, Moati states, “*Eros* as ambiguity goes beyond the face, and its ambiguity is expressed in this very overcoming . . . beyond the face toward that which is hidden.”⁹⁶

In this sense, *eros* is beyond the face in that it intends the Other not as a particular existent or person but rather beyond those into a being-not-yet. As Moati puts it, “The beloved evades any grasp and thus sustains pleasure through its refusal to be possessed.”⁹⁷ Need takes on the limitless directionality of Desire. So *eros* is a being moved by pity for the passivity of the beloved who recedes and is yet manifest, and this being moved is “a suffering transformed into happiness, voluptuousity.”⁹⁸ The enjoyment of the Other as Other aims at this pleasure in the evanescent tenderness of the Other. “Love aims at the Other” for Levinas.⁹⁹ However, it aims not at the Other as an existent person but at the love of the Other. It aims at a kind of fusion of sentiment with the Other, where the two lovers both share the one and the same identical sentiment of love and yet remain distinct from each other.¹⁰⁰ This is not a desire for possession; love is not strictly lust. But it is a passion—a passion that is compassion for the passivity of the beloved.¹⁰¹ For all these reasons, Levinas asserts the following: “Love is not reducible to a knowledge

⁹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257. For Levinas, regardless of the beloved’s actual gender, he or she is in *eros* feminine. This position has been criticized by feminist authors and would likely be problematic from Hildebrand’s standpoint, as a woman who loves a man does not love him as feminine but precisely in his masculinity.

⁹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256.

⁹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256–57.

⁹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256–57.

⁹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256–57.

⁹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 260–63; Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 164.

⁹⁶ Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 164.

⁹⁷ Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 169.

⁹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 259.

⁹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256.

¹⁰⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 265.

¹⁰¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 259.

mixed with affective elements which would open it to an unforeseen plane of being. It grasps nothing, issues in no concept, does not issue, has neither the subject-object structure nor the I-thou structure."¹⁰² A full comparison of Levinas's *eros* and the closest counterpart to it in Hildebrand's thought, romantic love of man and woman, would be very complex and have to be the subject of another paper. For now, it suffices to show that these two notions of love are distinct and to some degree irreconcilable. What is clear is that Levinas assures us that love cannot play the role of disclosing the Other that a Hildebrandian would want. Indeed, the aforementioned quote directly rejects this position. *Eros* does "not disclose what already exists as radiance and signification."¹⁰³ It is distinct from though it also presupposes the ethical relation to the Other, where I do aim at the Other as a person and find myself responsible for giving to the Other.

The Hildebrandian, however, does have a response to the specific objection at stake here: love does not aim at the Other as a person due to the presence of enjoyment. Hildebrand incorporates Levinas's ethical relationship of language into the very enjoyment found in romantic love. Recall that for Levinas, the "I" is constituted as a subject by its enjoyment. In Levinas's understanding of the ethical relation, the Other interrupts this enjoyment in the manifestation of the face. I find in the midst of my enjoyment that I am called to give out of my plenitude.¹⁰⁴ In Hildebrand's understanding, such a self-emptying transcendence suffices for many ethical relations, and indeed it is part of the *intentio benevolentiae* in neighbor love. Here Hildebrand speaks of "stepping outside of" or "transcending" one's *Eigenleben*, where my own concerns are not thematic, but rather the well-being of the neighbor is the theme of the love-relationship.¹⁰⁵

What makes *eros* in its structure "ambiguous" between immanence and transcendence for Levinas is that the enjoyment remains and becomes enjoyment of the Other as Other. Yet Hildebrand, while recognizing the potential for enjoyment of the beloved to lead to egoism or a loss of transcendence, considers the more intimate and higher forms of love to include enjoyment as part of the very transcendence of the lover to the Other.¹⁰⁶ In marital love especially I not only give from out of my enjoyment, but I give my very

¹⁰² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 261.

¹⁰³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 264.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251.

¹⁰⁵ Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 208–10.

