

It would be ludicrous to impugn Jabès for not having pronounced these questions in *Le livre des questions*. They can only sleep within the literary act which needs both their life and their lethargy. Writing would die of the pure vigilance of the question, as it would of the simple erasure of the question. Is not to write, once more, to confuse ontology and grammar? The grammar in which are inscribed all the dislocations of dead syntax, all the aggressions perpetrated by speech against language, every questioning of the letter itself? The written questions addressed to literature, all the tortures inflicted upon it, are always transfigured, drained, forgotten by literature, within literature; having become modifications of itself, by itself, in itself, they are mortifications, that is to say, as always, ruses of life. Life negates itself in literature only so that it may survive better. So that it may *be* better. It does not negate itself any more than it affirms itself: it differs from itself, defers itself, and writes itself as *différance*. Books are always books of *life* (the archetype would be the Book of Life kept by the God of the Jews) or of *afterlife* (the archetype would be the Books of the Dead kept by the Egyptians). When Maurice Blanchot writes: "Is man *capable* of a radical interrogation, that is to say, finally, is man *capable* of literature?" one could just as well say, on the basis of a certain conceptualization of life, "incapable" half the time. Except if one admits that pure literature is nonliterature, or death itself. The question about the origin of the book, the absolute interrogation, the interrogation of all possible interrogations, the "interrogation of God" will never belong to a book. Unless the question forgets itself within the articulations of its memory, the time of its interrogation, the time and tradition of its *sentence*, and unless the memory of itself, the syntax binding the question to itself, does not make a disguised affirmation of this origin. Already a book of the question becoming remote from its origin.

Henceforth, so that God may indeed be, as Jabès says, *an interrogation of God*, would we not have to transform a final affirmation into a question? Literature would then, perhaps, only be the dreamlike displacement of this question.

*"There is the book of God in which God questions himself, and there is the book of man which is proportionate to that of God."*

Reb Rida

Violence and  
Metaphysics  
An Essay on the  
Thought of  
Emmanuel  
Levinas

Hebraism and Hellenism.—  
between these two points of  
influence moves our world.  
At one time it feels more  
powerfully the attraction of  
one of them, at another time  
of the other; and it ought  
to be, though it never is,  
evenly and happily balanced  
between them. (Matthew  
Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*)

That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger—and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death—or that it has always lived knowing itself to be dying (as is silently confessed in the shadow of the very discourse which *declared philosophia perennis*); that philosophy died *one day, within history*, or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and wellspring; that beyond the death, or dying nature, of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even, as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in store; or, more strangely still, that the future itself has a future—all these are unanswerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve.

It may even be that these questions are not *philosophical*, are not *philosophy's* questions. Nevertheless, these should be the only questions today capable of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers; and called such in remembrance, at very least, of the fact that these questions must be examined unrelentingly, despite the diaspora of institutes and languages, despite the publications and techniques that follow on each other, procreating and accumulating by themselves.

like capital or poverty. A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question about the possibility of the question. This is very little—almost nothing—but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision. An unbreachable responsibility. Why unbreachable? Because the impossible has *already* occurred. The impossible according to the totality of what is questioned, according to the totality of beings, objects and determinations, the impossible according to the history of facts, has occurred: there is a history of the question, a pure memory of the pure question which in its possibility perhaps authorizes all inheritance and all pure memory in general and as such. The question has already begun—we know it has—and this strange certainty about an *other* absolute origin, an other absolute decision that has secured the past of the question, liberates an incomparable instruction: the discipline of the question. Through (through, that is to say that we must *already* know how to read) this discipline, which is not yet even the inconceivable tradition of the negative (of negative determination), and which is completely previous to irony, to maieutics, to *epoché*, and to doubt, an injunction is announced: the question must be maintained. As a question. The liberty of the question (double genitive)<sup>2</sup> must be stated and protected. A founded dwelling, a realized tradition of the question, remaining a question. If this commandment has an ethical meaning, it is not in that it belongs to the *domain* of the ethical, but in that it ultimately authorizes every ethical law in general. There is no stated law, no commandment, that is not addressed to a freedom of speech. There is therefore neither law nor commandment which does not confirm and *enclose*—that is, does not dissimulate by presupposing it—the possibility of the question. Thus, the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question. The purity of the question can only be indicated or recalled through the difference of a hermeneutical effort.

Thus, those who look into the possibility of philosophy, philosophy's life and death, are already engaged in, already overtaken by the dialogue of the question about itself and with itself; they always act in remembrance of philosophy, as part of the correspondence of the question with itself. Essential to the destiny of this correspondence, then, is that it comes to speculate, to reflect, and to question about itself within itself. This is where the objectification, secondary interpretation, and determination of the question's own history in the world all

begin; and this is where the combat embedded in the difference between the question in general and "philosophy" as a determined—finite and mortal—moment or mode of the question itself also begins. The difference between philosophy as a power and adventure of the question itself and philosophy as a determined event or turning point *within* this adventure.

This difference is better conceived today. That this difference has come to light, has been conceptualized *as such*, is doubtless an unnoticed and inessential sign for the historian of facts, techniques, and ideas. But, understood in all its implications, it is perhaps the most deeply inscribed characteristic of our age. And would not better thinking this difference be knowing that if something is still to transpire within the tradition by which philosophers always know themselves to be overtaken, then the tradition's origin will have to be summoned forth and adhered to as rigorously as possible? Which is not to stammer and huddle lazily in the depths of childhood, but precisely the opposite.

Close to us and since Hegel, in his mighty shadow, the two great voices which have ordered us to this total repetition—which itself has recalled us to ourselves and has been acknowledged as of utmost philosophical urgency—are those of Husserl and Heidegger. Despite the most profound dissimilarities, the appeal to tradition—which is in no way traditional—is shaped by an intention common to Husserlian phenomenology and to what we will call provisionally, by approximation and for reasons of economy, Heideggerean "ontology."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, very briefly:

1. The entirety of philosophy is conceived on the basis of its Greek source. As is well known, this amounts neither to an occidentalism, nor to a historicism.<sup>4</sup> It is simply that the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium. That Plato, for Husserl, was the founder of a reason and a philosophical task whose telos was still sleeping in the shadows; or that for Heidegger, on the contrary, Plato marks the moment at which the thought of Being forgets itself and is determined as philosophy—this difference is decisive only at the culmination of a common root which is Greek. The difference is fraternal in its posterity, entirely submitted to the same domination. Domination of the same too, which will disappear neither in phenomenology nor in "ontology."

2. The archaeology to which Husserl and Heidegger lead us by different paths entails, for both, a subordination or transgression, in any event a *reduction of metaphysics*. Even though, for each, this gesture has an entirely different meaning, or at least does so apparently.

3. Finally, the category of the *ethical* is not only dissociated from metaphysics but coordinated with something other than itself, a previous and more radical function. When ethics is not treated this way, when law, the power of resolution, and the relationship to the other are once more part of the *archia*, they lose their ethical specificity.<sup>5</sup>

These three motifs arrayed at the unique source of the unique philosophy would indicate the only possible direction to be taken by any philosophical resource in general. Any possible dialogue between Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian "ontology," at every point where they are more or less directly implicated, can be understood only from within the Greek tradition. At the moment when the fundamental conceptual system produced by the Greco-European adventure is in the process of taking over all of humanity, these three motifs would predetermine the totality of the logos and of the worldwide historico-philosophical situation. No philosophy could possibly dislodge them without first succumbing to them, or without finally destroying itself as a philosophical language. At a historical depth which the science and philosophies of history can only presuppose, we know that we are consigned to the security of the Greek element; and we know it with a knowledge and a confidence which are neither habitual nor comfortable but, on the contrary, permit us to experience torment or distress in general. For example, the consciousness of crisis is for Husserl but the provisional, almost necessary covering up of a transcendental motif which in Descartes and in Kant was already beginning to accomplish the Greek aim: philosophy as science. When Heidegger says that "for a long time, too long, thought has been desiccated," like a fish out of water, the element to which he wishes to return thought is still—already—the Greek element, the Greek thought of Being, the thought of Being whose irruption or call produced Greece. The knowledge and security of which we are speaking are therefore not in the world; rather, they are the possibility of our language and the nexus of our world.

It is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble.

At the heart of the desert, in the growing wasteland, this thought, which fundamentally no longer seeks to be a thought of Being and phenomenality, makes us dream of an inconceivable process of dismantling and dispossession.

1. In Greek, in our language, in a language rich with all the alluvia of its history—and our question takes shape already—in a language that admits to its powers of seduction while playing on them unceasingly, this thought summons us to a dislocation of the Greek logos, to a dislocation of our identity, and perhaps of identity in general; it summons us to depart from the Greek site and perhaps from every site in general, and to move toward what is no longer a source or a site (too welcoming to the gods), but toward an *exhalation*, toward a prophetic speech already emitted not only nearer to the source than Plato or the pre-Socratics, but inside the Greek origin, close to the other of the Greek (but will the other of the Greek be the non-Greek? Above all, can it be *named* the non-Greek? And our question comes closer.) A thought for which the entirety of the Greek logos has already erupted, and is now a quiet topsoil deposited not over bedrock, but around a more ancient volcano. A thought which, without philology and solely by remaining faithful to the immediate, but buried nudity of experi-

ence itself, seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One (other names for the light of Being and of the phenomenon) as if from oppression itself—an oppression certainly comparable to none other in the world, an ontological or transcendental oppression, but also the origin or alibi of all oppression in the world. A thought, finally, which seeks to liberate itself from a philosophy fascinated by the "visage of being that shows itself in war" which "is fixed in the concept of totality which dominates Western philosophy" (*Totality and Infinity* [hereafter *TI*], p. 21).

2. This thought nevertheless seeks to define itself, in its primary possibility, as metaphysical (a Greek notion however, if we follow the vein of our question). A metaphysics that Levinas seeks to raise up from its subordinate position and whose concept he seeks to restore in opposition to the entire tradition derived from Aristotle.

3. This thought calls upon the ethical relationship—a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other<sup>6</sup>—as the only one capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics. And does so without supporting ethics and metaphysics by anything other than themselves, and without making them flow into other streams at their source.

In question, therefore, is a powerful will to explication of the history of Greek speech. Powerful because, if this attempt is not the first of its kind, it reaches a height and a level of penetration in its dialogue at which the Greeks—and foremost among them the two Greeks named Husserl and Heidegger—are called upon to respond. If the messianic eschatology from which Levinas draws inspiration seeks neither to assimilate itself into what is called a philosophical truism, nor even to "complete" (*TI*, p. 22) philosophical truisms, nevertheless it is developed in its discourse neither as a theology, nor as a Jewish mysticism (it can even be understood as the trial of theology and mysticism); neither as a dogmatics, nor as a religion, nor as a morality. In the last analysis it never bases its authority on Hebraic theses or texts. It seeks to be understood from within a *recourse to experience itself*. Experience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience: the passage and departure toward the other; the other itself as what is most irreducibly other within it: Others. A recourse not to be confused with what has always been called a philosophical enterprise, but which reaches a point at which an exceeded philosophy cannot not be brought into question. Truthfully, messianic eschatology is never mentioned literally: it is but a question of designating a space or a hollow within naked experience where this eschatology can be understood and where it must resonate. This hollow space is not an opening among others. It is opening itself, the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience which can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme.

What do this explication and this reciprocal surpassing of two origins and two historical speeches signify? Do a new élan and some strange community begin to take shape, without being the spiraling return of Alexandrian promiscuity? If we recall that Heidegger, too, seeks to open the passageway to a former speech which, supporting itself from within philosophy, carries us to the outer or inner reaches of philosophy, what do this other speech and this other passageway signify here? It is this space of interrogation that we have chosen for a very partial<sup>7</sup> reading of Levinas's work. Of course it is not our intention to explore this space, even in the name of a timid beginning. Faintly and from afar, we will only attempt to point it out. First of all, in the style of commentary, we will try to remain faithful to the themes and audacities of a thought—and this despite several parentheses and notes which will enclose our perplexity. Faithful also to its history, whose patience and anxiety capitulate and carry within themselves the reciprocal interrogation of which we wish to speak.<sup>8</sup> Then we will attempt to ask several questions. If they succeed in approaching the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections, but rather the questions put to us by Levinas.

We have just spoken of "themes" and of the "history of a thought." The difficulty is classical and concerns not only method. The brevity of these pages will only intensify it. We will not choose. We will refuse to sacrifice the history of Levinas's thought and works to the order or aggregate of themes—which must not be called a system—sembled and enriched in the great book *Totality and Infinity*. And if we must, for once, have faith in him who stands most accused in the trial conducted by this book, the result is nothing without its becoming.<sup>9</sup> But neither will we sacrifice the self-coherent unity of intention to the becoming, which then would be no more than pure disorder. We will not choose between the opening and the totality. Therefore we will be incoherent, but without systematically resigning ourselves to incoherence. The possibility of the impossible system will be on the horizon to protect us from empiricism. Without reflecting here upon the philosophy of this hesitation, let us note between parentheses that by simply articulating it we have already come close to Levinas's own problematic.

### I The Violence of Light

The departure from Greece was discreetly premeditated in *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*. In France, in 1930, this was the first major work devoted to the entirety of Husserl's thought. Through a remarkable exposition of the developments of phenomenology, such as were then available from the published works and teachings of the master, and through precautions which already acknowledged the "surprises" that Husserl's meditations and unpublished works might "hold in store," a reticence was announced. The imperialism

of *theoria* already bothered Levinas. More than any other philosophy, *phenomenology*, in the wake of Plato, was to be struck with light. Unable to reduce the last naïveté, the naïveté of the glance, it predetermined Being as object.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, the accusation remains timid and is not of a piece.

(a) First, it is difficult to maintain a philosophical discourse against light. And thirty years later, when the charges against theoretism and (Husserlian) phenomenology became the essential motifs in the break with tradition, the nudity of the face of the other—this epiphany of a certain non-light before which all violence is to be quieted and disarmed—will still have to be exposed to a certain enlightenment. Especially as concerns the violence implicit in phenomenology.

(b) Next, it is difficult to overlook the fact that Husserl so little predetermined Being as object that in *Ideas I* absolute existence is accorded only to pure consciousness. True, it has often been argued that the difference hardly counts, and that a philosophy of consciousness is always a philosophy of the object. Levinas's reading of Husserl on this point has always been nuanced, supple, contrasted. As early as in the *Theory of Intuition*, theory is correctly distinguished from objectivity in general. As we shall see later, practical, axiological, etc., consciousness is for Husserl too a consciousness of the object. Levinas openly acknowledges this. Therefore, the accusation is really directed against the irreducible primacy of the subject-object correlation. But, later, Levinas will insist more and more on those aspects of Husserlian phenomenology which take us to the inner or outer reaches of the "subject-object correlation." For example, this would be "intentionality as a relationship with otherness," as an "exteriority which is not objective," sensibility, passive genesis, the movement of temporalization, etc.<sup>11</sup>

(c) Further, for Levinas the sun of the *epekeina tes ousias* will always illuminate the pure awakening and inexhaustible source of thought (*TI*, p. 127). It is not only the Greek ancestor of the Infinite which transcends totality (the totality of being or of *noema*, the totality of the same or the ego),<sup>12</sup> but is also the instrument of destruction for the phenomenology and ontology subjected to the neutral totality of the Same as Being or as Ego. All the essays in 1947 grouped under the title *De l'existence à l'existant* will be placed under the sign of "the Platonic formulation placing the Good beyond Being." (In *Totality and Infinity* the "Phenomenology of Eros" describes the movement of the *epekeina tes ousias* in the very experience of the caress.) In 1947 Levinas calls this movement, which is not theological, not a transcendence toward "a superior existence," "ex-cendence." With a foothold in being, ex-cendence is a "departure from being and from the categories which describe it." This ethical ex-cendence designates the site—rather the non-site—of metaphysics as metatheology, metaontology, metaphenomenology. We will have to return to this reading of the *epekeina tes ousias* and its relationship to ontology. Since we are speaking of

light, let us note for the moment that the Platonic movement is interpreted such that it leads no longer to the sun but even beyond light and Being, beyond the light of Being. "We thus encounter in our own way the Platonic idea of the Good beyond Being," we read at the end of *Totality and Infinity* (p. 293—my italics), concerning creation and fecundity. In our own way, which is to say that ethical excellence is not projected toward the neutrality of the good, but toward the Other, and that which (is) *epekeina tes ousias* is not essentially light but fecundity or generosity. Creation is but creation of the other; it can be only as paternity, and the relations of the father to son escape all the logical, ontological, and phenomenological categories in which the absoluteness of the other is necessarily the same. (But did not the Platonic sun already enlighten the visible sun, and did not excellence play upon the meta-phor of these two suns? Was not the Good the necessarily nocturnal source of all light? The light of light beyond light. The heart of light is black, as has often been noticed.<sup>13</sup> Further, Plato's sun does not only enlighten; it engenders. The good is the father of the visible sun which provides living beings with "creation, growth and nourishment" *Republic*, 508a–509b.)

(d) Finally, Levinas is certainly quite attentive to everything in Husserl's analyses which tempers or complicates the primordially of theoretical consciousness. In a paragraph devoted to *nontheoretical consciousness*, it is acknowledged that the primacy of objectivity in general is not necessarily confused, in *Ideas I*, with the primacy of the theoretical attitude. There are nontheoretical acts and objects "of a new and irreducible ontological structure." "For example, says Husserl, the act of valorization constitutes an *axiological* object (*Gegenständlichkeit*), specific in relation to the world of things; constitutes a being from a new region." Levinas also admits on several occasions that the importance accorded to theoretical objectivity has to do with the transcendental guide most often chosen in *Ideas I*: the perception of extended things. (However, we already know that this guide could be only a provisional example.)

Despite all these precautions, despite a constant oscillation between the letter and the spirit of Husserlianism (the former most often contested in the name of the latter),<sup>14</sup> and despite Levinas's insistence upon what is called a "fluctuation in Husserl's thought," a break not to be reconsidered is signified. The phenomenological reduction, whose "historical role . . . is not even a problem" for Husserl, remains a prisoner of the natural attitude which is possible "in the extent to which the latter is theoretical."<sup>15</sup> "Husserl gives himself the liberty of theory as he gives himself theory itself." Chapter 4 of *La conscience théorique* designates, within a compressed and nuanced analysis, the point of departure: one cannot simultaneously maintain the primacy of the objectifying act and the irreducible originality of nontheoretical consciousness. And if "the conception of consciousness in the 5th *Untersuchung* seems to us not only to affirm a primacy of theoretical consciousness, but sees it as the only access to what

creates the *being* of the object," if "the existing world, which is revealed to us, has the mode of existence of the object given over to the theoretical glance," if "the real world is the world of knowledge," if "in his [Husserl's] philosophy . . . knowledge and representation<sup>16</sup> is not a mode of life to the same degree as the others, nor a secondary mode," then "we will have to take our leave."

One already foresees the unease to which a thought rejecting the excellence of theoretical rationality will have to resign itself later, especially in that it never ceases to appeal to the most uprooted rationalism and universalism against the violences of mysticism and history, against the ravishing of enthusiasm and ecstasy. One foresees too, the difficulties of a progression which leads to a metaphysics of separation through a reduction of theoretism. For separation, distance or impassiveness heretofore have been the targets of the classical objections against theoretism and objectivism. On the contrary, there will be more force—and danger—in denouncing the blindness of theoretism, its inability to depart from itself towards absolute exteriority, towards the totally-other, the infinitely-other "more objective than objectivity" (*TI*). The complicity of theoretical objectivity and mystical communion will be Levinas's true target. The premetaphysical unity of one and the same violence. An alternation which always modifies the same confinement of the other.

In 1930 Levinas turns toward Heidegger against Husserl. *Sein und Zeit* is published, and Heidegger's teaching begins to spread. Everything which overflows the commentary and "letter" of Husserl's texts moves toward "ontology," "in the very special sense Heidegger gives to the term" (*Théorie de l'intuition* [hereafter *THI*]). In his critique of Husserl, Levinas retains two Heideggerean themes: (1) despite "the idea, so profound, that in the ontological order the world of science is posterior to the concrete and vague world of perception, and depends upon it," Husserl "perhaps was wrong to see in this concrete world, a world of perceived objects above all" (*THI*). Heidegger goes further, since for him this world is not primarily given over to the glance, but is rather—and we wonder whether Heidegger would have accepted this formulation—"in its very Being like a center of action, a field of activity or of *solicitude*" (*ibid.*). (2) if Husserl was right in his opposition to historicism and naturalistic history, he neglected "the historical situation of man . . . understood in another sense."<sup>17</sup> There exist a historicity and a temporality of man that are not only predicates but "the very substantiality of his substance." It is "this structure . . . which occupies such an important place in Heidegger's thought" (*ibid.*).

One already foresees the unease to which a thought rejecting the excellence of a "philosophy" which "appears . . . as independent of man's historical situation as a theory seeking to consider everything *sub specie aeternitatis*" (*THI*) will have to resign itself later, especially in that it never ceases to call upon the "eschatology" which like experience "as the 'beyond' of history withdraws

beings from history's jurisdiction." There is no contradiction here but rather a displacement of concepts—in this case the concept of history—which we must follow. Perhaps then the appearance of contradiction will vanish as the fantasy of a philosophy enveloped in its own fundamental conceptions. A contradiction according to what Levinas often will call "formal logic."