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed exposition of Hildebrand's views on the moral dangers of sex, but also its great value as a self-donation, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity: An Analysis of the Catholic Ideals of Purity and Virginity* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2017), particularly chapters 6–7.

subjectivity as constituted by enjoyment (the personal life of Levinas's "I," Hildebrand's *Eigenleben*) to the Other as a gift. The thick subjectivity we see in enjoyment is the very subjectivity that is given to the Other. My giving of my very enjoyment, my very subjectivity to the beloved, is how I am made subject to the Other in love. This is not an enjoyment of need but rather the joy and happiness that comes from the value of the beloved. The beloved's happiness becomes part of my own happiness. Indeed, were I to say to the beloved that I did not care if I were made happy in the relationship by her, she would rightly suspect I do not fully love her.¹⁰⁷ I "enthroned" the beloved in my very subjectivity (*Eigenleben*). I give my heart. This enthronement is still a transcendence, one not in contradistinction to but rather fed by the very immanence of *Eigenleben*. In this way, love is not only the correct and ethical relation in which I can encounter the Other as a person but is also the ethical relation, in Levinas's sense, par excellence, where the richness of my personal subjectivity is the gift to the Other.

Thus the presence of enjoyment does not interrupt the intentional themacity of the persons in love. For Hildebrand and contra Levinas, love is indeed a dialogue where the very word (*Wort*) of the beloved is perceived by the lover who responds (*Antwort*) with him or herself as the very word (*Wort*) of self-donation. Love does indeed aim at a union, but this union is far greater than any fusion of two into "the same"; rather, it is a communion that necessarily presupposes lover and beloved as separate and distinct. Indeed, Hildebrand speaks of how love presupposes a "reverence" and respectful "distance" in that the beloved Other is allowed to unfold as he or she ought.¹⁰⁸ So we can say that for Hildebrand, it is not enough that I step out and interrupt my subjective enjoyment to recognize my being subject to the Other, but rather, in the more intimate forms of love, it is that very subjectivity, that very enjoyment, that is the very response I give to the Other. I make of my person a donation to the Other.

Section 4: The Name of the Other

We saw earlier how well the word *Other* fits Levinas's conception of radical alterity, given the limitations of any human language. What then is the word in human language that corresponds to this personhood, this unique value, that is perceived and given in love? What is this word for self-donation in

¹⁰⁷ John F. Crosby, "Introductory Study," in Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, xxvii.

¹⁰⁸ Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Reverence," in *The Art of Living*, by Dietrich and Alice von Hildebrand (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2019), 3–5.

human language? It is, I submit, the personal name. The name shares with the term *Other* many features. The name has illeity, expressing the Other in the third person. It is a substantive that is indeclinable and can be used as a vocative when addressing a person by name. A name cannot be subsumed under a category or a concept. The name can be addressed to another, where the vocativity of the name testifies to the saying that is so crucial for Levinas.

However, there is one feature of the name that goes beyond the term *Other*: it expresses a unique personal content. In all cultures, the name has a content, a meaning. *Joshua* means “He saves,” *Michael* means “Who is like God,” *Jamal* means “Beauty,” and *Sarah* means “Princess.” The name reaches a specificity and richness beyond the word *Other*. It indicates that beyond the alterity of the Other that all Others qua Others share, there is a radical uniqueness possessed by only one “unrepeatable individual.” We often forget this etymological feature of names precisely because of the uniqueness of their bearers. When I refer to a person by name, especially if he or she is someone familiar to me, I intend him or her in his or her full personhood. I call over my friend, Michael. Indeed, I use his more familiar nickname, Mike, when asking him to come and sit with us at the table. When I do so, there is a greater specificity, and therefore more respect, than had I simply pointed at him and said, “You come over here.” Had I said, “You come over here,” it could have appeared rude. By addressing him as “Mike,” the others at the table can, even without knowing Mike or my relationship to him, quickly infer that he is my friend. In the simple saying of his name as Mike, it is clear that I intend him not as some replaceable or generalizable person but as someone who is a unique person.

Yet it is precisely the ability to speak of the name of the Other as a content that seems to pose a danger of reduction to what Levinas calls “the same.” First, names seem to indicate finite contents that could, in potential, be grasped by another. Second, they often contain meanings that seem arbitrary at best. A Joshua may not save anyone; the name does not seem to express an individual’s content or essence. Further, a name is sharable in ways the term *Other* is not. Each Other is always Other from all Others, but millions can have the same name. This suggests that the content of the name gives the name a generalizability that would lose the sense of alterity. Moreover, names are imposed. I did not choose my name—rather, it was chosen for me by my parents, who themselves selected it out of a rather limited selection of culturally appropriate names. Finally, the name can be changed. A person may join a religious order and change her name, or change her name for business purposes, or be enslaved and have her name changed for her. An immigrant may change his name to reflect the change or to gain acceptance. Yet it seems the Other is always Other; alterity cannot be altered

or abolished. So how could a particular name adequately express the alterity of the Other?

These objections show that our current names cannot capture or ever fully express our own unique content, though they make a kind of attempt to do so. Yet this attempt itself indicates that a true content exists. The presence of an etymological content in the name testifies in its very failure to express this content not that no such content exists but rather that there is a true content so radically unique that no human name could name it. This true content would be expressed by a true name for which we only have an insufficient substitution or metaphor. In her work *Finite and Eternal Being*, Edith Stein holds that every person is a radically unique content just as Hildebrand does. She considers the possibility of a divinely given true name that would fully express this content.¹⁰⁹ No human word can really express this content of a person, for human language “knows no genuine proper names.”¹¹⁰ Reflecting on a passage of the Revelation to John where every saint is given a stone with a new name, Stein reflects that this name given by God would in fact express the content and essence of the person.¹¹¹ Our terrestrial names function not so much to actually express our content as to be a “trace,” in Levinas’s sense, of such content. Viewed correctly, the name testifies to the content of the person but then effaces this unconceivable content by its limitations as a word of finite humans.

For this reason, a person may receive a new name that better indicates his or her content. Abram’s name was changed by God to Abraham to indicate that he would be patriarch of many nations. Stein herself accepted this by taking on the name Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. While names can certainly be imposed in violent manners, that is not how Teresa Benedicta viewed her name change. Rather, her new name testified to the vocation in which she believed she obtained fulfillment. It was a closer approximation to that true name known only to God. She still remained Edith and she still remained Theresa because both names contained something of her story and content. Yet they can only indicate her content and story precisely in the very failure to do so. So it would indeed be violent to suspect that the human name can fully express the person. Rather, it is the very vocativity of the name both as it exists in the mouth (my friend Mike) and as expressing a content beyond content (Who is like God) that shows the true power of the

¹⁰⁹ Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 505. I should note that I first encountered this interpretation of the biblical passage not from Edith Stein but from a discussion with a colleague, Brenton Smith, in the spring semester of 2018. I owe much of the initial inspiration of this work to that conversation.

¹¹⁰ Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 505.

¹¹¹ Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 505.

name in indicating alterity and personhood in its very failure to comprehend that personhood. In this way, while millions can have the same name, the name itself cannot be plural. Each name is a trace of the true content of the person that no human word can ever express but that is indeed given in self-donation.

By contrast, the word *Other* testifies to a content of the Other, yet this content is simply the alterity of the Other as its identity. This identity cannot, of course, be expressed, but it is something that every Other qua Other has. The Other never gives us a content beyond otherness defined as Other than the “I.” Levinas is aware of this fact: “The concept Other has, to be sure, no new content with respect to the concept of the I.”¹¹² The word *Other* fully captures the individuality of the person involved in the sense that the Other person is not any Other person. It is a correlate, in that sense, with the word *I*. Indeed, the word *Other* is a positive notion unlike the word *individual*, which merely indicates a thing divided against all else. The Levinasian recognizes that the Other is not the negation of me, nor I of the Other, but rather that the Other has a positive excess that always eludes my grasp. Yet this positive reality could still be, as Levinas seems to assume, features of me that are shared in a sense with all Others yet make us distinct—for example, my freedom versus the freedom of the Other, my enjoyment compared to the enjoyment of the Other. The content of the Other is no more, no less, than alterity itself, for the alterity of the Other qua Other is not founded on its identity, but rather its identity is constituted by alterity.