Let us follow this displacement. The respectful, moderate reproach directed against Husserl in a Heideggerean style will soon become the main charge of an indictment this time directed against Heidegger, and made with a violence that will not cease to grow. Certainly it is not a question of denouncing as militant theoretism a thought which, in its initial act, refused to treat the self-evidence of the object as its ultimate recourse; a thought for which the historicity of meaning, according to Levinas's own terms, "destroys clarity and constitution as authentic modes of the existence of the mind" (*En découvrant l'existence* [hereafter *EDE*]); and for which, finally, "the self-evident is no longer the fundamental mode of intellection," for which "existence is irreducible to the light of the self-evident" and "the drama of existence" is played out "before light" (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, at a singular depth—but the fact and the accusation are made only more significant by it—Heidegger still would have questioned and reduced theoretism from within, and in the name of, a Greco-Platonic tradition under the surveillance of the agency of the glance and the metaphor of light. That is, by the spatial pair inside-outside (but is this, in all its aspects, a *spatial* pair?) which gives life to the opposition of subject and object. By allegedly reducing this last schema, Heidegger would have retained what made it possible and necessary: light, unveiling, comprehension or precomprehension. This what the texts written after *En découvrant l'existence* tell us. "Heideggerean care, illuminated as it is by comprehension (even if comprehension offers itself as care), is already determined by the structure 'inside-outside' that characterizes light." In making the structure "inside-outside" tremble at the point where it would have resisted Heidegger, Levinas in no way pretends to erase it, or to deny its meaning and existence. Nor does he do so, moreover, when the opposition subject-object or cogito-cogitatum is in question. In the style by which strong and faithful thought is recognized (this is Heidegger's style too), Levinas respects the zone or layer of traditional truth; and the philosophies whose presuppositions he describes are in general neither refuted nor criticized. Here, for example, it is a question simply of revealing beneath this truth, as that which founds it and is dissimulated within it, "a situation which precedes the division of Being into an inside and an outside." However it is also a question of inaugurating, in a way that is to be new, quite new, a metaphysics of radical separation and exteriority. One anticipates that this metaphysics will have some difficulty finding its language in the medium of a traditional logos entirely governed by the structure "inside-outside," "interior-exterior."

Thus, "without being knowledge, Heidegger's temporality is ecstasy, 'being

outside itself.' Not a transcendence of theory, but already deportation from an interior toward an exterior." The structure of *Mitsein*<sup>18</sup> itself will be interpreted as a Platonic inheritance, belonging to the world of light. In effect, through the experience of eros and paternity, through the waiting for death, there should arise a relationship to the other which can no longer be understood as a modification of "the Eleatic notion of Being" (*Le temps et l'autre* [hereafter *TA*]). The latter would demand that multiplicity be included in, subjected to, the domination of unity. And it would still govern Plato's philosophy, according to Levinas, even unto its concept of femininity (conceived as matter in the categories of activity and passivity) and its concept of the city-state which "must imitate the world of ideas."

"It is . . . toward a pluralism which does not fuse into unity that we wish to make our way; and, if it can be dared, to break with Parmenides" (*TA*). Thus, Levinas exhorts us to a second parricide. The Greek father who still holds us under his sway must be killed; and this is what a Greek—Plato—could never resolve to do, deferring the act into a hallucinatory murder. A hallucination within the hallucination that is already speech. But will a non-Greek ever succeed in doing what a Greek in this case could not do, except by disguising himself as a Greek, by *speaking* Greek, by feigning to speak Greek in order to get near the king? And since it is a question of killing a speech, will we ever know who is the last victim of this stratagem? Can one feign speaking a language? The Eleatic stranger and disciple of Parmenides had to give language its due for having vanquished him: shaping non-Being according to Being, he had to "say farewell to an unnamable opposite of Being" and had to confine non-Being to its relativity to Being, that is to the movement of alterity.

Why was the repetition of the murder necessary according to Levinas? Because the Platonic gesture will be ineffectual for as long as multiplicity and alterity are not understood as the absolute *solitude* of the *existent* in its *existence*. These are the translations of *Seiendes* and *Sein* chosen by Levinas at this point "for reasons of euphony" (*TA*).<sup>19</sup> This choice will always retain a certain ambiguity: by *existent*, in effect, Levinas almost if not always understands the being which is man, being in the form of *Dasein*. Now, thus understood, the existent is not being (*Seiendes*) in general, but refers to what Heidegger calls *Existenz*—mainly because it has the same root—that is "the mode of Being, and precisely, the Being of the being which keeps itself open for the aperture of Being, and within it." "Was bedeutet 'Existenz' in Sein und Zeit? Das wort nennt eine Weise des Seins, und zwar das Sein desjenigen Seienden, das offen steht für die Offenheit des Seins, in der es steht, indem es sie aussteht" (Introduction to *Was ist Metaphysik*).

Now this solitude of the "existent" in its "existence" would be primordial and could not be conceived on the basis of the neutral unity of *existence* which Levinas often and profoundly describes under the heading of the "there is." But

is not the "there is" the totality of indeterminate, neutral, anonymous beings rather than Being itself? The theme of the "there is" calls for systematic confrontation with Heidegger's allusions to the "es gibt" (*Being and Time, Letter on Humanism*), and for a confrontation too, of terror, which Levinas opposes to Heideggerian anguish, with the experience of fright, which Heidegger says, in the *Nachwort* to *Was ist Metaphysik*, "always resides near essential anxiety."

The relationship to the other arises from the depths of this solitude. Without it, without this primordial secret, parricide is philosophy's theatrical fiction. To understand the secret on the basis of the unity of existence, on the pretext that it *exists* or that it *is* the secret of the existent, "is to confine oneself to unity, and to let Parmenides escape every parricide" (*TA*). Therefore, Levinas henceforth will move toward a thought of original difference. Is this thought in contradiction with Heidegger's intentions? Is there a difference between this difference and the difference of which Heidegger speaks? Is their juxtaposition anything but verbal? And which difference is more original? We will consider these questions later.

A world of light and of unity, a "philosophy of a world of light, a world without time." In this heliopolitics "the social ideal will be sought in an ideal of fusion . . . the subject . . . losing himself in a collective representation, in a common ideal . . . It is the collectivity which says 'us,' and which, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward the truth, experience, the other at his side and not face to face with him . . . *Miteinandersein* also remains the collectivity of the with, and its authentic form is revealed around the truth." Now, "we hope to show, for our part, that it is not the preposition *mit* which must describe the original relation with the other." Beneath solidarity, beneath companionship, before *Mitsein*, which would be only a derivative and modified form of the originary relation with the other, Levinas already aims for the face-to-face, the encounter with the face. "Face to face without intermediary" and without "communion." Without intermediary and without communion, neither mediate nor immediate, such is the truth of our relation to the other, the truth to which the traditional *logos* is forever inhospitable. This unthinkable truth of living experience, to which Levinas returns ceaselessly, cannot possibly be encompassed by philosophical speech without immediately revealing, by philosophy's own light, that philosophy's surface is severely cracked, and that what was taken for its solidity is its rigidity. It could doubtless be shown that it is in the nature of Levinas's writing, at its decisive moments, to move along these cracks, masterfully progressing by negations, and by negation against negation. Its proper route is not that of an "either this . . . or that," but of a "neither this . . . nor that." The poetic force of metaphor is often the trace of this rejected alternative, this wounding of language. Through it, in its opening, experience itself is silently revealed.

Without intermediary and without communion, absolute proximity and absolute distance: "eros in which, within the proximity to the other, distance is

integrally maintained; eros whose pathos is made simultaneously of this proximity and this duality." A community of nonpresence, and therefore of nonphenomenality. Not a community without light, not a blindfolded synagogue, but a community anterior to Platonic light. A light before neutral light, before the truth which arrives as a third party, the truth "which we look toward together," the judgmental arbitrator's truth. Only the other, the totally other, can be manifested as what it is before the shared truth, within a certain nonmanifestation and a certain absence. It can be said only of the other that its phenomenon is a certain nonphenomenon, its presence (*is*) a certain absence. Not pure and simple absence, for there logic could make its claim, but a *certain* absence. Such a formulation shows clearly that within this experience of the other the logic of noncontradiction, that is, everything which Levinas designates as "formal logic," is contested in its root. This root would be not only the root of our language, but the root of all of western philosophy,<sup>20</sup> particularly phenomenology and ontology. This naïveté would prevent them from thinking the other (that is from thinking; and this would indeed be the reason why, although Levinas, "the enemy of thought," does not say so), and from aligning their discourse with the other. The consequence would be double. (a) Because they do not think the other, they do not have time. Without time, they do not have history. The absolute alterity of each instant, without which there would be no time, cannot be produced—constituted—within the identity of the subject or the existent. It comes into time through the Other. Bergson and Heidegger would have overlooked this (*De l'existence à l'existent* [hereafter *EE*]), and Husserl even more so. (b) More seriously, to renounce the other (not by being weaned from it, but by detaching oneself from it, which is actually to be in relation to it, to respect it while nevertheless overlooking it, that is, while knowing it, identifying it, assimilating it), to renounce the other is to enclose oneself within solitude (the bad solitude of solidity and self-identity) and to repress ethical transcendence. In effect, if the Parmenidean tradition—we know now what this means for Levinas—disregards the irreducible solitude of the "existent," by the same token it disregards the relationship to the other. It does not think solitude, it does not appear to itself to be solitude, because it is the solitude of totality and opacity. "Solipsism is neither observation nor sophism; it is the very structure of reason." Therefore, there is a soliloquy of reason and a solitude of light. Incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other, phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence. Through them, the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same. The ancient clandestine friendship between light and power, the ancient complicity between theoretical objectivity and technico-political possession,<sup>21</sup> "If the other could be possessed, seized, and known, it would not be the other. To possess, to know, to grasp are all synonyms of power" (*TA*). To see and to know, to have and to will, unfold only within the

oppressive and luminous identity of the same; and they remain, for Levinas, fundamental categories of phenomenology and ontology. Everything given to me within light appears as given to myself by myself. Henceforward, the heliological *metaphor* only turns away our glance, providing an alibi for the historical violence of light: a displacement of technico-political oppression in the direction of philosophical discourse. For it has always been believed that metaphors exculpate, lift the weight of things and of acts. If there is no history, except through language, and if language (except when it names Being *itself* or nothing: almost never) is elementally metaphorical, Borges is correct: "Perhaps universal history is but the history of several metaphors." Light is only one example of these "several" fundamental "metaphors," but what an example! Who will ever dominate it, who will ever pronounce its meaning without first being pronounced by it? What language will ever escape it? How, for example, will the metaphysics of the face as the *epiphany* of the other free itself of light? Light perhaps has no opposite; if it does, it is certainly not night. If all languages combat within it, *modifying only* the same metaphor and choosing the *best* light, Borges, several pages later, is correct again: "Perhaps universal history is but the history of the diverse *intonations* of several metaphors" (*La sphère de Pascal*: my italics).

## II Phenomenology, Ontology, Metaphysics

These measures were critical, but they obeyed the voice of full certainty. They appeared, through the essays, the concrete and subtle analyses concerning exoticism, the caress, insomnia, fecundity, work, the instant, fatigue, only at the point, at the edge of the indescribable indestructible which opens up classical conceptuality, seeking its own conceptuality between rejections. *Totality and Infinity*, the great work, not only enriches these concrete analyses but organizes them within a powerful architecture. Levinas calls the positive movement which takes itself beyond the disdain or disregard of the other, that is, beyond the appreciation or possession, understanding and knowledge of the other, *metaphysics* or *ethics*. Metaphysical transcendence is *desire*.

This concept of desire is as anti-Hegelian as it can possibly be. It does not designate a movement of negation and assimilation, the negation of alterity first necessary in order to become "self-consciousness" "certain of itself" (*Phenomenology of the Mind* and *Encyclopedia*). For Levinas, on the contrary, desire is the respect and knowledge of the other as other, the ethico-metaphysical moment whose transgression consciousness *must* forbid itself. According to Hegel, on the contrary, this gesture of transgression and assimilation is necessary and essential. Levinas sees in it a premetaphysical, natural necessity, and in several splendid analyses separates desire from enjoyment—which Hegel does not appear to do. Enjoyment is only deferred in work:<sup>22</sup> thus, Hegelian desire

would be only need, in Levinas's sense. But one rightly suspects that things would appear more complicated, if one followed closely the movement of certitude and the truth of desire in the *Phenomenology of the Mind*. Despite his anti-Kierkegaardian protests, Levinas here returns to the themes of *Fear and Trembling*: the movement of desire can be what it is only paradoxically, as the renunciation of desire.

Neither theoretical intentionality nor the affectivity of need exhaust the movement of desire: they have as their meaning and end their own accomplishment, their own fulfillment and satisfaction within the totality and identity of the same. Desire, on the contrary, permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the other to which it must remain infinitely inadequate. Desire is equal only to excess. No totality will ever encompass it. Thus, the metaphysics of desire is a metaphysics of infinite separation. Not a consciousness of separation as a Judaic consciousness, as an unhappy consciousness:<sup>23</sup> in the Hegelian Odyssey Abraham's unhappiness is an expediency, the provisional necessity of a figure and a transition within the horizons of a reconciliatory return to self and absolute knowledge. Here there is no return. For desire is not unhappy. It is opening and freedom. Further, a desired infinite may govern desire itself, but it can never appease desire by its presence. "And if desire were to cease with God / Ah, I would envy you hell." (May we cite Claudel to comment upon Levinas, when the latter also polemizes against "this spirit admired since [our] earliest youth"?)

The infinitely other is the invisible, since vision opens up only the illusory and relative exteriority of theory and of need. A provisional exteriority, given only within *sight* of its own consummation, its own consumption. Inaccessible, the invisible is the most high. This expression—perhaps inhabited by the Platonic resonances Levinas evokes, but more so by others more readily recognizable—tears apart, by the superlative excess, the spatial literality of the metaphor. No matter how high it is, height is always accessible; the most high, however, is higher than height. No addition of more height will ever measure it. It does not belong to space, is not of this world. But what necessity compels this inscription of language in space at the very moment when it exceeds space? And if the pole of metaphysical transcendence is a spatial non-height, what, in the last analysis, legitimates the expression of trans-ascendance, borrowed from Jean Wahl? The theme of the face perhaps will help us understand it.

The ego is the same. The alterity or negativity interior to the ego, the interior difference, is but an appearance: an *illusion*, a "play of the Same," the "mode of identification" of an ego whose essential moments are called body, possession, home, economy, etc. Levinas devotes some splendid descriptions to them. But this play of the same is not monotonous, is not repeated as monologue and formal tautology. As the work of identification and the concrete production of egoity, it entails a *certain* negativity. A finite negativity, an internal and relative

modification through which the ego affects itself by itself, within its own movement of identification. Thus it alters itself toward itself within itself. The resistance to work, by provoking it, remains a moment of the same, a finite moment that forms a system and a totality with the agent. It necessarily follows, then, that Levinas will describe *history* as a blinding to the other, and as the laborious procession of the same. One may wonder whether history can be history, *if there is history*, when negativity is enclosed within the circle of the same, and when work does not truly meet alterity, providing itself with its own resistance. One wonders whether history itself does not begin with this relationship to the other which Levinas places beyond history. The framework of this question should govern the entire reading of *Totality and Infinity*. In any event, one observes the displacement of the concept of historicity of which we spoke above. It must be acknowledged that without this displacement no anti-Hegelianism could be logically consequent. The *necessary* condition for this anti-Hegelianism is therefore fulfilled.

A precaution must be made: the theme of the concrete (nonformal) tautology or of false (finite) heterology—this very difficult theme is proposed rather discreetly at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity*, but it conditions every affirmation made in the book. If negativity (work, history, etc.) never has a relation to the other, if the other is not the simple negation of the same, then neither separation nor metaphysical transcendence can be conceived under the category of negativity. Just as—as we saw above—simple internal consciousness could not provide itself with time and with the absolute alterity of every instant without the irruption of the totally-other, so the ego cannot engender alterity within itself without encountering the Other.

If one is not convinced by these initial propositions authorizing the equation of the ego and the same, one never will be. If one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the things offered to work or to desire—in the Hegelian sense: for example, natural objectivity—belong to the ego, to the ego's economy (to the same), and do not offer the absolute resistance reserved for the other (Others); if one is tempted to think that this last resistance supposes, in its innermost meaning, the possibility of the resistance of things—the existence of the world which is not myself and in which I am, in as original a way as one may wish, for example as origin of the world within the world, although it is not to be confused with this possibility; if one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the true resistance to the same is not that of things, is not *real* but rather is *intelligible*,<sup>24</sup> and if one rebels against the notion of a purely intelligible resistance, then in all these cases one will follow Levinas no further. Nor will one be able to follow, without an indefinable malaise, the conceptual operations liberated by the classical dissymmetry of the same and other, as they are overturned; or (as a classical mind would say), while they *feign* permitting themselves to be overturned, all the while remaining the *same*, impassive beneath an algebraic substitution.

What, then, is this encounter with the absolutely-other? Neither representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same. The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship. And first of all because the concept (material of language), which is always *given to the other*, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other. The dative or vocative dimension which opens the original direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence. Language, therefore, cannot make its own possibility a totality and *include* within itself its own origin or its own end.

Truthfully, one does not have to wonder *what* this encounter is. It is *the* encounter, the only way out, the only adventuring outside oneself toward the unforeseeably-other. *Without hope of return*. In every sense of this expression, which is why this eschatology which awaits *nothing* sometimes appears infinitely hopeless. Truthfully, in *La trace de l'autre* eschatology does not only "appear" hopeless. It is given as such, and renunciation belongs to its essential meaning. In describing liturgy, desire, and the work of art as ruptures of the Economy and the Odyssey, as the impossibility of return to the same, Levinas speaks of an "eschatology without hope for the self or without liberation in my time."

Therefore, there is no way to conceptualize the encounter: it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable "resistant to all categories." Concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen. The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized. Thus we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed—which we still cannot not believe—to be the very ether of our thought and language. To attempt to think the opposite is stiffing. And it is a question not only of thinking the opposite which is still in complicity with the classical alternatives, but of liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond these alternatives. Doubtless this encounter, which for the first time does not take the form of an intuitive contact (in ethics, in the sense given to it by Levinas, the principal, central prohibition is that of contact) but the form of a separation (encounter as separation, another rupture of "formal logic").<sup>25</sup> Doubtless this encounter of the unforeseeable *itself* is the only possible opening of time, the only pure future, the only pure expenditure *beyond* history as economy. But this future, this beyond, is not another time, a day after history. It is *present* at the heart of experience. Present not as a total presence but as a *trace*. Therefore, before all dogmas, all conversions, all articles of faith or philosophy, experience itself is eschatological at its origin and in each of its aspects.

Face to face with the other within a glance *and* a speech which both maintain distance and interrupt all totalities, this being-together as separation precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. Levinas calls it *religion*. It opens

ethics. The ethical relation is a religious relation (*Difficile libert * [hereafter *DL*]). Not a religion, but *the* religion, the religiosity of the religious. This transcendence beyond negativity is not accomplished by an intuition of a positive presence; it "only institutes language at the point where neither no nor yes is the first word" (*TI*) but an interrogation. Not a theoretical interrogation, however, but a total question, a distress and denuding, a supplication, a demanding prayer addressed to a freedom, that is, to a commandment: the only possible ethical imperative, the only incarnated nonviolence in that it is respect for the other. An immediate respect for the other himself—one might say, although without following any literal indication by Levinas—because it does not pass through the neutral element of the universal, and through respect—in the Kantian sense<sup>26</sup>—for the law.

This restitution of metaphysics then permits the radicalization and systematization of the previous reductions of phenomenology and ontology. The act of *seeing* is at the outset a respectful knowledge, and light passes for the medium which—as faithfully and neutrally as possible, as a third party—permits the known to be. It is not by chance that the theoretical relation has been the preferred framework of the metaphysical relation (cf. *TI*). When the third term, in its most neutral indetermination, is the light of Being—which is neither a being nor a non-being, while the same and the other *are*—the theoretical relation is ontology. According to Levinas, the latter always brings the other back into the midst of the same and does so for the benefit of the unity of Being. And the theoretical freedom which accedes to the thought of Being is but the identification of the same, the light in which I provide myself with what I claim to encounter, that is, an *economic* freedom, in the particular sense Levinas gives to this word. A freedom in immanence, a premetaphysical, one could almost say a physical, freedom, an empirical freedom, even if it is called reason within history. Reason would be nature. Metaphysics begins when theory criticizes itself as ontology, as the dogmatism and spontaneity of the same, and when metaphysics, in departing from itself, lets itself be put into question by the other in the movement of ethics. Although in fact it is secondary, metaphysics as the critique of ontology is rightfully and philosophically primary. If it is true that "Western philosophy most often has been an ontology" dominated since Socrates by a Reason which receives only what it gives itself,<sup>27</sup> a Reason which does nothing but recall itself to itself, and if ontology is tautology and egology, then it has always *neutralized* the other, in every sense of the word. Phenomenological neutralization, one might be tempted to say, gives the most subtle and modern form to this historical, political and authoritarian neutralization. Only metaphysics can free the other from the light of Being or from the phenomenon which "takes away from Being its resistance."