Because of this identification of content and alterity, the word *Other* has a certain generalizability and abstractness to it. This has been criticized by Jean-Luc Marion in his essay “The Intentionality of Love.” Marion reads Levinas as claiming that the Other in the ethical relationship is a purely general Other, substitutable for any other Other.¹¹³ This is because Marion considers ethics to open up to humanity in general and to issue universal injunctions.¹¹⁴ Marion argues that only love, which is constituted by a shared interpenetration of glances, reveals the full individuality of this particular Other, and what is more, this love “requires nothing less than *haecceitas*.”¹¹⁵ Christina Gschwandtner in her “Ethics, Eros, or Caritas?” has criticized Marion’s reading of Levinas. She points out that Levinas does indicate in several passages that the Other encountered in the ethical relation is this specific

¹¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 261.

¹¹³ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 9.

¹¹⁴ Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” 91–93.

¹¹⁵ Marion, “The Intentionality of Love,” 95.

Other.¹¹⁶ Levinas expressly says, “The epiphany of the face *qua* face” opens up humanity, and Gschwandtner argues that the face here is specifically this particular face of this particular and concrete Other who in turn signifies to me my relationality and responsibility to all of humanity.¹¹⁷

I agree with Gschwandtner that there is a thisness, a particularity, to Levinas’s Other. One does not meet a general Other but this Other in Levinas’s writings. The *visage* is always radically particular. Yet even granting that Levinas recognizes the particularity of the Other, and in that sense *haecceitas* specifically in the sense of thisness, one still finds what I call a certain “thinness” to the term *Other*. In my article “Toward a Thicker Notion of the Self,” I distinguished the “thin,” negative notion of individuality, the person’s being divided against all others, from the “thick,” concrete *uniqueness* of personhood, a person’s being an absolutely singular irrepeatable someone, a one-what (uni-que). Personhood implies a rich, “thick,” and inexpressible content.¹¹⁸ Individuality as such is a purely negative notion that can have no content beyond my not being what others are. Alterity is a thicker, more positive, and more concrete reality than individuality, as it involves excess beyond my grasp. Yet this positive reality could still be, as Levinas seems to assume, features of me that are shared in a sense with all Others yet make us distinct as discussed earlier. Because of this, all Others have alterity, and indeed each Other has this specific alterity of this specific Other. Yet this thin alterity is always found to be an abstraction from their richer, thicker personhood. In experience, I never encounter mere Others any more than I encounter mere I’s, but rather I encounter persons. Only by a kind of prescinding from this irreducible content do we get the person to appear as the Other rather than as Mike, Jamal, or Aiko.

This delimitation of view is often appropriate in many contexts—for example, in a philosophy drawing out the implications of alterity *qua* alterity. But that alterity, as much as my individuality, is founded upon the unique content of personhood that the Other and I are. The Other as a person has a unique value, a content, that is entirely his or her own and that marks his or her distinctness and separation from me. Uniqueness entails and incorporates alterity. It is because the Other has a content absolutely irreducible to anything I possess or could possess that the Other is unique and Other.

¹¹⁶ Christina Gschwandtner “Ethics, Eros, or Caritas? Levinas and Marion on Individuation of the Other” *Philosophy Today* 49, no. 1 (2005), 75–78.

¹¹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213; Gschwandtner “Ethics, Eros, or Caritas?,” 77.

¹¹⁸ Alexander Montes, “Toward a Thicker Notion of the Self: Sartre and von Hildebrand on Individuality, Personhood and Freedom.” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 9, no. 2 (2019): 80.