Heideggerean "ontology," despite its seductive appearance, would not escape this framework. It would still remain "egology" and even "egoism": "*Sein und*

*Zeit* has argued perhaps but one sole thesis: Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being (which unfolds as time); Being is already an appeal to subjectivity. The primacy of ontology for Heidegger does not rest on the truism: 'to know the *existent* it is necessary to have comprehended the Being of the existent.' To affirm the priority of *Being* over the *existent* is, indeed, to decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent (the ethical relation), to a relation with the *Being of the existent*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom . . . the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other" (*TI*, p. 45). Despite all the misunderstandings which may be embedded in this treatment of Heideggerean thought—we will study them for themselves later—Levinas's intention, in any event, seems clear. The neutral thought of Being neutralizes the Other as a being: "Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power" (*TI*, p. 46), a philosophy of the neutral, the tyranny of the state as an anonymous and inhuman universality. Here we find the premises for a critique of the state's alienation whose anti-Hegelianism would be neither subjectivist, nor Marxist; nor anarchist, for it is a philosophy of the "principle, which can be only as a commandment." The Heideggerean "possibilities" remain powers. Although they are pretechnical and preobjective, they are nonetheless oppressive and possessive. By another paradox, the philosophy of the neutral communicates with a philosophy of the site, of rootedness, of pagan violence, of ravishment, of enthusiasm, a philosophy offered up to the sacred, that is, to the anonymous divinity, the divinity without the Deity (*DL*). It is a "shameful materialism" in that it is complete, for at heart materialism is not primarily sensualism, but a recognized primacy of the neutral (*TI*). The notion of *primacy*, employed so frequently by Levinas, well translates the gesture of his entire critique. According to the indication present in the notion of *archia*, the philosophical beginning is immediately transposed into an ethical or philosophical command. From the very first, *primacy* indicates principle and chief. All the classical concepts interrogated by Levinas are thus dragged toward the *agora*, summoned to justify themselves in an ethico-political language that they have not always sought—or believed that they sought—to speak, summoned to transpose themselves into this language by confessing their violent aims. Yet they already spoke this language in the city, and spoke it well, by means of the detours of philosophy and despite philosophy's apparent disinterest, notwithstanding its eventual return to power. Here we find the premises for a non-Marxist reading of philosophy as ideology. The ways chosen by Levinas are decidedly difficult: rejecting idealism and the philosophies of subjectivity, he must also denounce the neutrality of a "Logos which is the verb of no one" (*TI*). (It could no doubt be demonstrated that Levinas, uncomfortably situated in the difference between Husserl and Heidegger—and, indeed, by virtue of the history of his thought—always

criticizes the one in a style and according to a scheme borrowed from the other, and finishes by sending them off into the wings together as partners in the "play of the same" and as accomplices in the same historico-philosophical coup.) The verb must not only be the verb of someone—it must overflow, in its movement toward the other, what is called the speaking subject. Neither the philosophies of the neutral nor the philosophies of subjectivity can acknowledge this trajectory of speech that no speech can make into a totality. By definition, if the other is the other, and if all speech is for the other, no logos as absolute knowledge can comprehend dialogue and the trajectory toward the other. This incomprehensibility, this rupture of logos is not the beginning of irrationalism but the wound or inspiration which opens speech and then makes possible every logos or every rationalism. A total logos still, in order to be logos, would have to let itself be proffered toward the other beyond its own totality. If, for example, there is an ontology or a logos of the comprehension of the Being (of beings), it is in that "already the comprehension of Being is said to the existent, who again arises behind the theme in which he is presented. This 'saying to the other'—this relationship to the other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent*—precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics" (TI, pp. 47–48). "Prior to the unveiling of Being in general, as the basis of knowledge and meaning of Being, there is a relationship with the existent which is expressed; before the ontological level, the ethical level." Ethics is therefore metaphysics. "Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy."

The absolute overflowing of ontology—as the totality and unity of the same: Being—by the other occurs as infinity because no totality can constrain it. The infinity irreducible to the *representation* of infinity, the infinity exceeding the ideation in which it is thought, thought of as more than I can think, as that which cannot be an object or a simple "objective reality" of the idea—such is the pole of metaphysical transcendence. After the *epekeina tes ousias*, the Cartesian idea of infinity made metaphysics emerge for a second time in Western ontology. But what neither Plato nor Descartes recognized (along with several others, if we may be permitted not to believe to the same extent as Levinas in their solitude among the philosophical crowd which understands neither true transcendence nor the strange idea of Infinity) is that the expression of this infinity is the *face*.

The face is not only a visage which may be the surface of things or animal facies, aspect, or species. It is not only, following the origin of the word, what is *seen*, seen because it is naked. It is also that which sees. Not so much that which sees things—a theoretical relation—but that which exchanges its glance. The visage is a face only in the face-to-face. As Scheler said (but our citation must not make us forget that Levinas is nothing less than Schelerian): "I see not only the eyes of an other, I see also that he looks at me."

Did not Hegel say this too? "If we ask ourselves now in which particular organ

the soul appears as such in its entirety we shall at once point to the eye. For in the eye the soul concentrates itself; it not merely uses the eye as its instrument, but is itself therein manifest. We have, however, already stated, when referring to the external covering of the human body, that in contrast with the bodies of animals, the heart of life pulses through and throughout it. And in much the same sense it can be asserted of art that it has to invent every point of the external appearance into the direct testimony of the human eye, which is the source of soul-life, and reveals spirit."<sup>28</sup> This is perhaps the occasion to emphasize, concerning a precise point, a theme that we will enlarge upon later: Levinas is very close to Hegel, much closer than he admits, and at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion. This is a situation he must share with all anti-Hegelian thinkers, and whose final significance calls for much thought. Here, in particular, on the relations between desire and the eye, between sound and theory, the convergence is as profound as the difference, being neither simply added to nor juxtaposed with it. In effect, like Levinas Hegel thought that the eye, not aiming at "consumption," suspends desire. It is the very limit of desire (and perhaps, thereby, its resource) and is the first theoretical sense. We must not conceive light and the eye's opening on the basis of any physiology, but on the basis of the relation between death and desire. After having spoken of taste, touch, and smell, Hegel again writes, in the *Aesthetics*: "Sight, on the other hand, possesses a purely ideal relation to objects by means of light, a material which is at the same time immaterial, and which suffers on its part the objects to continue in their free self-subsistence, making them appear and reappear, but which does not, as the atmosphere or fire does, consume them actively either by imperceptible degrees or patently. Everything, then is an object of the appetiteless vision, [la vue exempte de désirs] which, however, in so far as it remains unimpaired in its integrity, merely is disclosed in its form and colour."<sup>29</sup>

This neutralization of desire is what makes sight excellent for Hegel. But for Levinas, this neutralization is also, and for the same reasons, the first violence, even though the face is not what it is when the glance is absent. Violence, then, would be the solitude of a mute glance, of a face without speech, the *abstraction* of seeing. According to Levinas the glance *by itself*, contrary to what one may be led to believe, does not *respect* the other. Respect, beyond grasp and contact, beyond touch, smell and taste, can be only as desire, and metaphysical desire does not seek to consume, as do Hegelian desire or need. This is why Levinas places sound above light. ("Thought is language and is thought in an element analogous to sound and not to light." What does this *analogy* mean here, a difference and a resemblance, a relation between the sensible sound and the sound of thought as intelligible speech, between sensibility and signification, the senses and sense? This is a question also posed by Hegel, admiring the word *Sinn*.)

In *Totality and Infinity* the movement of metaphysics is thus also the transcendence of hearing in relation to seeing. But in Hegel's *Aesthetics* too: "The remaining ideal sense is hearing. This is in signal contrast to the one just described. Hearing is concerned with the tone, rather than the form and colour of an object, with the vibration of what is corporeal; it requires no process of dissolution, as the sense of smell requires, but merely a trembling of the object, by which the same is in no wise impoverished. This ideal motion, in which through its sound what is as it were the simple individuality [*subjectivité*] the soul of the material thing expresses itself, the ear receives also in an ideal way, just as the eye shape and colour, and suffers thereby what is ideal or not external in the object to appeal to what is spiritual or non-corporeal."<sup>30</sup> But:

Hearing, which, as also the sight, does not belong to the senses of action [*sens pratiques*] but those of contemplation [*sens théoriques*]; and is, in fact, still more ideal than sight. For the unruffled, aesthetic observation of works of art no doubt permits the objects to stand out quietly in their freedom just as they are without any desire to impair that effect in any way; but that which it apprehends is not that which is itself essentially ideally composed, but rather on the contrary, that which receives its consistency in its sensuous existence. The ear, on the contrary, receives the result of that ideal vibration of material substance, without placing itself in a practical relation towards the objects, a result by means of which it is no longer the material object in its repose, but the first example of the more ideal activity of the soul itself which is apprehended.<sup>31</sup>

The question of the analogy would thus lead us back to the notion of *trembling*, which seems to us decisive in Hegel's *Aesthetics* in that it opens the passage to ideality. Further, in order to confront systematically Hegel's and Levinas's thoughts on the theme of the face, one would have to consult not only the pages of the *Phenomenology of the Mind* devoted to physiognomy, but also paragraph 411 of the *Encyclopedia* on mind, face, and language.

For reasons now familiar to us, the face-to-face eludes every category. For within it the face is given simultaneously as expression and as speech. Not only as glance, but as the original unity of glance and speech, eyes and mouth, that speaks, but also pronounces its hunger. Thus it is also that which *hears* the invisible, for "thought is language," and "is thought in an element analogous to sound and not to light." This unity of the face precedes, in its signification, the dispersion of senses and organs of sensibility. Its signification is therefore irreducible. Moreover, the face does not *signify*. It does not incarnate, envelop, or signal anything other than self, soul, subjectivity, etc. Thought is speech, and is therefore immediately face. In this, the thematic of the face belongs to the most modern philosophy of language and of the body itself. The other is not signaled by his face, he is this face: "Absolutely present, in his face, the Other—without any metaphor—faces me."<sup>32</sup> The other, therefore, is given "in person" and

without allegory only in the face. Let us recall what Feuerbach, who also made the themes of height, substance, and face communicate with each other, said on this subject: "That which is situated highest in space is also in its quality the highest part of man, that which is closest to him, that which one can no longer separate from him—and this is his *head*. If I see a man's head, it is the man himself who I see; but if I only see his torso, I see no more than his torso."<sup>33</sup> *That which can no longer be separated from . . . is substance in its essential predicates and "in itself."* Levinas also often says *kath' auto* and "substance" in speaking of the other as face. The face is presence, *ousia*.

The face is not a metaphor, not a figure. The discourse on the face is neither allegory nor, as one might be tempted to believe, prosopopoeia. Consequently the height of the face (in relation to the rest of the body) perhaps determines *in part* (in part only, as we will see later) the expression *most-high* which we examined above. If the height of the most-high, as we might be tempted to say, *does not belong* to space (and this is why the superlative must destroy space as it constructs the metaphor), it is not because it is foreign to space, but because (within) space it is the origin of space, orienting space through speech and glance, through the face, the chief who commands body and space from above. (Aristotle, indeed, compares the transcendental principle of the good to the chief of the armies; however, he overlooks both the face, and the fact that the god of the armies is the Face.) The face does not signify, does not present itself as a sign, but *expresses itself*, offering itself *in person*, in itself, *kath' auto*: "the thing in itself expresses itself." To express oneself is to be *behind* the sign. To be behind the sign: is this not, *first of all*, to be capable of attending (to) one's speech, to assist it, according to the expression used in the *Phaedrus* as argument against Theuth (or Hermes)—an expression Levinas makes his own on several occasions. Only living speech, in its mastery and magisteriality, is able to assist itself; and only living speech is expression and not a servile sign—on the condition that it is truly speech, "the creative voice, and not the accomplice voice which is a servant" (E. Jabès). And we know that all the gods of writing (Greece, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia) have the status of auxiliary gods, servile secretaries of the great god, lunar and clever couriers who occasionally dethrone the king of the gods by dishonorable means. The written and the work are not expressions but signs for Levinas.

Along with the reference to the *epekeina tes ousias*, this is at very least the second Platonic theme of *Totality and Infinity*. It is also to be found in Nicholas of Cusa. "While the worker abandons his work, which then pursues its independent destiny, the verb of the professor is inseparable from the very person who proffers it."<sup>34</sup> The critique of the work thus implied separates Hegel from Nicholas of Cusa for one time at least.

This problematic requires separate consideration in and of itself. Is "oral discourse" "the plenitude of discourse?" Or, is it, in another sense, the "speech

activity" in which I "am absent, missing from my products" which then betray me more than they express me? Is the "frankness" of expression essentially an aspect of living speech for him who is not God? This question is meaningless for Levinas, who conceives the face in terms of the "resemblance" of man and God. Are not weight and magisterial instruction an aspect of writing? Is it not possible to invert all of Levinas's statements on this point? By showing, for example, that writing can assist itself, for it *has time* and freedom, escaping better than speech from empirical urgencies. That, by neutralizing the demands of empirical "economy," writing's essence is more "metaphysical" (in Levinas's sense) than speech? That the writer absents himself better, that is, expresses himself better as other, addresses himself to the other more effectively than the man of speech? And that, in depriving himself of the *enjoyments* and effects of his signs, the writer more effectively renounces violence? It is true that he perhaps intends only to multiply his signs to infinity, thus forgetting—at very least—the other, the infinitely other as death, and thus practicing writing as *deferral* and as an *economy of death*. The limit between violence and nonviolence is perhaps not between speech and writing but within each of them. The thematic of the *trace* (which Levinas distinguishes from the effect, the path, or the sign which is not related to the other as the invisible absolute) should lead to a certain rehabilitation of writing. Is not the "He" whom transcendence and generous absence uniquely announce in the trace more readily the author of writing than of speech? The work, trans-economy, the pure expenditure as determined by Levinas, is neither play nor death. It is not simply to be confused with either the letter or with speech. It is not a sign, and therefore its concept cannot include the concept of the work found in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas is thus at once quite close to and quite far from Nietzsche and Bataille.

Maurice Blanchot speaks of his disagreement with this preeminence of oral discourse, which resembles "the tranquil humanist and socratic speech which brings us close to the speaker."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, how could Hebraism belittle the letter, in praise of which Levinas writes so well? For example: "To admit the action of literature on men—this is perhaps the ultimate wisdom of the West, in which the people of the Bible will be recognized" (*DL*); and "The spirit is free in the letter, and subjugated in the root"; and then, "To love the Torah more than God" is "protection against the madness of a direct contact with the Sacred" (*DL*). The aspect of living and original speech *itself* which Levinas seeks to save is clear. Without its possibility, outside its horizon, writing is nothing. In this sense, writing will always be secondary. To liberate it from this possibility and this horizon, from this essential secondariness, is to deny it as writing, and to leave room for a grammar or a lexicon without language, for cybernetics or electronics. But it is only in God that speech, as presence, as the origin and horizon of writing, is realized without defect. One would have to be able to show that only this reference to the speech of God distinguishes Levinas's intentions

from those of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*; and that for a thought of original finitude this distinction is no longer possible. And that if writing is secondary at this point, nothing, however, has occurred before it.

As for Levinas's ties to Blanchot, it seems to us that despite the frequent rapprochements he proposes, the profound and incontestable affinities between them all belong to the critical and negative moment, within the hollow space of finitude in which messianic eschatology comes to resonate, within the expectation of expectation in which Levinas has begun to hear a response. This response is still called expectation, of course, but Levinas no longer has to await it. The affinity ceases, it seems to us, at the moment when eschatological positivity retrospectively comes to illuminate the common route, to lift the finitude and pure negativity of the question, when the neutral is determined. Blanchot could probably extend over all of Levinas's propositions what he says about the dissymmetry within the space of communication: "Here, I believe, is what is decisive in the affirmation which we must hear, and which must be maintained independently of the theological context in which it occurs." But is this possible? Independent of its "theological context" (an expression that Levinas would most likely reject) does not this entire discourse collapse?

To be behind the sign which is in the world is *afterward* to remain invisible to the world within epiphany. In the face, the other is given over in person *as other*, that is, as that which does not reveal itself, as that which cannot be made thematic. I could not possibly speak of the Other, make of the Other a theme, pronounce the Other as object, in the accusative. I can only, *I must* only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a *case* of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech. Categories must be missing for the Other not to be overlooked; but for the Other not to be overlooked, He must present himself as absence, and must appear as nonphenomenal. Always behind its signs and its works, always within its secret interior, and forever discreet, interrupting all historical totalities through its freedom of speech, the face is not "of this world." It is the origin of the world. I can speak *of it* only by speaking *to it*; and *I may* reach it only as *I must* reach it. But I must only *reach* it as the inaccessible, the invisible, the intangible. Secret, separate, invisible like Gyjès ("the very condition of man")—this is the very state, the very status of what is called the *psyche*. This absolute separation, this natural atheism, this lying freedom in which truth and discourse take root—all this is a "great glory for the creator." An affirmation which, for once at least, is hardly disorienting.

For the face to present the other without metaphor, speech must not only translate thought. Thought, of course, already must be speech, but above all the body must also remain a language. Rational knowledge must not be the first word of words. If one is to believe Levinas, Husserl and Heidegger, at bottom, accepted the classical subordination of language to thought, and body to lan-

guage. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty, "better than others," would have shown "that disincarnated thought, thinking of speech before speaking it, thought as constitutive of the world of speech, was a myth." But by the force of a movement proper to Levinas, he accepts this extreme "modern" audacity only to redirect it toward an infinitism that this audacity itself must suppose, according to himself; and the form of this infinitism is often quite classical, pre-Kantian rather than Hegelian. Thus, the themes of one's own body as language and as intentionality cannot get around the classical dangers, and thought cannot *first* be language unless it is acknowledged that thought is *first* and irreducibly a relation to the other (which it seems to us did not escape Merleau-Ponty);<sup>36</sup> but a relation to an irreducible other who summons me without possibility of return from without, for in this order is presented the infinity which no thought can enclose and which forbids all monologue "even if it had 'the corporal intentionality' of Merleau-Ponty." Despite all appearances and all habitual thinking, it must be acknowledged here that the dissociation of thought and language, and the subordination of the latter to the former, are proper to a philosophy of finitude. And this demonstration would refer us once more to the Cartesian Cogito of the third *Meditation*, beyond Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Husserl. And does so according to a schema that seems to us to support the entirety of Levinas's thought: the other is the other only if his alterity is absolutely irreducible, that is, infinitely irreducible; and the infinitely Other can only be Infinity.

As speech and glance the face is not in the world, since it opens and exceeds the totality. This is why it marks the limit of all power, of all violence, and the origin of the ethical. In a sense, murder is always directed against the face, but thereby always misses it. "Murder exerts a power over that which escapes power. Still, a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible; but already impotence, because the face rips apart the sensible." "The Other is the only being who I may wish to kill," but the only one, also, who orders that "thou shalt commit no murders," and thus absolutely limits my power. Not by opposing me with another force in the world, but by speaking to me, and by looking at me from an *other* origin of the world, from that which no finite power can restrict: the strange, unthinkable notion of unreal resistance. Since his 1953 article (already cited), Levinas no longer, to our knowledge, speaks of "intelligible resistance"—an expression whose sense still belongs at least literally, to the realm of the same, and which was utilized, apparently, only to signify an unreal resistance. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas speaks of "ethical resistance."

That which escapes the concept as power, therefore, is not existence in general, but the existence of the Other. And first of all because, despite all appearances, there is no concept of the Other. We would have to reflect upon this word "Other" [*Autruï*] in an artisan-like way, in the realm where philosophy and philology constrain each other, uniting their concerns and their rigor—this word "Other" circumscribed in silence by the capital letter which ever increases the

neutrality of the *other*, and which we use so familiarly, even though it is the very disorder of our conceptuality. Is it only a common noun without concept? But, first of all, is it a noun? It is not an adjective, or a pronoun; therefore it is a substantive—and such it is classed by the dictionaries—but a substantive which is not, as usual, a species of noun: neither common noun, for it cannot take, as in the category of the other in general, the *heteron*, the definite article. Nor the plural. "In the chancellery location *l'autruï* [the Other], *le* must not be understood as the article of *autruï*: implied is *property, rights: the property, the rights of Others*," notes Littré, who began thus: "*Autruï*, from *alter-huic*, this other, in regimen: this is why *autruï* is always in regimen, and why *autruï* is less general than *les autres* [the others]." Thus, without making language the accident of thought, we would have to account for this: that, within language, that which is always "in regimen" and in the least generality is, in its meaning, undeclinable and beyond genre. What is the origin of this *case* of meaning in language, of this *regimen* in which language places meaning? Nor is *autruï* a proper noun, even though its anonymity signifies but the unnamable source of every proper noun. We would have to examine patiently what emerges in language when the Greek conception of *heteron* seems to run out of breath when faced by the *alter-huic*: what happens when the *heteron* seems to become incapable of mastering what it alone, however, is able to precomprehend by concealing it as alterity (other in general), and which, in return, will reveal to *heteron* its irreducible center of meaning (the other as Other [*autruï*]). We would have to examine the complicity of the concealment and the precomprehension which does not occur within a conceptual movement, for the French word *autruï* does not designate a category of the genre *autre*. We would have to examine this thought of the other *in general* (which is not a genre), the Greek thought within which this nonspecific *difference* realizes (itself in) our history. Or, rather: what does *autre* mean before its Greek determination as *heteron*, and its Judeo-Christian determination as *autruï*? This is the kind of question which Levinas seems to contest profoundly: according to him, only the irruption of the Other permits access to the absolute and to the irreducible alterity of the other. We would have to examine, therefore, this *Huic* of *autruï* whose transcendence is not yet that of a thou. Here, Levinas's opposition to Buber or to Gabriel Marcel becomes meaningful. After opposing the magisterial height of the *You* to the intimate reciprocity of the Me-Thou (*TI*), Levinas seems to move toward a philosophy of the *Ille*, of the *He* (*II*) in his meditation of the *Trace* (that is, of the neighbor as a distant stranger, according to the original ambiguity of the word translated as the "neighbor" to be loved). A philosophy of the *He* who would not be an impersonal object opposed to the *thou*, but the invisible transcendence of the Other.<sup>37</sup> If the face's expression is not revelation, then the unrevealable is expressed beyond all thematization, beyond all constitutive analysis, all phenomenology. At its various stages, the transcendental constitution of the *alter*

ego—of which Husserl attempts to reassemble the description in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*—would presuppose that whose genesis it allegedly traces (according to Levinas). The Other could not be constituted as an alter ego, as a phenomenon of the ego, by and for a nomadic subject proceeding by appresentative analogy. All the difficulties encountered by Husserl could be “surmounted” if the ethical relationship were recognized as the original face-to-face, as the emergence of absolute alterity, the emergence of an exteriority which can be neither derived, nor engendered, nor constituted on the basis of anything other than itself. An absolute outside, an exteriority infinitely overflowing the monad of the *ego cogito*. Here again, Descartes against Husserl, the Descartes of the *Third Meditation* allegedly misconstrued by Husserl. While Descartes, in his reflections on the *cogito*, becomes aware that infinity not only cannot be constituted as a (dubitable) object, but has already made infinity possible as a *cogito* overflowing the object, (a nonspatial overflowing, against which metaphor shatters), Husserl, on the other hand, “sees in the *cogito* a subjectivity with no support from without, constituting the idea of infinity itself, and providing himself with it as object” (TI). Now, the infinite(-ly other) cannot be an object because it is speech, the origin of meaning and the world. Therefore, no phenomenology can account for ethics, speech, and justice.

But if all justice begins with speech, all speech is not just. Rhetoric may amount to the violence of theory, which *reduces* the other when it *leads* the other, whether through psychology, demagogy, or even pedagogy which is not instruction. The latter descends from the heights of the master, whose absolute exteriority does not impair the disciple’s freedom. Beyond rhetoric, speech uncovers the nudity of the face, without which no nudity would have any meaning. All nudity, “even the nudity of the body experienced in shame,” is a “figure of speech” in relation to the nonmetaphorical nudity of the face. This is already quite explicit in *Is Ontology Fundamental?* “The nudity of the face is not a stylistic figure.” And it is shown, still in the form of negative theology, that this nudity is not even an opening, for an opening is relative to a “surrounding plenitude.” The word “nudity” thus destroys itself after serving to indicate something beyond itself. An entire reading and interrogation of *Totality and Infinity* could be developed around this affirmation. For this affirmation seems to us quite implicitly—perhaps even too implicitly—to support the decisive division between what Levinas calls the face and that which is *Beyond the Face*, the section which considers, aside from the *Phenomenology of Eros, Love, Fecundity, and Time*. This nudity of the face, speech, and glance, being neither theory nor theorem, is offered and exposed as denuding, as demanding supplication, as the unthinkable unity of a speech able to assist itself and a glance which calls for assistance.

Asymmetry, non-light, and commandment then would be violence and injustice themselves—and, indeed, so they are commonly understood—if they estab-

lished relations between finite beings, or if the other was but a negative determination of the (finite or infinite) same. But we have seen that this is not the case. Infinity (as infinitely other) cannot be violent as is totality (which is thus always *defined* by Levinas, always determined by an option, that is, an initial decision of his discourse, as *finite totality*: totality, for Levinas, means a finite totality. This functions as a silent axiom.) This is why God alone keeps Levinas’s world from being a world of the pure and worst violence, a world of immorality itself. The structures of living and naked experience described by Levinas are the very structures of a world in which war would rage—strange conditional—if the infinitely other were not infinity, if there were, by chance, one naked man, finite and alone. But in this case, Levinas would no doubt say, there no longer would be any war, for there would be neither face nor true asymmetry. Therefore the naked and living experience in which God has *already* begun to speak could no longer be our concern. In other words, in a world where the face would be fully respected (as that which is not of this world), there no longer would be war. In a world where the face no longer would be absolutely respected, where there no longer would be a face, there would be no more cause for war. God, therefore, is implicated in war. His name too, like the name of peace, is a function within the system of war, the only system whose basis permits us to speak, the only system whose language may ever be spoken. With or without God, there would be no war. War supposes and excludes God. We can have a relation to God only within such a system. Therefore war—for war there is—is the difference between the face and the finite world without a face. But is not this difference that which has always been called the world, in which the absence-presence of God *plays*? Only the play of the world permits us to *think the essence* of God. In a sense that our language—and Levinas’s also—accommodates poorly the play of the world precedes God.

The face-to-face, then, is not originally determined by Levinas as the vis-à-vis of two equal and upright men. The latter supposes the face-to-face of the man with bent neck and eyes raised toward the God on high. Language is indeed the possibility of the face-to-face and of being-upright, but it does not exclude inferiority, the humility of the glance at the father as the glance of the child made in memory of having been expelled before knowing how to walk, and of having been delivered, prone and *infans*, into the hands of the adult masters. Man, one might say, is a God arrived too early, that is, a God who knows himself forever late in relation to the already-there of Being. But it is certain that these last remarks—and this is the least one might say—do not belong to the genre of commentary. And we are not referring, here, to the themes known under the name of psychoanalysis, nor to the embryological or anthropological hypothesis on the structurally premature birth of man’s offspring. Let it suffice us to know that man is born.<sup>38</sup>

God’s name is often mentioned, but this return to experience, and to “things

themselves," as a relation to the infinite(ly) other is not theological, even if it alone is capable, afterward, of founding theological discourse, which up to now has "imprudently considered the idea of the relationship between God and creation in ontological terms" (II). The foundation of metaphysics—in Levinas's sense—is to be encountered in the return to things themselves, where we find the common root of humanism and theology: the resemblance between man and God, man's visage and the Face of God. "The Other resembles God" (*ibid.*). Via the passageway of this resemblance, man's speech can be lifted up toward God, an almost unheard of *analogy* which is the very movement of Levinas's discourse on discourse. Analogy as dialogue with God: "Discourse is discourse with God . . . Metaphysics is the essence of this language with God." Discourse with God, and not in God as *participation*. Discourse with God, and not discourse on God and his attributes as *theology*. And the dissymetry of my relation to the other, this "curvature of inter-subjective space signifies the divine intention of all truth." It "is, perhaps, the very presence of God." Presence as separation, presence-absence—again the break with Parmenides, Spinoza and Hegel, which only "the idea of creation *ex nihilo*" can consummate. Presence as separation, presence-absence as resemblance, but a resemblance which is not the "ontological mark" of the worker imprinted on his product, or on "beings created in his image and resemblance" (Malebranche);<sup>39</sup> a resemblance which can be understood neither in terms of communion or knowledge, nor in terms of participation and incarnation. A resemblance which is neither a sign nor an effect of God. Neither the sign nor the effect exceeds the same. We are "in the Trace of God." A proposition which risks incompatibility with every allusion to the "very presence of God." A proposition readily converted into atheism: and if God was an *effect of the trace*? If the idea of divine presence (life, existence, parousia, etc.), if the name of God was but the movement of erasure of the trace in presence? Here it is a question of knowing whether the trace permits us to think presence in its system, or whether the reverse order is the true one. It is doubtless the *true order*. But it is indeed the *order of truth* which is in question. Levinas's thought is maintained between these two postulations.

The face of God disappears forever in showing itself. Thus are reassembled in the unity of their metaphysical signification, at the very heart of the experience denuded by Levinas, the diverse evocations of the Face of Yahweh, who of course is never named in *Totality and Infinity*. The face of Yahweh is the *total* person and the *total* presence of "the Eternal speaking face to face with Moses," but saying to him also: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall be no man see me and live . . . thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cliff of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:20–23). The face of God which commands while hiding itself is at once more and less a face than all faces. Whence, perhaps, despite all Levinas's precautions, the equivocal

complicity of theology and metaphysics in *Totality and Infinity*. Would Levinas subscribe to this infinitely ambiguous sentence from the *Book of Questions* by Edmond Jabès: "All faces are His; this is why HE has no face"?

The face is neither the face of God nor the figure of man: it is their resemblance. A resemblance which, however, we must think before, or without, the assistance of the Same.<sup>40</sup>

### III Difference and Eschatology

The questions whose principles we now will attempt to indicate are all, in several senses, questions of language: questions of language and the question of language. But if our commentary has not been too unfaithful, it is already clear that there is no element of Levinas's thought which is not, in and of itself, engaged by such questions.

#### *Of the Original Polemic*

First, let it be said, for our own reassurance: the route followed by Levinas's thought is such that all our questions already belong to his own interior dialogue, are displaced into his discourse and only listen to it, from many vantage points and in many ways.

A. Thus, for example, *De l'existence à l'existant* and *Le temps et l'autre* seemed to proscribe the "logic of genre," as well as the categories of the Same and Other. These lacked the originality of the experience to which Levinas wished to lead us back: "To the cosmos which is Plato's world is opposed the world of the mind, in which the implications of eros are not reduced to the logic of genre, in which the ego is substituted for the *same*, and Others for the *other*." Now, in *Totality and Infinity*, where the categories of Same and Other return in force, the *vis demonstrandi* and very energy of the break with tradition is precisely the adequation of Ego to the Same, and of Others to the Other. Without using these terms themselves, Levinas often warned us against confusing *identity* and *ipseity*. Same and Ego: *idem* and *ipse*. This confusion, which, in a certain way, is immediately practiced by the Greek concept of *autos* and the German concept of *selbst*, does not occur as spontaneously in French; nevertheless, it returns as a kind of silent axiom in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>41</sup> We have seen this: according to Levinas there would be no interior difference, no fundamental and autochthonous alterity within the ego. If, formerly, interiority, the secret and original separation, had permitted the break with the classical use of the Greek concepts of Same and Other, the amalgamation of Same and Ego (Same and Ego homogenized, and homogenized with the concept, as well as with the finite

totality) now permits Levinas to include within the same condemnation both the Greek and the most modern philosophies of subjectivity, the philosophies most careful to distinguish, as did Levinas previously, the Ego from the Same and Others from the other. Without close attention to this double movement, to this progress which seems to contest its own condition and its own initial stage, we would miss the originality of this protest against the concept, the state and totality: it is not made, as is generally the case, in the name of subjective existence, but against it. Simultaneously against Hegel and against Kierkegaard.

Levinas often warns us against confusing—as one is so tempted to do—his anti-Hegelianism with a subjectivism, or with a Kierkegaardian type of existentialism, both of which would remain, according to Levinas, violent and premetaphysical egoisms. "It is not I who do not accept the system, as Kierkegaard thought, it is the other." Can one not wager that Kierkegaard would have been deaf to this distinction? And that he, in turn, would have protested against this conceptuality? If as subjective existence, he would have remarked perhaps, that the other does not accept the system. The other is not myself—and who has ever maintained that it is?—but it is *an* Ego, as Levinas must suppose in order to maintain his own discourse. The passage from Ego to other as *an* Ego is the passage to the essential, non-empirical *egoity* of subjective existence *in general*. The philosopher Kierkegaard does not *only* plead for Søren Kierkegaard, ("the egoistic cry of a subjectivity still concerned with Kierkegaard's happiness or salvation"), but for subjective existence in general (a noncontradictory expression); this is why his discourse is philosophical, and not in the realm of empirical egoism. The name of a philosophical subject, when he says *I*, is always, in a certain way, a pseudonym. This is a truth that Kierkegaard adopted systematically, even while protesting against the "possibilization" of individual existence which resists the concept. And is not this essence of subjective existence presupposed by the respect for the other, which can be what it is—the other—only as subjective existence? In order to reject the Kierkegaardian notion of subjective existence Levinas should eliminate even the notions of an *essence* and a *truth* of subjective existence (of the Ego, and primarily of the Ego of the Other). Moreover, this gesture would comply with the logic of the break with phenomenology and ontology. The least one might say is that Levinas does not do so, and cannot do so, without renouncing philosophical discourse. And, if you will, the attempt to achieve an opening toward the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed *within language*—and Levinas recognizes that there is no thought before language and outside of it—except by *formally* and *thematically* posing the question of the relations between belonging and the opening, the question of closure. Formally—that is by posing it in the most effective and most formal, the most formalized, way possible: not in a *logic*, in other words in a philosophy, but in an inscribed description, in an inscription of

the relations between the philosophical and the nonphilosophical, in a kind of unheard of *graphics*, within which philosophical conceptuality would be no more than a *function*.

Let us add, in order to do him *justice*, that Kierkegaard had a sense of the relationship to the irreducibility of the totally-other, not in the egoistic and esthetic here and now, but in the religious beyond of the concept, in the direction of a certain Abraham. And did he not, in turn—for we must let the other speak—see in Ethics, as a moment of Category and Law, the forgetting, in anonymity, of the subjectivity of religion? From his point of view, the ethical moment is Hegelianism itself, and he says so explicitly. Which does not prevent him from reaffirming ethics in repetition, and from reproaching Hegel for not having constituted a morality. It is true that Ethics, in Levinas's sense, is an Ethics without law and without concept, which maintains its non-violent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws. This is not an objection: let us not forget that Levinas does not seek to propose laws or moral rules, does not seek to determine *a* morality, but rather the essence of the ethical relation in general. But as this determination does not offer itself as a *theory* of Ethics, in question then, is an Ethics of Ethics. In this case, it is perhaps serious that this Ethics of Ethics can occasion neither a determined ethics nor determined laws without negating and forgetting itself. Moreover, is this Ethics of Ethics beyond all laws? Is it not the Law of laws? A coherence which breaks down the coherence of the discourse against coherence—the infinite concept, hidden within the protest against the concept.

If juxtaposition with Kierkegaard has often imposed itself upon us, despite the author's own admonitions, we are certain that as concerns the essential in its initial inspiration Levinas's protest against Hegelianism is foreign to Kierkegaard's protest. Inversely, a confrontation of Levinas's thought with Feuerbach's anti-Hegelianism would necessarily uncover, it seems to us, more profound convergences and affinities that the meditation of the Trace would confirm further still. We are speaking here of convergences, and not of influences; primarily because the latter is a notion whose philosophical meaning is not clear to us; and next because, to our knowledge, Levinas nowhere alludes to Feuerbach or to Jaspers.

But why does Levinas return to categories he seemed to have rejected previously in attempting this very difficult passage beyond the debate—which is also a complicity—between Hegelianism and classical anti-Hegelianism?

We are not denouncing, here, an incoherence of language or a contradiction in the system. We are wondering about the meaning of a necessity: the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it. Why did this necessity finally impose itself upon Levinas? Is it an extrinsic necessity? Does it not touch upon only an instrument, only an "expression," which can be put between quotation marks? Or does it hide, rather, some indestructible and un-

foreseeable resource of the Greek logos? Some unlimited power of envelopment, by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be overtaken?

B. During the same period, Levinas had expelled the concept of *exteriority*. The latter referred to an enlightened unity of space which neutralized radical alterity: the relation to the other, the relation of Instants to each other, the relation to Death, etc.—all of which are not relations of an Inside to an Outside. "The relation with the other is a relation with a Mystery. It is the other's exteriority, or rather his alterity, for exteriority is a property of space, and brings the subject back to himself through the light which constitutes his entire being" (TA). Now *Totality and Infinity*, subtitled *Essay on Exteriority*, does not only abundantly employ the notion of exteriority. Levinas also intends to show that *true* exteriority is not spatial, for space is the Site of the Same. Which means that the Site is always a site of the Same. Why is it necessary still to use the word "exteriority" (which, if it has a meaning, if it is not an algebraic X, obstinately beckons toward space and light) in order to signify a nonspatial relationship? And if every "relationship" is spatial, why is it necessary still to designate as a (nonspatial) "relationship" the respect which absolves the other? Why is it necessary to *obliterate* this notion of exteriority without erasing it, without making it illegible, by stating that its truth is its untruth, that *true* exteriority is not spatial, that is, is not exteriority? That it is necessary to state infinity's *excess* over totality in the language of totality; that it is necessary to state the other in the language of the Same; that it is necessary to think *true* exteriority as non-*exteriority*, that is, still by means of the Inside-Outside structure and by spatial metaphor; and that it is necessary still to inhabit the metaphor in ruins, to dress oneself in tradition's shreds and the devil's patches—all this means, perhaps, that there is no philosophical logos which must not *first* let itself be expatriated into the structure Inside-Outside. This deportation from its own site toward the Site, toward spatial locality is the *metaphor* congenital to the philosophical logos. Before being a rhetorical procedure within language, metaphor would be the emergence of language itself. And philosophy is only this language; in the best of cases, and in an unaccustomed sense of the expression, philosophy can only *speak it*, state the metaphor *itself*, which amounts to *thinking* the metaphor within the silent horizon of the nonmetaphor: Being. Space being the wound and finitude of birth (of the birth) without which one could not even open language, one would not even have a true or false exteriority to speak of. Therefore, one can, by using them, *use up* tradition's words, rub them like a rusty and devalued old coin; one can say that true exteriority is nonexteriority without being interiority, and one can write by crossing out, by crossing out what already has been crossed out: for crossing out writes, still draws in space. The syntax of the Site whose archaic description is not legible on the metal of language cannot be erased: it is this metal itself, its too somber solidity and its too shining brilliance. Language, son of earth and sun.

writing. One would attempt in vain, in order to wean language from exteriority and interiority, in order to wean language from weaning, to forget the words "inside," "outside," "exterior," "interior," etc., and to banish them by decree; for one would never come across a language without the rupture of space, an aerial or aquatic language in which, moreover, alterity would be lost more surely than ever. For the meanings which radiate from Inside-Outside, from Light-Night, etc., do not only inhabit the proscribed words; they are embedded, in person or vicariously, at the very heart of conceptuality itself. This is because they do not signify an immersion *in* space. The structure Inside-Outside or Day-Night has no meaning *in* a pure space given over to itself and disoriented. It emerges on the basis of an *included* origin, an *inscribed* eastern horizon which is neither within nor without space. This text of the glance is *also* the text of speech. Therefore it can be called Face. But one must not expect, henceforth, to separate language and space, to empty language of space, to snatch speech away from light, to speak while a Hand hides Glory. In vain would one exile any given word ("inside," "outside," "exterior," "interior," etc.), and in vain would one burn or imprison the letters of light, for language in its entirety already has awakened as a fall into light. That is, if you will, language arises with the sun. Even if "the sun is never named . . . its power is in our midst" (Saint-John Perse). To say that the infinite exteriority of the other *is not* spatial, is non-exteriority and non-interiority, to be unable to designate it otherwise than negatively—is this not to acknowledge that the infinite (also designated negatively in its current positivity: in-finite) cannot be stated? Does this not amount to acknowledging that the structure "inside-outside," which is language itself, marks the original finitude of speech and of whatever befalls it? No philosophical language will ever be able to reduce the naturalness of a spatial praxis in language; and one would have to meditate the unity of Leibniz's distinction between "civil language" and "scholarly" or philosophical language. And here one would have to meditate even more patiently the irreducible complicity, despite all of the philosopher's rhetorical efforts, between everyday language and philosophical language; or, better, the complicity between certain historical languages and philosophical language. A certain ineradicable naturalness, a certain original naïveté of philosophical language could be verified for each speculative concept (except, of course, for the nonconcepts which are the name of *God* and the verb *to be*). Philosophical language belongs to a system of language(s). Thereby, its nonspeculative ancestry always brings a certain equivocality into speculation. Since this equivocality is original and irreducible, perhaps philosophy must adopt it, think it and be thought in it, must accommodate duplicity and difference within speculation, within the very purity of philosophical meaning. No one, it seems to us, has attempted this more profoundly than Hegel. Without naïvely using the category of chance, of happy predestination or of the chance encounter, one would have to do for each concept what Hegel does for the German notion of

*Aufhebung*, whose equivocality and presence in the German language he calls *delightful*: "Aufheben has in the German language a double sense: that of preserving, maintaining, and that of leaving off, bringing to an end. To preserve, moreover, has a negative sense. . . . Lexicologically, these two determinations of the *Aufheben* may be considered as two meanings of the word. It is remarkable that a language comes to use one and the same word to express two opposed meanings. Speculative thought is *delighted* [*my italics*] to find in language words which by themselves have a speculative sense; the German language possesses several of these" (*Wissenschaft der Logik* I, pp. 124–25). In the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*) Hegel also notes that the union of two meanings (*historia rerum gestarum* and *res gestas*) of the word *Geschichte* "in our language" is not a "simple exterior contingency."