The Otherness of the Other stands as an aspect of this personal uniqueness. For this reason, the name can capture a richer, more specific alterity than the term *Other* can. Insofar as the name indicates this rich personal content, it exceeds a mere thisness and particularity to indicate a full, rich uniqueness. It is not the term *Other* but rather the name that does justice to this alterity because it alone indicates an alterity that is not just uniquely and particularly the Other's own but *richly* the Other's own. This content, along with alterity, is fully revealed in love, where the Other is not just Other but specifically Sally, my older sister, who loves me, or Jacob, my elderly father for whom I am called to care in love. The love, the self-donation I experience, does indeed testify to their radical Otherness from me but only insofar as that Otherness is but one aspect of their value and content that I grasp in love.

The fact that we are given our names indicates that our subjectivity is a gift of the Other. I noted in my previous article that small children inadvertently indicate the fundamentality of personhood in their inability to use the first person pronoun "I" but rather use their own names.¹¹⁹ When asked, "Do you love Mommy?" a small child, Bobby, may not use the first person pronoun "I" but rather say, "Bobby loves Mommy." This is an overidentification of himself with the Other's views of him, but that fact itself brings out a further truth. It is through the Other's views of him, and in particular the love that is given to him by his mother, that brings Bobby to a growing awareness of himself. He sees his mother's love directed specifically at him, not at Uncle Michael or his sister Kathy, and "is affected" by a spontaneous child's joy in this love. The value-perception and affection here both bring Bobby to himself as a unique person. It is his mother's love that allows Bobby to respond, awakening him to awareness of that subjectivity by addressing Bobby with his name. He then responds to love with love in a "mutual interpenetration of looks" as he affirms, "Bobby loves Mommy." To put all of this in other terms, Bobby's subjectivity and growing self-awareness is determined by the response-ability his mother gives him. And this response-ability is granted not just in the revelation of the face of the "Other" but rather this specific Other who speaks Bobby's name, his mother. So in having his name given to him by another, Bobby's subjectivity is awakened by the Other, but a specific, concrete, richly distinct and primary Other. He inadvertently testifies to a fact that philosophy has often failed to recognize: that behind every I-Thou or I-Other relations are more rich, concrete, and specific person-to-person relations—for example, Bobby-Kathy, Bobby-Mommy relations. The relationship to the Other is a conversation between two persons. As such, the relationship itself is completely unique in every case, containing a richness no human word, the said, could ever do justice to. Rather, the relationship to

¹¹⁹ Montes, "Toward a Thicker Notion of the Self," 80.

the Other is itself a dialogue that is trace of the Infinite, infinitely exceeding all human comprehension.

There is one more Levinasian insight that the name testifies to. For Levinas, the Other, precisely as exceeding any and all conceptions of it, is a “trace” of the Infinite. The very word *Other* achieves this—the person marked by the term *Other* is always “Other” than any comprehension of this Other. Yet the name too contains this feature. Even its content, the meaning of the name, points to a uniqueness and therefore to an Other who can never be fully comprehended. The true name is always elusive. The name signifies this content and then effaces it. So the name, just as much as and even more so than the word *Other*, is a trace of the Infinite. Alterity, understood correctly, points us to the Infinite latent in personhood.

In conclusion, despite significant and to some extent irreconcilable differences in their phenomenological approaches and philosophies, there are deep similarities between Levinas’s and Hildebrand’s approaches to the Other. Both regard responsibility to the Other as prior to the activity of the self. They also ascribe a rich and “thick” affective subjectivity to the person in enjoyment over and above being the mere subject of one’s actions. Yet while every Other is particularly and distinctly Other, this Otherness is founded upon the rich uniqueness of personhood that the term *Other* is unable to capture. It is this rich uniqueness, a trace of the Infinite in personhood, that names with their contents testify to in their very failure to express.¹²⁰

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