Henceforth, if I cannot designate the (infinite) irreducible alterity of the Other except through the negation of (finite) spatial exteriority, perhaps the meaning of this alterity is finite, is not positively infinite. The infinitely other, the infinity of the other, is not the other as a positive infinity, as God, or as resemblance with God. The infinitely Other would not be what it is, other, if it was a positive infinity, and if it did not maintain within itself the negativity of the indefinite, of the *apeiron*. Does not "infinitely other" primarily signify that which does not come to an end, despite my interminable labor and experience? Can one respect the Other as Other, and expel negativity—labor—from transcendence, as Levinas seeks to do? The positive Infinity (God)—if these words are meaningful—cannot be infinitely Other. If one thinks, as Levinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires, infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words *infinite* and *other*. Infinity cannot be understood as Other except in the form of the in-finite. As soon as one attempts to think Infinity as a positive plenitude (one pole of Levinas's nonnegative transcendence), the other becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable. Perhaps Levinas calls us toward this unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (tradition's) Being and Logos. But it must not be possible either to think or state this call. In any event, that the positive plenitude of classical infinity is translated into language only by betraying itself in a negative word (in-finite), perhaps situates, in the most profound way, the point where thought breaks with language. A break which afterward will but resonate throughout all language. This is why the modern philosophies which no longer seek to distinguish between thought and language, nor to place them in a hierarchy, are essentially philosophies of original finitude. But then they should be able to abandon the word "finitude," forever prisoner of the classical framework. Is this possible? And what does it mean to *abandon* a classical notion?

The other cannot be what it is, infinitely other, except in finitude and mortality

(mine and its). It is such as soon as it comes into language, of course, and only then, and only if the word *other* has a meaning—but has not Levinas taught us that there is no thought before language? This is why our questions certainly would be less bothersome for a classical infinitism of the Cartesian type, for example, which would dissociate thought and language, the latter never going as fast or as far as the former. Not only would these questions be less bothersome for a classical infinitism, but they could be its own questions. In another way: to neutralize space within the description of the other, in order thereby to liberate positive infinity—is this not to neutralize the essential finitude of a face (glance-speech) which *is a body*, and not, as Levinas continually insists, the corporeal metaphor of etherealized thought? Body: that is, *also* exteriority, locality in the fully spatial, literally spatial, meaning of the word; a zero point, the origin of space, certainly, but an origin which has no meaning before the *of*, an origin inseparable from genitivity and from the space that it engenders and orients: an *inscribed* origin. The *inscription* is the written origin: traced and henceforth *inscribed* in a system, in a figure which it no longer governs. Without which there no longer would be a body proper to oneself. If the face of the other was not *also, irreducibly*, spatial exteriority, we would still have to distinguish between soul and body, thought and speech; or better, between a true, nonspatial face, and its mask or metaphor, its spatial figure. The entire Metaphysics of the Face would collapse. Again, this question could be derived as much from a classical infinitism (duality of thought and language, but also of thought and body) as from the most modern philosophy of finitude. This strange alliance in the question perhaps signifies that within philosophy and within language, within *philosophical discourse* (supposing there are any others), one cannot simultaneously save the themes of positive infinity and of the face (the nonmetaphorical unity of body, glance, speech, and thought). This last unity, it seems to us, can be thought only within the horizon of infinite (indefinite) alterity as the irreducibly *common* horizon of Death and the Other. The horizon of finitude or the finitude of the horizon.

But, let us repeat, all this *within philosophical discourse*, where the thought of Death *itself* (without metaphor) and the thought of a positive Infinity have never been able to understand each other. If the face *is body*, it is mortal. Infinite alterity as death cannot be reconciled with infinite alterity as positivity and presence (God). Metaphysical transcendence cannot be at once transcendence towards the other as Death and transcendence towards the other as God. Unless God means Death, which after all has never been *excluded* by the entirety of the classical philosophy within which we understand God both as Life and as the Truth of Infinity, of positive Presence. But what does this *exclusion* mean if not the exclusion of every particular *determination*? And that God is *nothing* (determined), is not life, because he is *everything*? and therefore is at once All and

Nothing, Life and Death. Which means that God is or appears, *is named*, within the difference between All and Nothing, Life and Death. Within difference, and at bottom as Difference itself. This difference is what is called *History*. God is *inscribed* in it.

It will be said that Levinas stands opposed to precisely this kind of philosophical discourse. But in this combat, he already has given up the best weapon: disdain of discourse. In effect, when confronted by the classical difficulties of language we are referring to, Levinas cannot provide himself with the classical resources against them. At arms with the problems which were equally the problems of negative theology and of Bergsonism, he does not give himself the right to speak, as they did, in a language resigned to its own failure. Negative theology was spoken in a speech that knew itself failed and finite, inferior to logos as God's understanding. Above all, negative theology never undertook a Discourse with God in the face to face, and breath to breath, of two free speeches; and this despite the humility and the haughtiness of breaking off, or undertaking, the exchange. Analogously, Bergson had the right to announce the intuition of duration, and to denounce intellectual spatialization, within a language given over to space. It was not a question of saving, but of destroying discourse within "metaphysics," the science which allegedly does without symbols" (Bergson). Antagonistic metaphors were multiplied systematically in this autodestruction of language which advocated silent metaphysical intuition. Language being defined as a historical residue, there was no contradiction in utilizing it, for better or for worse, in order to denounce its own betrayal, and then to abandon it to its own insufficiency as rhetorical refuse, *speech lost to metaphysics*. Like negative theology, a philosophy of intuitive communion gave itself the right (correctly or incorrectly, another problem) to travel through philosophical discourse as through a foreign medium. But what happens when this right is no longer given, when the possibility of metaphysics is the possibility of speech? When metaphysical responsibility is responsibility for language, because "thought consists of speaking" (TI), and metaphysics is a language with God? How to think the other, if the other can be spoken only as exteriority and through exteriority, that is, nonalterity? And if the speech which must inaugurate and maintain absolute separation is by its essence rooted in space, which cannot conceive separation and absolute alterity? If, as Levinas says, only discourse (and not intuitive contact) is righteous, and if, moreover, all discourse essentially retains within it space and the Same—does this not mean that discourse is originally violent? And that the philosophical logos, the only one in which peace may be declared, is inhabited by war? The distinction between discourse and violence<sup>42</sup> always will be an inaccessible horizon. Nonviolence would be the telos, and not the essence of discourse. Perhaps it will be said that something like discourse has its essence in its telos, and the presence of its present in its future.

This certainly is so, but on the condition that its future and its telos be nondiscourse: peace as a *certain* silence, a certain beyond of speech, a certain possibility, a certain silent horizon of speech. And telos has always had the form of presence, be it a future presence. There is war only after the opening of discourse, and war dies out only at the end of discourse. Peace, like silence, is the strange vocation of a language called outside itself by itself. But since *finite* silence is also the medium of violence, language can only indefinitely tend toward justice by acknowledging and practicing the violence within it. Violence against violence. *Economy* of violence. An economy irreducible to what Levinas envisions in the word. If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. This *vigilance* is a violence chosen as the least violence by a philosophy which takes history, that is, finitude, seriously; a philosophy aware of itself as *historical* in each of its aspects (in a sense which tolerates neither finite totality, nor positive infinity), and aware of itself, as Levinas says in another sense, as *economy*. But again, an economy which in being history, can be *at home* neither in the finite totality which Levinas calls the Same nor in the positive presence of the Infinite. Speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before the possibility of speech. The philosopher (man) *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. This is why this avowal of the war within discourse, an avowal which is not yet peace, signifies the opposite of bellicosity; the bellicosity—and who has shown this better than Hegel?—whose best accomplice *within history* is irenics. *Within history* which the philosopher cannot escape, because it is not history in the sense given to it by Levinas (totality), but is the history of the departures from totality, history as the very movement of transcendence, of the excess over the totality without which no totality would appear as such. History is not the totality transcended by eschatology, metaphysics, or speech. It is transcendence itself. If speech is a movement of metaphysical transcendence, it is history, and not beyond history. It is difficult to think the origin of history in a perfectly finite totality (the Same), as well as, moreover, in a perfectly positive infinity. If, in this sense, the movement of metaphysical transcendence is history, it is still violent, for—and this is the legitimate truism from which Levinas always draws inspiration—history is violence. Metaphysics is *economy*: violence against violence, light against light: philosophy (in general). About which it can be said, by transposing Claudel's intention, that everything in it "is painted on light as if with condensed light, like the air which becomes frost." This becoming is war. This polemic is language itself. Its inscription.

*Of Transcendental  
Violence*

In addition, metaphysics, unable to escape its ancestry in light, always supposes a phenomenology in its very critique of phenomenology, and especially if, like Levinas's metaphysics, it seeks to be discourse and instruction.

A. Does metaphysics suppose this phenomenology only as a method, as a technique, in the strict sense of these words? Although he rejects the majority of the literal results of Husserl's researches, Levinas keeps to the methodological inheritance: "The presentation and development of the notions employed owes everything to the phenomenological method" (*TI; DL*). But are not the presentation and development of ideas but the vestments of thought? And can a method be borrowed, like a tool? Thirty years earlier, in the wake of Heidegger, did not Levinas maintain that method cannot be isolated? For method always shelters, especially in Husserl's case, "an anticipated view of the 'sense' of the being which one encounters" (*THI*). Levinas wrote at this time: "Consequently, in our exposition we cannot separate the theory of intuition, as a philosophical method, from what might be called Husserl's *ontology*" (*THI*).

Now, what the phenomenological method refers to, explicitly and in the last analysis (and this would be too easy to show), is Western philosophy's very decision, since Plato, to consider itself as science, as theory: that is, precisely as that which Levinas wishes to put into question by the ways and means of phenomenology.

B. Beyond its method, the aspect of "Husserl's essential teaching" (*TI*) which Levinas intends to retain is not only its supple and necessary descriptions, the fidelity to the meaning of experience, but also the concept of intentionality. An intentionality enlarged beyond its representative and theoretical dimension, beyond the noetico-noematic structure which Husserl incorrectly would have seen as the primordial structure. Repression of the infinite would have kept Husserl from access to the true depths of intentionality as desire and as metaphysical transcendence toward the other beyond phenomenality or Being. This repression would occur in two ways.

*On the one hand*, in the value of *adequation*. As vision and theoretical intuition, Husserlian intentionality would be *adequation*. This latter would exhaust and interiorize all distance and all true alterity. "Vision, in effect, is essentially an *adequation* of exteriority to interiority: exteriority is reabsorbed in the contemplating soul, and, as an *adequate idea*, is revealed a priori, resulting in a *Sinngebung*" (*TI*). Now, "intentionality, in which thought remains *adequation* to its object, does not define . . . consciousness at its fundamental level." Certainly Husserl is not named here, at the very moment when Levinas speaks of intention-

ality as *adequation*; one may always suppose that by the expression "intentionality, in which thought remains *adequation*," Levinas means "an intentionality such that, etc., an intentionality in which at least, etc." But the context, numerous other passages and the allusion to the *Sinngebung*, all clearly indicate that Husserl, in the letter of his texts, was unable to recognize that "as intentionality all knowledge already supposes the idea of infinity, which is *adequation par excellence*" (*TI*). Thus, supposing that Husserl had foreseen the infinite horizons which overflow objectivity and adequate intuition, he would have interpreted them, *literally*, as "thoughts aiming at objects": "What does it matter if in Husserlian phenomenology, understood literally, these unsuspected horizons are interpreted, in turn, as thoughts aiming at objects!" (cited above).

*On the other hand*, supposing that the Husserlian Cogito opened onto the infinite, according to Levinas, it would open onto an object-infinity, an infinity without alterity, a false infinity: "If Husserl sees in the cogito a subjectivity with no support outside itself, he is constituting the idea of infinity itself, giving it to himself as an object." The "false-infinity," a Hegelian expression which Levinas never uses, nevertheless seems to us, perhaps because it is Hegelian, to haunt numerous gestures of denunciation in *Totality and Infinity*. As it was for Hegel, the "false-infinity" for Levinas would be the indefinite, *negative* form of infinity. But, since Levinas conceives *true* alterity as nonnegativity (nonnegative transcendence), he can make the other the true infinity, and make the same (in strange complicity with negativity) the false-infinity. Which would have seemed absolutely mad to Hegel (and to all the metaphysics expanded and rethought in him): how can alterity be separated from negativity, how can alterity be separated from the "false infinity"? Or inversely, how could absolute sameness not be infinity? If, as Levinas says, the same is a violent totality, this would mean that it is a finite totality, and therefore is abstract, more other than the other (than an other totality), etc. The same as finite totality would not be the same, but still the other. Levinas would be speaking of the other under the rubric of the same, and of the same under the rubric of the other, etc. If the finite totality was the same, it could not be thought, or posed as such, without becoming other than itself (and this is war). If it did not do so, it could not enter into war with others (finite totalities), nor could it be violent. Henceforth, not being violent, it would not be the same in Levinas's sense (finite totality). Entering into war—and war there is—it is conceived, certainly, as the other's other, that is, it gains access to the other as an other (self). But again, it is no longer a totality in Levinas's sense. In this language, which is the only language of western philosophy, can one not repeat Hegelianism, which is only this language coming into absolute possession of itself?

Under these conditions, the only effective position to take in order not to be enveloped by Hegel would seem to be, for an instant, the following: to consider the false-infinity (that is, in a profound way, original finitude) irreducible.

Perhaps this is what Husserl does, at bottom, by demonstrating the irreducibility of intentional incompleteness, and therefore of alterity; and by showing that since consciousness is irreducible, it can never possibly, by its own essence, become self-consciousness, nor be reassembled absolutely close to itself in the parousia of an absolute knowledge. But can this *be said*, can one think the "false infinity" as such (time, in a word), can one pause alongside it as alongside the truth of experience, without *already* (an already which permits us to think time!) having let the *true* infinity, which then must be recognized as such, be indicated, presented, thought and stated? What we call philosophy, which perhaps is not the entirety of thought, cannot think the false, nor even choose the false, without paying homage to the anteriority and the superiority of the true (same relationship between the other and the same). This last question, which indeed could be Levinas's question to Husserl, would demonstrate that as soon as *he speaks* against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already.

But is there a more rigorously and, especially, a more literally Husserlian theme than the theme of inadequation? Of the infinite overflowing of horizons? Who was more obstinately determined than Husserl to show that vision was originally and essentially the inadequation of interiority and exteriority? And that the perception of the transcendent and extended thing was essentially and forever incomplete? That immanent perception occurred within the infinite horizon of the flux of experience? (cf., for example, *Ideas I*, paragraph 83, *passim*). And above all, who better than Levinas first gave us to understand these Husserlian themes? Therefore, it is not a question of recalling their existence, but of asking whether Husserl finally *summarized* inadequation, and reduced the infinite horizons of experience to the condition of available objects. And whether he did so by the secondary interpretation of which Levinas accuses him.

We can hardly believe so. In the two intentional directions of which we have just spoken, the *Idea in the Kantian sense* designates the infinite overflowing of a horizon which, by reason of an absolute and essential necessity which itself is absolutely principled and irreducible, *never* can become an object itself, or be completed, *equaled*, by the intuition of an object. Even by God's intuition. The horizon itself cannot become an object because it is the unobjectifiable wellspring of every object in general. This impossibility of adequation is so radical that neither the *originality* nor the *apodicticity* of evident truths are necessarily adequations. (Cf., for example, *Ideas I*, sec. 3; *Cartesian Meditations*, sec. 9, *passim*.) (Of course, this does not imply that certain possibilities of adequate evident truths—particular and founded ones—are overlooked by Husserl.) The importance of the concept of horizon lies precisely in its inability to *make* any constitutive act *into* an object, and in that it opens the work of objectification to infinity. In phenomenology there is never a constitution of horizons, but horizons of constitution. That the infinity of the Husserlian horizon has the form of an indefinite opening, and that it offers itself without any possible end to the

negativity of constitution (of the work of objectification)—does this not certainly keep it from all totalization, from the illusion of the immediate presence of a plentitudinous infinity in which the other suddenly becomes unfindable? If a consciousness of infinite inadequation to the infinite (and even to the finite) distinguishes a body of thought careful to respect exteriority, it is difficult to see how Levinas can depart from Husserl, on this point at least. Is not intentionality respect itself? The eternal irreducibility of the other to the same, but of the other *appearing as* other for the same? For without the phenomenon of other as other no respect would be possible. The phenomenon of respect supposes the respect of phenomenality. And ethics, phenomenology.

In this sense, phenomenology is respect itself, the development and becoming-language of respect itself. This was Husserl's aim in stating that reason does not tolerate being distinguished into theoretical, practical, etc. (cf. above). This does not mean that respect as ethics is *derived* from phenomenology, that it supposes phenomenology as its premise, or as a previous or superior value. The presupposition of phenomenology is of a unique kind. It "commands" nothing, in the worldly (real, political, etc.) sense of commandment. It is the very neutralization of this kind of commandment. But it does not neutralize the worldly type of commandment in order to substitute another type of commandment for it. It is profoundly foreign to all hierarchies. Which is to say that ethics not only is neither dissipated in phenomenology nor submitted to it, but that ethics finds within phenomenology its own meaning, its freedom and radicality. Moreover, it seems incontestable to us that the themes of nonpresence (temporalization and alterity) contradict that which makes phenomenology a metaphysics of presence, *working* it ceaselessly, and we emphasize this elsewhere.

C. Can Levinas separate himself from Husserl more legitimately as concerns theoretism and the primacy of the consciousness of the object? Let us not forget that the "primacy" necessarily in question here is that of the object or of objectivity *in general*. Now phenomenology has surely contributed nothing if not an infinite renewal, enlargement, and suppling of the notion of object in general. The ultimate jurisdiction of evident truths is infinitely open, is open for every type of possible object, that is, for every conceivable sense present for consciousness in general. No discourse (for example, the discourse in *Totality and Infinity* which seeks to reawaken ethical truths to their absolute independence, etc.) could be meaningful, could be thought or understood, if it did not draw upon this layer of phenomenological evidence in general. It suffices that ethical meaning be *thought* in order for Husserl to be right. Not only nominal definitions but, before them, possibilities of essence which guide all concepts, are presupposed when one speaks of ethics, of transcendence, of infinity, etc. These expressions must have a meaning for concrete consciousness in general, or no

discourse and no thought would be possible. This domain of absolutely "prior" truths is the domain of the transcendental phenomenology in which a phenomenology of ethics must take root. This rooting is not *real*, does not signify a real dependence; it would be vain to reproach transcendental phenomenology for being *in fact* incapable of engendering ethical values or behaviors (or, amounting to the same thing for being able to repress them, more or less directly). Since every determined meaning, every thought meaning, every noema (for example, the meaning of ethics) supposes the possibility of *noema in general*, it is fitting to begin *rightfully* with transcendental phenomenology. To begin *rightfully* with the general possibility of a noema which—let us recall this decisive point—is not a *real (reell)* moment for Husserl, and therefore is without any real (hierarchical or other) relationship to *anything else*: anything else being capable of conception only in noematicity. In particular, this means that from Husserl's point of view ethics *in fact*, in existence and in history, could not be *subordinated* to transcendental neutralization, nor be submitted to it in any way. Neither ethics, nor anything else in the world, moreover. Transcendental neutralization is in principle, by its meaning, foreign to all factuality, all existence in general. In fact it is neither before nor after ethics. Neither before nor after anything that is.

Thus, one may speak of ethical objectivity, or of ethical values or imperatives as objects (noemas) with all their originality, without reducing this objectivity to any of those which incorrectly (but the fault is not Husserl's) function as the model for what commonly is understood as objectivity (theoretical objectivity, political, technical, natural, etc. objectivity). Truthfully, there are two meanings of the theoretical: the current meaning, the one Levinas's protest particularly aims at; and the more hidden sense in which *appearance* in general is maintained, including the appearance of the nontheoretical (in the first sense) in particular. In this second sense, phenomenology is indeed a theoretism, but it is so in the extent to which all thought and all language are tied to theoretism, *de facto* and *de jure*. Phenomenology measures this extent. I know the meaning of the non-theoretical as such (for example, ethics or the metaphysical in Levinas's sense), with a theoretical knowledge (in general), and I respect it as such, as what it is, in its meaning. I have regard<sup>43</sup> for recognizing that which cannot be regarded as a thing, as a façade, as a theorem. I have regard for the face itself.

D. But, as we know, the fundamental disagreement between Levinas and Husserl is not here. Nor does it bear upon the ahistoricity of meaning with which Levinas formerly reproached Husserl, and concerning which the latter had "held in store surprises" (as Levinas's eschatology was to surprise us thirty years later in speaking "*from beyond the totality or history*" *TI*). Which supposes, once more, that the totality is finite (a supposition in no way inscribed in its concept), that history as such can be a finite totality, and that there is no history beyond the

finite totality. Perhaps one would have to show, as was suggested above, that history is impossible, meaningless, in the finite totality, and that it is impossible, meaningless, in the positive and actual infinity; that history keeps to the difference between totality and infinity, and that history precisely is that which Levinas calls transcendence and eschatology. A *system* is neither finite nor infinite. A structural totality escapes this alternative in its functioning. It escapes the archaeological and the eschatological, and inscribes them in itself.

The disagreement appears definite as concerns the Other. As we have seen: according to Levinas, by making the other, notably in the *Cartesian Meditations*, the ego's phenomenon, constituted by analogical appresentation on the basis of belonging to the ego's own sphere, Husserl allegedly missed the infinite alterity of the other, reducing it to the same. To make the other an alter ego, Levinas says frequently, is to neutralize its absolute alterity.

(a) Now, it would be easy to show the degree to which Husserl takes pains to respect, in its meaning, the alterity of the Other, particularly in the *Cartesian Meditations*. He is concerned with describing how the other *as other*, in its irreducible alterity, is presented to me. Is presented to me, as we will see later, as originary nonpresence. It is the other as other which is the ego's phenomenon: the phenomenon of a certain non-phenomenality which is irreducible for the ego as ego in general (the *eidos* ego). For it is impossible to encounter the alter ego (in the very form of the encounter<sup>44</sup> described by Levinas), impossible to respect it in experience and in language, if this other, in its alterity, does not *appear* for an ego (in general). One could neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other, if there was not a phenomenon of the totally other, or evidence of the totally other as such. No one more than Husserl has been sensitive to the singular and irreducible style of this evidence, and to the original non-phenomenalization indicated within it. Even if one neither seeks nor is able to thematize the other *of which* one does not speak, but *to whom* one speaks, this impossibility and this imperative themselves can be thematized (as Levinas does) only on the basis of a certain appearance of the other as other for an ego. Husserl speaks of this *system*, of this appearance, and of the impossibility of thematizing the other in person. This is *his* problem: "They, (the other *egos*) however, are not simple representations or objects represented within me, synthetic unities of a process of verification taking place 'within me,' but precisely 'others' . . . 'subjects for this same world . . . subjects who perceive the world . . . and who thereby experience me, just as I experience the world and in it, 'others'" (*Cartesian Meditations*). It is this appearance of the other as that which I can never be, this originary non-phenomenality, which is examined as the ego's *intentional phenomenon*.

(b) For—and here we are keeping to the most manifest and most massively incontestable meaning of the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations* whose course is so mazelike—Husserl's most central affirmation concerns the *irreducibly mediate* nature of the intentionality aiming at the other as other. It is evident, by

an essential, absolute and definitive self-evidence that the other as transcendental other (other absolute origin and other zero point in the orientation of the world), can never be given to me in an original way and in person, but only through analogical appresentation. The necessary reference to analogical appresentation, far from signifying an analogical and assimilatory reduction of the other to the same, confirms and respects separation, the unsurpassable necessity of (nonobjective) mediation. If I did not approach the other by way of analogical appresentation, if I attained to the other immediately and originally, silently, in communion with the other's own experience, the other would cease to be the other. Contrary to appearances, the theme of appresentative transposition translates the recognition of the radical separation of the absolute origins, the relationship of absolved absolutes and nonviolent respect for the secret: the opposite of victorious assimilation.

Bodies, transcendent and natural things, are others in general for my consciousness. They are outside, and their transcendence is the sign of an already irreducible alterity. Levinas does not think so; Husserl does, and thinks that "other" already means something when things are in question. Which is to take seriously the reality of the external world. Another sign of this alterity in general, which things share here with others, is that something within them too is always hidden, and is indicated only by anticipation, analogy and appresentation. Husserl states this in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations*: analogical appresentation belongs, to a certain extent, to *every perception*. But in the case of the other as transcendent thing, the principled possibility of an originary and original presentation of the hidden visage is always open, in principle and a priori. This possibility is absolutely rejected in the case of Others. The alterity of the transcendent thing, although already irreducible, is such only by means of the indefinite incompleteness of my original perceptions. Thus it is incomparable to the alterity of Others, which is also irreducible, and adds to the dimension of incompleteness (the body of the Other in space, the history of our relations, etc.) a more profound dimension of nonoriginality—the radical impossibility of going around to see things from the other side. But without the first alterity, the alterity of bodies (and the Other is also a body, from the beginning), the second alterity could never emerge. The system of these two alterities, the one inscribed in the other, must be thought together: the alterity of Others, therefore, by a double power of indefiniteness. The stranger is infinitely other because by his essence no enrichment of his profile can give me the subjective face of his experience *from his perspective*, such as he has lived it. Never will this experience be given to me originally, like everything which is *mir eigenes*, which is *proper* to me. This transcendence of the nonproper no longer is that of the entirety, always inaccessible on the basis of always partial attempts: transcendence of *Infinity*, not of *Totality*.

Levinas and Husserl are quite close here. But by acknowledging in this infinitely other *as such* (appearing as such) the status of an intentional modification of the ego in general, Husserl gives himself the *right to speak* of the infinitely other as such, accounting for the origin and the legitimacy of his language. He describes the phenomenal system of nonphenomenality. Levinas *in fact* speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego—which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him—he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language. What authorizes him to say "infinitely other" if the infinitely other does not appear as such in the zone he calls the same, and which is the neutral level of transcendental description? To return, as to the only possible point of departure, to the intentional phenomenon in which the other appears as other, and lends itself to language, *to every possible language*, is perhaps to give oneself over to violence, or to make oneself its accomplice at least, and to *acquiesce*—in the critical sense—to the violence of the fact; but in question, then, is an irreducible zone of factuality, an original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence. Is it meaningful to speak of a preethical violence? If the transcendental "violence" to which we allude is tied to phenomenality itself, and to the possibility of language, it then would be embedded in the root of meaning and logos, before the latter had to be determined as rhetoric, psychagogy, demagoguery, etc.

(c) Levinas writes: "The other, as other, is not only an alter ego. It is what I myself am not" (*EE* and *TA*). "Decency" and "everyday life" incorrectly lead us to believe that "the other is known through sympathy, as an other like myself, as alter ego" (*TA*). This is exactly what Husserl does not do. He seeks to recognize the other as Other only in its form as ego, in its form of alterity, which cannot be that of things in the world. If the other were not recognized as a transcendental alter ego, it would be entirely in the world and not, as ego, the origin of the world. To refuse to see in it an ego in this sense is, within the ethical order, the very gesture of all violence. If the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse. Therefore, it seems that one may not suppose that Husserl makes of the other an other like myself (in the factual sense of the word), or a *real* modification of *my life*, without misconstruing his most permanent and openly stated intentions. If the Other was a real moment of my egological life, if "inclusion of an other monad within my own" (*Cartesian Meditations*) was real, I would perceive it *originaliter*. Husserl does not cease to emphasize that this is an absolute impossibility. The other as alter ego signifies the other as other, irreducible to *my* ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego. The egoity of the other permits him to say "ego" as I do; and this is why he is Other, and not a stone, or a being without speech *in my real economy*. This is why, if you will, he is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually

command me. Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without this symmetry, which is not of the world, and which, having no real aspect, imposes no limit upon alterity and dissymmetry—makes them possible, on the contrary. This dissymmetry is an *economy* in a new sense; a sense which would probably be intolerable to Levinas.

Despite the logical absurdity of this formulation, this economy is the transcendental symmetry of two empirical asymmetries. The other, for me, is an ego which I know to be in relation to me as to an other. Where have these movements been better described than in *The Phenomenology of the Mind*? The movement of transcendence toward the other, as invoked by Levinas, would have no meaning if it did not bear within it, as one of its essential meanings, that in my ipseity I know myself to be other for the other. Without this, "I" (in general: egoity), unable to be the other's other, would never be the victim of violence. The violence of which Levinas speaks would be a violence without victim. But since, in the dissymmetry which he describes, the author of violence could never be the other himself, but always the same (ego), and since all egos are others for others, the violence without victim would be also a violence without author. And all these propositions can be reversed without difficulty. It will be easily understood that if the Parmenides of the *Poem* gives us to believe, through interposed historical phantasms, that he lent himself to parricide several times, the great and fearful white shadow which spoke to the young Socrates continues to smile when we undertake grand discourses on separate beings, unity, difference, the same and the other. To what exercises would Parmenides give himself over, at the frontiers of *Totality and Infinity*, if we attempted to make him understand that *ego* equals *same*, and that the other is what it is only as the absolute infinitely other absolved of its relationship to the Same. For example: (1) The infinitely other, he would say perhaps, can be what it is only if it is other, that is, other *than*. *Other than* must be *other than* myself. Henceforth, it is no longer absolved of a relation to an ego. Therefore, it is no longer infinitely, absolutely other. It is no longer what it is. If it was absolved, it would not be the other either, but the Same. (2) The infinitely other cannot be what it is—infinitely other—except by being absolutely not the same. That is, in particular, by being other than itself (non ego). Being other than itself, it is not what it is. Therefore, it is not infinitely other, etc.

At bottom, we believe, this exercise is not just verbiage, or dialectical virtuosity in the "play of the Same." It would mean that the expression "infinitely other" or "absolutely other" cannot be stated and thought simultaneously; that the other cannot be absolutely exterior<sup>45</sup> to the same without ceasing to be other; and that, consequently, the same is not a totality closed in upon itself, an identity playing with itself, having only the appearance of alterity, in what Levinas calls economy, work, and history. How could there be a "play of the Same" if alterity

itself was not already *in* the Same, with a meaning of inclusion doubtless betrayed by the word *in*? Without alterity *in* the same, how could the "play of the Same" occur, in the sense of playful activity, or of dislocation, in a machine or organic totality which *plays* or *works*? And it could be shown that for Levinas work, always enclosed inside totality and history, fundamentally remains a game. A proposition that we can accept, with several precautions, more easily than he.

Finally, let us confess our total deafness to propositions of this type: "Being occurs as multiple, and as divided into Same and Other. This is its ultimate structure" (II). What is the division of *being between* the same and the other? Is it a division *between* the same and the other, which does not suppose, at very least, that the same *is* the other's other, and the other the same as oneself? We are not only thinking of Parmenides' exercise, playing with the young Socrates. The Stranger in the *Sophist* who, like Levinas, seems to break with Eleatism in the name of alterity, knows that alterity can be thought only as negativity, and above all, can be *said* only as negativity, which Levinas begins by refusing; he knows too, that differing from Being, the other is always relative, is stated *pros eteron*, which does not prevent it from being an *eidos* (or a *genre*, in a nonconceptual sense), that is, from being the same as itself ("same as itself" already supposing, as Heidegger notes in *Identity and Difference*, precisely as concerns the *Sophist*, mediation, relation, and difference: *eksastan auto tauton*). Levinas, from his perspective, would refuse to assimilate the Other to the *eteron* in question here. But how can the "Other" be thought or said without reference—we do not say reduction—to the alterity of the *eteron* in general? This last notion, henceforth, no longer has the restricted meaning which permits its simple opposition to the notion of *Other*, as if it was confined to the region of real or logical objectivity. The *eteron*, here, belongs to a more profound and original zone than that in which this philosophy of subjectivity (that is, of objectivity), still implicated in the notion of the Other, is expanded.

The other, then, would not be what he is (my fellow man as foreigner) if he were not alter ego. This is a self-evidence greatly prior to "decency" and to the dissimulations of "daily life." Does not Levinas treat the expression *alter ego* as if *alter* were the epithet of a real subject (on a pre-eidetic level)? As an epithetical, accidental modification of my real (empirical) identity? Now, the transcendental syntax of the expression *alter ego* tolerates no relationship of substantive to adjective, of absolute to epithet, in one sense or the other. This is its strangeness. A necessity due to the finitude of meaning: the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I. Inversely, the other as *res* is simultaneously less other (not absolutely other) and less "the same" than I. Simultaneously more and less other, which means, once more, that the absolute of alterity is the same. And this contradiction (in

terms of a formal logic which Levinas follows for once, since he refuses to call the other *alter ego*), this impossibility of translating my relation to the Other into the rational coherence of language—this contradiction and this impossibility are not the signs of “irrationality”: they are the sign, rather, that one may no longer draw inspiration from *within* the coherence of the *Logos*, but that thought is stifled in the region of the origin of language as dialogue and difference. This origin, as the concrete condition of rationality, is nothing less than “irrational,” but it could not be “included” in language. This origin is an inscribed inscription.

Further, every reduction of the other to a *real* moment of *my* life, its reduction to the state of empirical alter-ego, is an empirical possibility, or rather eventuality, which is called violence; and violence presupposes the necessary eidetic relationships envisaged in Husserl's descriptions. For, on the contrary, to gain access to the egoity of the alter ego as if to its alterity itself is the most peaceful gesture possible. *We do not say absolutely peaceful. We say economical.* There is a transcendental and preethical violence, a (general) dissymmetry whose archia is the same, and which eventually permits the inverse dissymmetry, that is, the ethical nonviolence of which Levinas speaks. In effect, *either* there is only the same, which can no longer even appear and be said, nor even exercise violence (pure infinity or finitude); *or* indeed there is the same *and* the other, and then the other cannot be the other—of the same—except by being the same (as itself: ego), and the same cannot be the same (as itself: ego) except by being the other's other: alter ego. That I am also essentially the other's other, and that I know I am, is the evidence of a strange symmetry whose trace appears nowhere in Levinas's descriptions. Without this evidence, I could not desire (or) respect the other in ethical dissymmetry. This transcendental violence, which does not spring from an ethical resolution or freedom, or from a *certain way* of encountering or exceeding the other, originally institutes the relationship between two finite ipseities. In effect, the necessity of gaining access to the meaning of the other (in its irreducible alterity) on the basis of its “face,” that is, its nonphenomenal phenomenon, its nonthematic theme, in other words, on the basis of an intentional modification of my ego (in general), (an intentional modification upon which Levinas indeed must base the meaning of his discourse); and the necessity of speaking of the other as other, or to the other as other, on the basis of its appearing-for-me-as-what-it-is: the other (an appearing which dissimulates its essential dissimulation, takes it out of the light, stripping it, and hiding that which is hidden in the other), as the necessity from which no discourse can escape, from its earliest origin—these necessities are violence itself, or rather the transcendental origin of an irreducible violence, supposing, as we said above, that it is somehow meaningful to speak of preethical violence. For this transcendental origin, as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is at the

same time nonviolence, since it opens the relation to the other. It is an *economy*. And it is this economy which, by this opening, will permit access to the other to be determined, in ethical freedom, as moral violence or nonviolence. It is difficult to see how the notion of violence (for example, as the dissimulation or oppression of the other by the same, a notion which Levinas employs as self-evident, and which, however, already signifies alteration of the same, of the other as what it is) could be determined rigorously on a purely ethical level, without prior eidetic-transcendental analysis of the relations between ego and alter-ego in general, between several origins of the world in general. That the other appears as such only in its relationship to the same, is a self-evidence that the Greeks had no need to acknowledge in the transcendental egology which would confirm it later; and, it is violence as the origin of meaning and of discourse in the reign of finitude.<sup>46</sup> The difference between the same and the other, which is not a difference or a relation among others, has no meaning in the infinite, except to speak, as Hegel does and against Levinas, of the anxiety of the infinite which determines and negates itself. Violence, certainly, appears within the horizon of an idea of the infinite. But this horizon is not the horizon of the infinitely other, but of a reign in which the difference between the same and the other, *différance*, would no longer be valid, that is, of a reign in which peace itself would no longer have meaning. And first of all because there would be no more phenomenality or meaning in general. The infinitely other and the infinitely same, if these words have meaning for a finite being, is the same. Hegel himself recognized negativity, anxiety or war in the infinite absolute only as the movement of the absolute's own history, whose horizon is a final pacification in which alterity would be absolutely *encapsulated*, if not lifted up, in parousia.<sup>47</sup> How are we to interpret the *necessity of thinking the fact* of what is first of all *on the horizon* in what is generally called the end of history? Which amounts to asking what the *thought* of the other *as other* means, and whether or not the light of the “as such” is dissimulation in this unique case. Unique case? No, we must reverse the terms: “other” is the name, “other” is the meaning of this unthinkable unity of light and night. What “other” means is phenomenality as disappearance. Is it a question, here, of a “third route excluded by these contradictory ones” (revelation and dissimulation, *The Trace of the Other*)? But this route cannot appear, cannot be stated as tertiary. If it is called “trace,” the word can emerge only as a metaphor whose philosophical elucidation will ceaselessly call upon “contradictions.” Without which its originality—that which distinguishes it from the *Sign* (the word conventionally chosen by Levinas)—would not appear. For it *must* be made to appear. And the phenomenon supposes original contamination by the sign.

War, therefore, is congenital to phenomenality, is the very emergence of speech and of appearing. Hegel does not abstain by chance from pronouncing the

word "man" in the *Phenomenology of the Mind*: and he describes war (for example, the dialectic of the Master and the Slave) without anthropological reference, within the realm of a science of *consciousness*, that is, of phenomenality itself, in the necessary structure of its movement: a science of experience and of consciousness.

Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever *being able* to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse. *Necessarily* without reappropriating it, for if it did so, the horizon of peace would disappear into the night (worst violence as previolence). This secondary war, as the avowal of violence, is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence, the violence of primitive and prelogical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day, an absolute violence which would not even be the opposite of nonviolence: nothingness or pure non-sense. Thus discourse chooses itself violently in opposition to nothingness or pure non-sense, and, in philosophy, against nihilism. For this not to be so, the eschatology which animates Levinas's discourse would have to have had kept its promise already, even to the extent of no longer being able to occur within discourse as eschatology, and as the idea of a peace "beyond history." The "messianic triumph" "armed against evil's revenge" would have to have been ushered in. This messianic triumph, which is the horizon of Levinas's book, but which "overflows its framework" (*TI*), could abolish violence only by suspending the difference (conjunction or opposition) between the same and the other, that is, by suspending the *idea* of peace. But here and now (in a present in general), this horizon cannot be stated, an end cannot be stated, eschatology is not possible, except *through violence*. This infinite passage through violence is what is called history. To overlook the irreducibility of this last violence, is to revert—within the order of philosophical discourse which one cannot *seek to reject*, except by risking the *worst violence*—to an infinitist dogmatism in pre-Kantian style, one which does not pose the question of responsibility for its own finite philosophical discourse. It is true that the delegation of this responsibility to God is not an abdication, God not being a finite third party: thus conceived, divine responsibility neither excludes nor diminishes the integrity of my own responsibility, the responsibility of the finite philosopher. On the contrary, divine responsibility requires and calls for this latter responsibility, as its telos or its origin. But the *fact* of the inadequation of these two responsibilities, or of this unique responsibility for itself—this history or anxiety of the infinite—is not yet a *theme* for the pre-Kantian, or rather even pre-Hegelian, rationalists.

Nor will it be so for as long as the absolutely principial self-evidence, in Levinas's own terms, of "the impossibility for the ego not to be itself" is not

dissolved. The ego cannot not be itself even when it ventures out toward the other, nor could it venture forth with this impossibility, which thus "marks the innate tragedy of the ego, the fact that it is riveted to its own being" (*EE*), according to Levinas's strong statement. And above all, marks the fact that the ego knows this. This knowledge is the first discourse and first word of eschatology; it is that which permits separation and speaking to the other. It is not a knowledge among others, but is knowledge itself. "It is this 'always-being-one-and-yet-always-other' which is the fundamental characteristic of knowledge, etc." (Schelling). No philosophy responsible for its language can renounce ipseity in general, and the philosophy or eschatology of separation may do so less than any other. Between original tragedy and messianic triumph there is *philosophy*, in which violence is returned against violence within knowledge, in which original finitude appears, and in which the other is respected within, and by, the same. This finitude makes its appearance in an irreducibly open question which is the *philosophical question in general*: *why* is the essential, irreducible, absolutely general and unconditioned form of experience as a venturing forth toward the other still egoity? *Why* is an experience which would not be lived as *my own* (for an ego in general, in the eidetic-transcendental sense of these words) impossible and unthinkable? This unthinkable and impossible are the limits of reason in general. In other words: *why finitude*, if, as Schelling had said, "egoity is the general principle of finitude"? And *why Reason*, if it is true that "Reason and Egoity, in their true Absoluteness, are one and the same" (Schelling), and true that "reason . . . is a kind of universal and essential structure of transcendental subjectivity in general" (Husserl)? The philosophy which is the discourse of this reason as phenomenology cannot answer such a question by essence, for every answer can be made only in language, and language is opened by the question. Philosophy (in general) can only open itself to the question, within it and by it. It can only *let itself be questioned*.

Husserl knew this. And he called the irreducibly egoic essence of experience "archi-factuality" (*Urtatsache*), nonempirical factuality, transcendental factuality (a notion to which attention has never been paid, perhaps). "This *I am* is for me, for the I who says it and understands it accordingly, the *primordial intentional foundation of my world (der intentionale Urgrund für meine Welt)*."<sup>48</sup> *My world* is the opening in which all experience occurs, including, as the experience par excellence, that which is transcendence toward the Other as such. Nothing can appear outside the appurtenance to "my world" for an "I am." "Whether it is suitable or not, whether it appears to me monstrous (due to whatever prejudices) or not, *I must stand firm before the primordial fact (die Urtatsache, der ich standhalten muss)*, from which I cannot turn my glance for an instant, as a philosopher. For philosophical children this indeed may be the dark corner to which the ghosts of solipsism, or of psychologism or relativism, return. The true

philosopher will prefer, instead of fleeing from these ghosts, to illuminate the dark corner."<sup>48</sup> Understood in this sense, the intentional relationship of "ego to my world" cannot be opened on the basis of an infinite-other radically foreign to "my world," nor can it be imposed upon me by a God who determines this relationship: "The subjective a priori is that which precedes the Being of God and of everything, without exception, which exists for me, a thinking being. God too, is for me what he is by my own conscious production; I cannot look away from this in the anguished fear of what may be considered blasphemy, but on the contrary must see in it the problem. Here too, just as concerning the *alter ego*, 'conscious production' does not mean that I invent and fashion this supreme transcendence."<sup>50</sup> God no more really depends upon me than does the *alter-ego*. But he has *meaning* only for an ego in general. Which means that before all atheism or all faith, before all theology, before all language about God or with God, God's divinity (the infinite alterity of the infinite other, for example) must have a meaning for an ego in general. Let us note in passing that the "subjective a priori" recognized by transcendental phenomenology is the only possible way to check the totalitarianism of the neutral, the impersonal "absolute Logic," that is, eschatology without dialogue and everything classed under the conventional—quite conventional—rubric of Hegelianism.

The question about egoity as transcendental archi-factuality can be repeated more profoundly in the direction of the archi-factuality of the "living present." For egological life has as its irreducible and absolutely universal form the living present. There is no experience which can be lived other than in the present. The absolute impossibility of living other than in the present, this eternal impossibility, defines the unthinkable as the limit of reason. The notion of a past whose meaning could not be thought in the form of a (past) present marks the *impossible-unthinkable-unstable* not only for philosophy in general but even for a thought of being which would seek to take a step outside philosophy. This notion, however, does become a theme in the meditation of the trace announced in Levinas's most recent writings. In the living present, the notion of which is at once the most simple and most difficult of notions, all temporal alterity can be constituted and appear as such: as other past present, other future present, other absolute origins relived in intentional modification, in the unity and actuality of my living present. Only the actual unity of my living present permits other presents (other absolute origins) from appearing as such, in what is called memory or anticipation (for example, but in truth in the constant movement of temporalization). But only the alterity of past and future presents permits the absolute identity of the living present as the self-identity of non-self identity. One would have to show,<sup>51</sup> on the basis of the *Cartesian Meditations*, and given the reduction of every problem of factual genesis, how the question of *anteriority* in the relation between the constitution of other as *other present* and the constitution of the other as *Others* is a false question, which must refer to a common structural root. Although in the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl evokes only the

*analogy* of the two movements (Sec. 52), in many of the unpublished works he seems to hold them to be inseparable.

In the last analysis, if one wishes to determine violence as the necessity that the other not appear as what it is, that it not be respected except in, for, and by the same, that it be dissimulated by the same in the very freeing of its phenomenon, then time is violence. This movement of freeing absolute alterity in the absolute same is the movement of temporalization in its most absolutely unconditioned universal form: the living present. If the living present, the absolute form of the opening of time to the other in itself, is the absolute form of egological life, and if egoity is the absolute form of experience, then the present, the presence of the present, and the present of presence, are all originally and forever violent. The living present is originally marked by death. Presence as violence is the meaning of finitude, the meaning of meaning as history.

But why? Why finitude? Why history?<sup>52</sup> And why may we, on what basis may we, examine this violence as finitude and as history? Why the why? And from whence does it permit itself to be understood in its philosophical determination?

Levinas's metaphysics in a sense presupposes—at least we have attempted to show this—the transcendental phenomenology that it seeks to put into question. And yet the legitimacy of this putting into question does not seem to us any less radical. What is the origin of the question about transcendental archi-factuality as violence? Upon what basis does one ask questions about finitude as violence? Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse permit itself to be commanded to be returned against itself, to be always, as language, the return against itself which recognizes the other as other? Of course, one cannot *answer* these questions (for example, by saying that the question about the violence of finitude can be posed only on the basis of finitude's other and the idea of infinity), except by undertaking a new discourse which once more will seek to justify transcendental phenomenology. But the naked opening of the question, its silent opening, escapes phenomenology, as the origin and end of phenomenology's logos. The silent opening of the question about history as finitude and violence permits the appearance of history *as such*; it is the call (to) (of) an eschatology which dissimulates its own opening, covers this opening with its own noise as soon as the opening stands forth and is determined. This is the opening of a question, in the inversion of transcendental dissymmetry, put to philosophy as logos, finitude, history, violence: an interpellation of the Greek by the non-Greek at the heart of a silence, an ultralogical affect of speech, a question which can be stated only by being forgotten in the language of the Greeks; and a question which can be stated, as forgotten, only in the language of the Greeks. The strange dialogue of speech and silence. The strange community of the silent question of which we spoke above. It seems to us that this is the point at which, beyond any misunderstandings about Husserl's literal ambitions, phenomenology and eschatology can *open* a dialogue interminably, *be opened* in it, calling each other to silence.

### Of Ontological Violence

Silence is a word which is not a word, and breath an object which is not an object. (G. Bataille)

Does not the movement of this dialogue also govern the explication with Heidegger? It would not be surprising. To be persuaded of this, it would suffice to notice, in the most schematic way possible, the following: in order to speak, as we have just spoken, of the present as the absolute form of experience, one *already* must understand *what time is*, must understand the *ens of the praes-ens*, and the proximity of the *Being of this ens*. The present of presence and the presence of the present suppose the horizon, the precomprehending anticipation of Being as time. If the meaning of Being always has been determined by philosophy as presence, then the *question of Being*, posed on the basis of the transcendental horizon of time (first stage, in *Being and Time*) is the first tremor of philosophical security, as it is of self-confident presence.

Now, Husserl never unfolded this question of Being. If phenomenology carries this question within itself each time that it considers the themes of temporalization, and of the relationship to the alter ego, it nonetheless remains dominated by a metaphysics of presence. The question of Being does not govern its discourse.

Phenomenology in general, as the passageway to essentiality, presupposes an anticipation of the *esse* of essence, the unity of the *esse* prior to its distribution into essence and existence. Via another route, one could probably show that Husserl silently presupposes a metaphysical anticipation or decision when, for example, he affirms Being (*Sein*) as the nonreality (*Realität*) of the ideal (*Ideal*). Ideality is unreal, but it *is*—as object or as thought-being. Without a presupposed access to a meaning of Being not exhausted by reality, the entire Husserlian theory of ideality would collapse, and with it all of transcendental phenomenology. For example, Husserl could no longer write: "Offenbar muss überhaupt jeder Versuch, das Sein des Idealen in ein mögliches Sein von Realem umzudeuten, daran scheitern, dass Möglichkeiten selbst wieder ideale Gegenstände sind. So wenig in der realen Welt Zahlen im allgemeinen, Dreiecke im allgemeinen zu finden sind so wenig Möglichkeiten" ("Manifestly every attempt to reinterpret the Being of the ideal as a possible Being of the real must fail, on the whole, for the possibilities themselves are in turn ideal. In the real world, one finds as few possibilities as one does numbers in general, or triangles in general)."<sup>53</sup> The meaning of Being—before each of its regional determinations—must be thought *first*, if one is to distinguish the ideal which *is* not only from the real which it is *not*, but also from the fictional which belongs to the domain of the possible real. ("Naturally, it is not our intention to place the *Being of the ideal* on the same level as the *Being-thought of the fictional or the absurd*."<sup>54</sup> Hundreds

of analogous texts could be cited.) But if Husserl can write this, and if, therefore, he presupposes access to a meaning of Being in general, how can he distinguish his idealism as a theory of knowledge from metaphysical idealism? The latter too, posited the unreal Being of the ideal. Husserl doubtless would respond, thinking of Plato, that the ideal was *realized* within metaphysical idealism, that is, that it was substantiated, hypostasized, as soon as it was not understood essentially, in each of its aspects, as noema, and as soon as one imagined that it could be without in some way being thought or envisaged. This situation would not have been totally modified later when the *eidōs* became originally and essentially noema only in the Understanding or Logos of an infinite subject: God. But to what extent does transcendental idealism, whose way is opened thereby, escape the horizon—at the very least—of this infinite subjectivity? This cannot be debated here.

However, if he had previously opposed Heidegger to Husserl, Levinas now contests what he calls "Heideggerian ontology": "The primacy of ontology for Heidegger does not rest on the truism, 'To know the *existent* it is necessary to have comprehended the Being of the existent.' To affirm the priority of *Being* over the *existent* is to decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of the existent*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of the existent (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom" (*TI*, p. 45). This ontology would be valid for every existent, "except for the Other."<sup>55</sup>

Levinas's phrase overwhelms "ontology": not only would the thought of the Being of the existent have the impoverished logic of the truism, but it escapes this poverty only in order to seize and to murder the Other. It is a laughably self-evident but criminal truism, which places ethics under the heel of ontology.

Therefore, what of "ontology" and the "truism" ("in order to know the *existent* it is necessary to have comprehended the Being of the existent")? Levinas says that "the primacy of ontology does not rest" on a "truism." Is this certain? If the *truism* (*true, truth*) is fidelity to truth (that is, to the Being of what is as what it is, and such as it is), it is not certain that thought (Heidegger, for example) has ever sought to avoid it. "What is strange about this thought of Being is its simplicity," says Heidegger, at the very moment, moreover, when he demonstrates that this thought entertains no theoretical or practical aims. "The accomplishment of this thought is neither theoretical nor practical; no more does it consist in the union of these two modes of behavior."<sup>56</sup> Is not this gesture of return to what is within the dissociation of theory and practice also Levinas's gesture?<sup>57</sup> Does he not have to define metaphysical transcendence, therefore, as a not (yet) practical ethics? We are concerned here with some rather strange truisms. It is "by the simplicity of its essence" that "the thought of Being makes itself unknowable for us."<sup>58</sup>

If, on the contrary, by "truism" one understands, in the realm of *judgment*, analytic affirmation and the poverty of tautology, then the incriminated proposition is perhaps the least analytic of all; for if there were to be only one thought in the world which escapes the form of the truism, it would be this one. First, what Levinas envisages in the word "truism" is not a judicative proposition but a truth previous to judgment, which in turn founds all possible judgment. A banal truism is the repetition of the subject in the predicate. Now, Being is not simply a predicate of the existent, no more than it is the existent's subject. If it is taken as essence or as existence (as Being-such or Being-there), if it is taken as copula or as position of existence, or, more profoundly and more originally, if it is taken as the unitary focal point of all these possibilities, then the Being of the existent does not belong to the realm of predication, because it is already implied in all predication in general, and makes predication possible. And it makes every synthetic or analytic judgment possible. It is beyond genre and categories, transcendental in the scholastic sense, before scholasticism had made of the transcendental a supreme and infinite existent, God himself. It must be a singular truism that, through which is sought, in the most profound way, as the most concrete thought of all thoughts, the common root of essence and existence, without which no judgment, no language would be possible, and which every concept can only presuppose, by dissimulating it.<sup>59</sup> But if "ontology" is not a truism, or at least a truism among others, and if the strange difference between Being and the existent has a meaning, or is meaning, can one speak of the "priority" of Being in relation to the existent? An important question, here, for it is this alleged "priority" which, for Levinas, would enslave ethics to "ontology."

There can be an order of priority only between two determined things, two existents. Being, since *it is nothing* outside the existent, a theme which Levinas had commented upon so well previously, could in no way *precede* the existent, whether in time, or in dignity, etc. Nothing is more clear, as concerns this, in Heidegger's thought. Henceforth, one cannot legitimately speak of the "subordination" of the existent to Being, or, for example, of the ethical relation to the ontological relation. To precomprehend or explicate the implicit relation of Being to the existent<sup>60</sup> is not to submit the existent (for example, someone) to Being in a violent fashion. Being is but the *Being-of* this existent, and does not exist outside it as a foreign power, or as a hostile or neutral impersonal element. The neutrality so often denounced by Levinas can only be the characteristic of an undetermined existent, of an anonymous ontic power, of a conceptual generality, or of a principle. Now, Being is not a principle, is not a principial existent, an *archia* which would permit Levinas to insert the face of a faceless tyrant under the name of Being. The thought of Being (of the existent) is radically foreign to the search for a principle, or even for a root (although certain images lead us to believe this, occasionally), or for a "tree of knowledge": it is, as we have seen,

beyond theory, and is not the first word of theory. It is even beyond all hierarchies. If every "philosophy," every "metaphysics," has always sought to determine the first existent, the excellent and truly existent existent, then the thought of the Being of the existent is not this metaphysics or first philosophy. It is not even ontology (cf. above), if ontology is another name for first philosophy. Since it is not first philosophy concerned with the archi-existent, that is, the first thing or first cause which governs, then the thought of Being is neither concerned with, nor exercises, any power. For power is a relationship between existents. "Such thinking has no result. It produces no effect" (*Humanism*). Levinas writes: "Ontology, as first philosophy, is a philosophy of power" (II). This is perhaps true. But we have just seen that the thought of Being is neither ontology, nor first philosophy, nor a philosophy of power. Foreign to every first philosophy, it is not opposed to any kind of first philosophy. Not even to morals, if, as Levinas says, "morals is not a branch of philosophy but first philosophy" (II). Foreign to the search for an ontic *archia* in general, for an ethical or political *archia* in particular, it is not *foreign*, in the sense understood by Levinas who accuses it precisely of this foreignness, in the way violence is foreign to nonviolence, or evil to good. One may say of it what Alain said of philosophy: it "is no more politics" (or ethics) . . . "than it is agriculture." Which does not mean that it is an industry. Radically foreign to ethics, it is not a counterethics, nor a subordination of ethics to a function in the realm of ethics that is already secretly violent: the neutral. Levinas always reconstructs, and not only in the case of Heidegger, the *polis* or kind of social organization whose delicate outline he believes can be traced through a discourse offered neither as sociological, nor as political, nor as ethical. Thus it is paradoxical to see the Heideggerean city governed by a neutral power, by an anonymous discourse, that is, by the "one" (*man*) whose inauthenticity Heidegger was the first to describe. And if it is true, in a difficult sense, that the Logos, according to Heidegger, "is the Logos of no one," this certainly does not mean that it is the anonymity of oppression, the impersonality of the State, or the neutrality of the "one says." It is anonymous only as the *possibility* of the name and of responsibility. "But if man must one day arrive in the neighborhood of Being, he must first learn to exist in that which has no name" (*Humanism*). Did not the Kabbala also speak of the unnameable possibility of the Name?

The thought of Being, therefore, can have no *human* design, secret or not. Taken by itself, it is doubtless the only thought which no anthropology, no ethics, and above all, no ethico-anthropological psychoanalysis will ever enclose.<sup>61</sup>

Quite the contrary. Not only is the thought of Being not ethical violence, but it seems that no ethics—in Levinas's sense—can be opened without it. Thought—or at least the precomprehension of Being—*conditions* (in its own fashion, which excludes every ontic conditionality: principles, causes, premises, etc.) the

recognition of the essence of the existent (for example someone, existent as other, as other self, etc.). It conditions the respect for the other as *what it is*: other. Without this acknowledgment, which is not a knowledge, or let us say without this "letting-be" of an existent (Other) as something existing outside me in the essence of what it is (first in its alterity), no ethics would be possible. "To let be" is an expression of Heidegger's which does not mean, as Levinas seems to think,<sup>62</sup> to let be as an "object of comprehension first," and, in the case of the Other, as "interlocutor afterward." The "letting-be" concerns all possible forms of the existent, and even those which, *by essence*, cannot be transformed into "objects of comprehension."<sup>63</sup> If it belongs to the essence of the Other first and foremost to be an "interlocutor" and to be "interpellated," then the "letting-be" will let the Other be what it is, will respect it as interpellated-interlocutor. The "letting-be" does not only, or by privilege, concern impersonal things. To let the other be in its existence and essence as other means that what gains access to thought, or (*and*) what thought gains access to, is that which is essence and that which is existence; and that which is the Being which they both presuppose. Without this, no letting-be would be possible, and first of all, the letting be of respect and of the ethical commandment addressing itself to freedom. Violence would reign to such a degree that it would no longer even be able to appear and be named.

Therefore, the "relation to the Being of the existent" cannot possibly dominate the "relation to the existent." Heidegger not only would criticize the notion of a *relation* to Being, just as Levinas criticizes that of a *relation to the other*, but also the notion of *domination*: Being is not elevated, is not the land of the existent, for elevation belongs to the existent. There are few themes which have demanded Heidegger's insistence to this extent: Being is not an excellent existent.

That Being is not *above* the existent does not imply that it is *beside* it. For then it would be another existent. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of "the ontological significance of the *existent* in the general economy of Being—which Heidegger simply places *beside* Being through a distinction . . ." (EE) It is true that Levinas acknowledges elsewhere that "if there is distinction, there is not separation" (TA); and this is already to acknowledge the impossibility of every relationship of ontic domination between Being and existent. In reality, there is not even a *distinction* in the usual sense of the word, between Being and existent. For reasons of essence, and first because Being is nothing outside the existent, and because the opening amounts to the ontico-ontological difference, it is impossible to avoid the ontic metaphor in order to articulate Being in language, in order to let Being circulate in language. This is why Heidegger says of language that it is "*lichtend-verbergende Ankunft des seins selbst*" (*Humanismus*). At one and the same time language illuminates and hides Being itself. Nevertheless, Being itself is *alone* in its absolute resistance to *every metaphor*. Every philology which

allegedly reduces the *meaning* of Being to the metaphorical origin of the word "Being," whatever the historical (scientific) value of its hypotheses, misses the history of the meaning of Being. This history is to such an extent the history of a liberation of Being as concerns the determined existent, that one existent among others has come to be thought of as the eponymous existent of Being, for example, *respiration*. Renan and Nietzsche, for example, refer to respiration as the etymological origin of the word *Being* when they wish to reduce the meaning of what they take to be a concept—the indeterminate generality of Being—to its modest metaphorical origin. (Renan: *On the Origin of Language*. Nietzsche: *The Birth of Philosophy*).<sup>64</sup> Thus is explained all of empirical history, except precisely for the essential, that is, the thought that respiration and *non-respiration are*, for example. And are in a determined way, among other ontic determinations. Etymological empiricism, the hidden root of all empiricism, explains everything except that at a given moment the metaphor, has been thought *as* metaphor, that is, has been ripped apart as the veil of Being. This moment is the emergence of the thought of Being itself, the very movement of metaphoricity. For this emergence still, and always, occurs beneath an *other* metaphor. As Hegel says somewhere, empiricism always forgets, at very least, that it employs the words to be. Empiricism is thinking *by* metaphor without thinking the metaphor *as such*.

Concerning "Being" and "respiration," let us permit ourselves a juxtaposition which does not only have the value of a historical curiosity. In a letter to X . . . , dated March 1638, Descartes explains that the proposition "I breathe, therefore I am" concludes nothing, if it has not been proven previously that one exists, or if one does not imply: *I think that I breathe* (even if I am mistaken in this), therefore I am; and it is nothing other to state in this sense *I breathe, therefore I am* than *I think, therefore I am*. Which means, in terms of what concerns us here, that the *meaning* of respiration is always but a dependent and particular determination of my thought and my existence, and a fortiori of thought and of Being in general. Supposing that the word "Being" is derived from a word meaning "respiration" (or any other determined thing), no etymology or philology—as such, and as determined sciences—will be able to account for the thought for which "respiration" (or any other determined thing) becomes a determination of Being among others. Here, for example, no philology will be able to account for the gesture of Descartes's thought. One must travel other roads—or an other reading of Nietzsche—in order to trace the genealogy of the unheard-of meaning of Being.

This is a first reason why the "relation with an existent," with someone (the ethical relation), cannot be "dominated" by "a relation with the Being of the existent (a relation of knowledge)."

Second reason: the "relation with the Being of the existent," which is in no way a relation, above all is not a "relation of knowledge."<sup>65</sup> It is not a theory, as

we have seen, and teaches us nothing about what is. It is because it is not science that Heidegger sometimes refuses it even the name of ontology, after having distinguished it from metaphysics, and even from fundamental ontology. Since it is not knowledge, the thought of Being is not to be confused with the concept of pure Being as undetermined generality. Formerly, Levinas had given us to understand this: "Precisely because Being is not an existent, it must not be apprehended *per genus et differentiam specificam*" (EDE). Now, according to Levinas, all violence is a violence of the concept; and both *Is Ontology Fundamental?* and *Totality and Infinity* interpret the thought of Being as a concept of Being. Opposing himself to Heidegger, Levinas writes, among many other similar passages: "In our relation with the Other, the latter does not affect us on the basis of a concept" (*Is Ontology Fundamental?*). According to Levinas, it is finally the absolutely undetermined concept of Being which offers the Other to our understanding, that is, to our power and our violence. Now Heidegger is emphatic on this point: the Being *which is in question* is not the concept to which the existent (for example, someone) is to be submitted (subsumed). Being is not the concept of a rather indeterminate and abstract predicate, seeking to cover the totality of existents in its extreme universality: (1) because it is not a predicate, and authorizes all predication; (2) because it is "older" than the concrete presence of the ens; (3) because belonging to Being does not cancel any predicative difference, but, on the contrary, permits the emergence of every possible difference.<sup>66</sup> Being is therefore transcategorical, and Heidegger would say of it what Levinas says of the other: it is "refractory to the category" (TI). "The question of Being as a question of the possibility of the concept of Being arises from the preconceptual comprehension of Being,"<sup>67</sup> writes Heidegger, opening a dialogue and a repetition, (as concerns the Hegelian concept of pure Being as nothingness), which will not cease to deepen and, in the style which is almost always that of Heidegger's dialogue with the thinkers of tradition, will not cease to permit Hegel's discourse to grow and to speak—Hegel's discourse as that of all of metaphysics (Hegel included, or rather, being entirely included in Hegel).

Thus, the thought or pre-comprehension of Being signifies nothing less than a conceptual or totalitarian com-prehension. What we have just said of Being could also be said of the same.<sup>68</sup> To treat Being (and the same) as categories, or to treat the "relationship to Being" as a relation to a category which itself could be (by "reversal of terms," TI) posed afterward, or subordinated to a determined relation (an ethical relation, for example)—is this not to forbid oneself every determination (the ethical one, for example) from the outset? Every determination, in effect, presupposes the thought of Being. Without it, how can one give meaning to Being as other, as other self, to the irreducibility of the existence and the essence of the other, and to the consequent responsibility? etc. "This prerogative . . . of being answerable to oneself as essent, in short, this prerogative

of existing, involves in itself the necessity of a comprehension of Being."<sup>69</sup> If to understand Being is to be able to let be (that is, to respect Being in essence and existence, and to be responsible for one's respect), then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not. If Being is always to be let be, and if to think is to let Being be, then Being is indeed the other of thought. But since it is what it is only by the letting-be of thought, and since the latter is thought only by virtue of the presence of the Being which it lets be, then thought and Being, thought and the other, are the same; which, let us recall, does not mean identical, or one, or equal.

This amounts to stating that the thinking of Being does not make of the other a species of the genre Being. Not only because the other is "refractory to the category," but because Being is not a category. Like the Other, Being is not at all the accomplice of the totality, whether of the finite totality, (the violent totality of which Levinas speaks) or of an infinite totality. The notion of totality is always related to the existent. It is always a "metaphysical" or "theological" notion, and the notions of finite and infinite take on meaning in relation to it.<sup>70</sup> Foreign to the finite totality, or to the infinity of existents, *foreign* in the sense specified above, foreign without being another existent or another totality of existents, Being could not oppress or enclose the existent and its differences. If the glance of the other is to command me, as Levinas says, and is to command me to command, then I must be able to let be the other in his freedom as Other, and vice versa. But Being itself commands nothing or no one. As Being is not the lord of the existent, its priority (ontic metaphor) is not an *archia*. The best liberation from violence is a certain putting into question, which makes the search for an *archia* tremble. Only the thought of Being can do so, and not traditional "philosophy" or "metaphysics." The latter are therefore "politics" which can escape ethical violence only by economy: by battling violently against the violences of the *an-archy* whose possibility, in history, is still the accomplice of archism.

Just as he implicitly had to appeal to phenomenological self-evidences against phenomenology, Levinas must ceaselessly suppose and practice the thought of precomprehension of Being in his discourse, even when he directs it against "ontology." Otherwise, what would "exteriority as the essence of Being" mean (TI)? And that "eschatology places one in relation to Being, *beyond the totality* or history, and not with Being beyond past and present" (TI)? And "to support pluralism as the structure of Being" (DL)? And that "the encounter with the face is, absolutely, a relation to what is. Perhaps man alone is substance, and this is why he is face"?<sup>71</sup> Ethico-metaphysical transcendence therefore presupposes ontological transcendence. The *epekeina tes ousias* (in Levinas's interpretation) would not lead beyond Being itself, but beyond the totality of the existent or the existent-hood of the existent (the Being existent of the existent), or beyond ontic

history. Heidegger also refers to the *epekeina tes ousias* in order to announce ontological transcendence,<sup>72</sup> but he also shows that the undetermined *agathon* toward which transcendence breaks through has been determined too quickly.

Thus, the thought of Being could not possibly occur as ethical violence. On the contrary, without it one would be forbidden to let be the existent, and one would enclose transcendence within identification and empirical economy. By refusing, in *Totality and Infinity*, to accord any dignity to the onto-ontological difference, by seeing in it only a ruse of war, and by calling the intra-ontic movement of ethical transcendence (the movement respectful of one existent toward another) *metaphysics*, Levinas confirms Heidegger in his discourse: for does not the latter see in metaphysics (in metaphysical ontology) the forgetting of Being and the dissimulation of the onto-ontological difference? "Metaphysics does not pose the question of the truth of Being itself."<sup>73</sup> It thinks Being in an implicit fashion, as is inevitable in every language. This is why the thinking of Being must take its driving force from metaphysics, and must first occur as the metaphysics of metaphysics in the question "What is Metaphysics?" But the difference between the implicit and the explicit is the entirety of thought; and if correctly determined, it imprints its form on all ruptures and on the most radical questions. "It is true," says Heidegger once more, "that Metaphysics represents the existent in its Being, and thus thinks the Being of the existent. But it does not think the difference of Being and the existent."<sup>74</sup>

For Heidegger, it is therefore metaphysics (or metaphysical ontology) which remains a closure of the totality, and transcends the existent only toward the (superior) existent, or toward the (finite or infinite) totality of the existent. This metaphysics essentially would be tied to a humanism which never asks itself "in what manner the essence of man belongs to the truth of Being."<sup>75</sup> "What is proper to all metaphysics is revealed in its 'humanism.'<sup>76</sup> Now, Levinas simultaneously proposes to us a humanism and a metaphysics. It is a question of attaining, via the royal road of ethics, the supreme existent, the truly existent ("substance" and "in itself" are Levinas's expressions) as other. And this existent is man, determined as face in his essence as man on the basis of his resemblance to God. Is this not what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of the unity of metaphysics, humanism and onto-theology? "The encounter with the face is not only an anthropological fact. It is, absolutely speaking, a relation with what is. Perhaps man alone is substance, and this is why he is face." Certainly. But it is the analogy between the face and God's visage that, in the most classical fashion, distinguishes man from animal, and determines man's substantiality: "The Other resembles God." Man's substantiality, which permits him to be face, is thus founded in his resemblance to God, who is therefore both The Face and absolute substantiality. The theme of the Face thus calls for a second reference to Descartes. Levinas never formulates it: it is, as recognized by the Schoolmen, the ambiguity of the notion of substance as concerns God and his

creatures (cf. for example, *Principes*, I, sec. 51). By means of more than one mediation we thus are referred to the Scholastic problem of the analogy. We do not intend to enter into it here.<sup>77</sup> Let us simply notice that conceived on the basis of a doctrine of analogy, of "resemblance," the expression "human face" is no longer, at bottom, as foreign to metaphor as Levinas seems to wish. "... The Other resembles God..." Is this not the original metaphor? The question of Being is nothing less than a disputation of the *metaphysical* truth of this schema; which, let us note in passing, "atheistic humanism" employs precisely in order to denounce the very process of alienation. The question of Being draws back into this schema, this opposition of humanisms, in the direction of the thought of Being presupposed by the determination of the existent-man, the existent-God, and the analogical relationship between them; for the possibility of this relationship can be opened solely by the pre-conceptual and pre-analogical unity of Being. It is a question neither of substituting Being for God, nor of founding God on Being. The Being of the existent (for example, God)<sup>78</sup> is not the absolute existent, nor the infinite existent, nor even the foundation of the existent in general. This is why the question of Being cannot budge the metaphysical edifice of *Totality and Infinity* (for example). It is simply forever out of reach for the "inversion of the terms" *ontology* and *metaphysics* that Levinas proposes. The theme of this inversion, therefore, does not play an indispensable role, have meaning and necessity, except in the economy and coherence of Levinas's book in its entirety.

What would it mean, for metaphysics and for humanism, to ask "in what manner the essence of man belongs to the truth of Being" (*Humanismus*)? Perhaps this: would the experience of the face be possible, could it be stated, if the thought of Being were not already implied in it? In effect, the face is the inaugural unity of a naked glance and of a right to speech. But eyes and mouth make a face only if, beyond need, they can "let be," if they see and they say what is such as it is, if they reach the Being of what is. But since Being is, it cannot simply be produced, but precisely must be respected by a glance and a speech; Being must provoke them, interpellate them. There is no speech without the thought and statement of Being. But as Being is nothing outside the determined existent, it would not appear as such without the possibility of speech. Being *itself* can only be thought and stated. It is the contemporary of the Logos, which itself can only be as the Logos of Being, *saying* Being. Without this double genitivity, speech, cut off from Being and enclosed in the determined existent, would be only (according to Levinas's terminology) the cry of need before desire, the gesture of the self in the realm of the homogenous. It is only then, in the reduction or subordination of thought to Being, that "philosophical discourse itself" would not be "only a failed act, the pretext for an uninterrupted psychoanalysis or philology or sociology in which the appearance of discourse vanishes into the All" (*TI*). It is only then that the relation to exteriority would

no longer catch its breath. The metaphysics of the face therefore *encloses* the thought of Being, presupposing the difference between Being and the existent at the same time as it stifles it.

If this difference is original, if to think Being outside the existent is to think *nothing*, or if it is to *think* nothing no more than it is to approach the existent other than in its Being, doubtless one has some right to say with Levinas (excepting the ambiguous expression "Being in general") that "the relation to the expressed existent *preexists* . . . the unveiling of Being in general . . . ; at the ontological plane, the ethical one" (*TI*; my italics). If preexistence has the ontic sense which it must have, then this is incontestable. In fact, in existence the relationship with the *expressed* existent precedes the unveiling, the explicit thinking, of Being itself. With the limitation that there is no *expression*, in the sense of speech and not of need, except if there is already, implicitly, thought of Being. Likewise, *in fact*, the natural attitude precedes the transcendental reduction. But we know that ontological or transcendental "priority" is not of this order, and no one has ever alleged that it was. This "priority" no more contradicts than it confirms ontic or factual precedence. It follows that Being, since it is always, in fact, determined as an existent and is nothing outside the existent, is always dissimulated. Levinas's phrase—the preexistence of the relation to the existent—is the very formula of this initial concealment. Being not existing before the Existent—and this is why it is *History*—it begins by hiding itself beneath its determination. This determination as the revelation of the existent (Metaphysics) is the very veiling of Being. There is nothing accidental or regrettable about this. "The unconcealing of the existent, the clarity accorded to it, darkens the light of Being. Being draws back in that it is disclosed in the existent" (*Holzwege* p. 310). Is it not risky, then, to speak of the thinking of Being as of a thought dominated by the theme of unveiling (*TI*)? Without this dissimulation of Being by the existent there would be nothing, and there would be no history. That Being occurs in all respects as history and as world means that it can only retire beneath ontic determinations in the history of metaphysics. For historical "epochs" are metaphysical (ontotheological) determinations of Being which thus brackets itself, reserves itself beneath metaphysical concepts. In the strange light of this being-history Heidegger permits the reemergence of the notion of "eschatology," as it appears, for example, in *Holzwege*: "Being itself . . . is in itself eschatological" (p. 302). The relationship between this eschatology and messianic eschatology requires closer examination. The first supposes that war is not an accident which overcomes Being, but rather Being itself. "Das Sein selber das Strittige ist" (*Brief über den Humanismus*, p. 189). A proposition which must not be understood in consonance with Hegelianism: here, negativity has its origin neither in negation, nor in the anxiety of an infinite and primary existent. War, perhaps, is no longer even conceivable as negativity. Heidegger, as is well known, calls the original dissimulation of Being beneath

the existent, which is prior to the error in judgment, and which nothing precedes in the ontic order, erring [*Irren*: erring, going astray]: "Every epoch of world history is an epoch of erring" (*Holzwege* p. 311). If Being is time and history, then erring and the epochal essence of Being are irreducible. Henceforth, how can one accuse this thought of interminable wandering of being a new paganism of the Site, a complacent cult of the Seditary? (*TI, DL*).<sup>79</sup> Here, the solicitation of the Site and the Land is in no way, it must be emphasized, a passionate attachment to territory or locality, is in no way a provincialism or particularism. It is, at very least, as little linked to empirical "nationalism" as is, or should be, the Hebraic nostalgia for the Land, a nostalgia *provoked* not by an empirical passion, but by the irruption of a speech or a promise.<sup>80</sup> Is not to interpret the Heideggerian theme of the Land or the Dwelling as a nationalism or a Barrèsism first of all to express an *allergy*—the word, the accusation, which Levinas plays upon so often—to the "climate" of Heidegger's philosophy? Levinas acknowledges, moreover, that his "reflections," after having submitted to inspiration by "the philosophy of Martin Heidegger," "are governed by a profound need to depart from the climate of this philosophy" (*EE*). In question here is a need whose natural legitimacy we would be the last to question; what is more, we believe that its climate is never totally exterior to thought itself. But does not the naked truth of the other appear beyond "need," "climate," and a certain "history"? And who has taught us this better than Levinas?

The Site, therefore, is not an empirical Here but always an *Illic*: for Heidegger, as for the Jew and the Poet. The proximity of the Site is always held in reserve, says Hölderlin as commented on by Heidegger.<sup>81</sup> The thinking of Being thus is not a pagan cult of the *Site*, because the Site is never a given proximity but a promised one. And then also because it is not a *pagan cult*. The Sacred of which it speaks *belongs* neither to religion in general, nor to a particular theology, and thus cannot be determined by any history of religion. It is first the essential experience of divinity or of deity. As the latter is neither a concept nor a reality, it must provide access to itself in a proximity foreign to mystical theory or affectivity, foreign to theology and to enthusiasm. Again, in a sense which is neither chronological nor logical, nor ontical in general, it *precedes* every relationship to God or to the Gods. This last relationship, of whatever type, in order to be lived and stated supposes some precomprehension of the Deity, of God's Being-god, of the "dimension of the divine" of which Levinas also speaks by saying that it "is opened on the basis of the human face" (*TI*). This is all, and as usual it is simple and difficult. The sacred is the "only essential space of divinity which in turn opens only a dimension for the gods and the god . . ." (*Humanismus*). This space (in which Heidegger also names Elevation)<sup>82</sup> is within faith and atheism. Both presuppose it. "It is only on the basis of the truth of Being that the essence of the Sacred can be thought. It is only on the basis of the essence of the Sacred that the essence of Divinity must be thought. It is only in the light of the

essence of Divinity that one can think and say what the word 'God' must designate" (*Humanismus*). This precomprehension of the Divine cannot not be presupposed by Levinas's discourse at the very moment when he seeks to oppose God to the Sacred divine. That the gods or God cannot be indicated except in the Space of the Sacred and in the light of the deity, is at once the *limit* and the *wellspring* of finite-Being as history. Limit, because divinity is *not* God. In a sense it is nothing. "The sacred, it is true, appears. But the god remains distant."<sup>83</sup> Wellspring, because this anticipation as a thought of Being (of the existent God) always *sees* God *coming*, opens the possibility (the eventuality) of an encounter with God and of a dialogue with God.<sup>84</sup>

That the Deity of God, which permits the thinking and naming of God, is nothing, and above all is not God himself, is what Meister Eckhart, in particular, said this way: "God and the deity are as different from one another as heaven and earth . . . God operates, deity does not operate, has nothing to operate, has no operation in it, has never any operation in view" (Sermon *Nolite timere eos*). But this deity is still determined as the essence-of-the-threecfold-God. And when Meister Eckhart seeks to go beyond these determinations, the movement which he sketches seems to remain enclosed in ontic transcendence. "When I said that God was not a Being and was above Being, I did not thereby contest his Being, but on the contrary attributed to him a *more elevated Being*" (*Quasi stella matutina . . .*). This negative theology is still a theology and, *in its literality at least*, it is concerned with liberating and acknowledging the ineffable transcendence of an infinite existent, "Being above Being and superessential negation." *In its literality at least*, but the difference between metaphysical ontotheology, on the one hand, and the thought of Being (of difference), on the other, signifies the essential importance of the *letter*. Since everything occurs in movements of increasing explicitness, the literal difference is almost the entire difference of thought. This is why, here, when the thought of Being goes beyond ontic determinations it is not a negative theology, nor even a negative ontology.

"Ontological" anticipation, transcendence toward Being, permits, then, an understanding of the word God, for example, even if this understanding is but the ether in which dissonance can resonate. This transcendence inhabits and founds language, and along with it the possibility of all Being-together; the possibility of a *Mitsein* much more original than any of the eventual forms with which it has often been confused: solidarity, the team, companionship.<sup>85</sup> Implied by the discourse of *Totality and Infinity*, alone permitting to *let* be others in their truth, freeing dialogue and the face to face, the thought of Being is thus as close as possible to nonviolence.

*We do not say pure nonviolence.* Like pure violence, pure nonviolence is a contradictory concept. Contradictory beyond what Levinas calls "formal logic." Pure violence, a relationship between beings without face, is not yet violence, is pure nonviolence. And inversely: pure nonviolence, the nonrelation of the same

to the other (in the sense understood by Levinas) is pure violence. Only a face can arrest violence, but can do so, in the first place, only because a face can provoke it. Levinas says it well: "Violence can only aim at the face" ("La violence ne peut viser qu'un visage" 77). Further, without the thought of Being which opens the face, there would be only pure violence or pure nonviolence. Therefore, the thought of Being, in its unveiling, is never foreign to a certain violence.<sup>86</sup> That this thought always appears in difference, and that the same—thought (and) (of) Being—is never the identical, means first that Being is history, that Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear. A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing; in every sense of the word, and first of all the Greek sense, it would be speech without *phrase*.

In the last analysis, according to Levinas, nonviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence. Since the verb *to be* and the predicative act are implied in every other verb, and in every common noun, nonviolent language, in the last analysis, would be a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns in order to call to the other from afar. In effect, such a language would be purified of all *rhetoric*, which is what Levinas explicitly desires; and purified of the first sense of rhetoric, which we can invoke without artifice, that is, purified of every *verb*. Would such a language still deserve its name? Is a language free from all rhetoric possible? The Greeks, who taught us what *Logos* meant, would never have accepted this. Plato tells us in the *Cratylus* (425a), the *Sophist* (262 ad) and in Letter VII (342b), that there is no *Logos* which does not suppose the interlacing of nouns and verbs.

Finally, if one remains within Levinas's intentions, what would a language without phrase, a language which would say nothing, offer to the other? Language must give the world to the other, *Totality and Infinity* tells us. A master who forbids himself the *phrase* would give nothing. He would have no disciples but only slaves. The work—or liturgy—that is the expenditure which breaks with economy, and which must not be thought, according to Levinas, as a Game, would be forbidden to him.

Thus, in its most elevated nonviolent urgency, denouncing the passage through Being and the moment of the concept, Levinas's thought would not only propose an ethics without law, as we said above, but also a language without phrase. Which would be entirely coherent if the face was only glance, but it is also speech; and in speech it is the phrase which makes the cry of need become the expression of desire. Now, there is no phrase which is indeterminate, that is, which does not pass through the violence of the concept. Violence appears with

*articulation*. And the latter is opened only by (the at first preconceptual) circulation of Being. The very elocution of nonviolent metaphysics is its first disavowal. Levinas doubtless would not deny that every historical language carries within it an irreducible conceptual moment, and therefore a certain violence. From his point of view, the origin and possibility of the concept are simply not the thought of Being, but the gift of the world to the other as totally-other (cf., for example, *TI*, p. 175). In its original possibility as *offer*, in its still silent intention, language is nonviolent (but can it be language, in this pure intention?). It becomes violent only in its history, in what we have called the phrase, which obliges it to *articulate itself* in a conceptual syntax opening the circulation of the same, permitting itself to be governed both by "ontology" and by what remains, for Levinas, the concept of concepts: Being. Now, for Levinas, the concept of Being would be only an abstract means produced for the gift of the world to the other who is *above Being*. Hence, only in its silent origin, before Being, would language be nonviolent. But why history? Why does the phrase impose itself? Because if one does not uproot the silent origin from itself violently, if one decides not to speak, then the worst violence will silently cohabit the *idea* of peace? Peace is made only in a *certain silence*, which is determined and protected by the violence of speech. Since speech says nothing other than the horizon of this silent peace by which it has itself summoned and that it is its mission to protect and to prepare, speech *indefinitely* remains silent. One never escapes the *economy of war*.

It is evident that to separate the original possibility of speech—as non-violence and gift—from the violence necessary in historical actuality is to prop up thought by means of transhistoricity. Which Levinas does explicitly, despite his initial critique of Husserlian "ahistoricism." For Levinas, the origin of meaning is nonhistory, is "beyond history." One would then have to ask whether it is any longer possible to identify thought and language as Levinas seeks to do; and one would have to ask whether this transhistoricity of meaning is authentically Hebraic in its inspiration; and finally, whether this nonhistory uproots itself from history in general, or only from a certain empirical or ontic dimension of history. And whether the eschatology invoked can be separated from every reference to history. *For our own reference to history, here, is only contextual. The economy of which we are speaking does not any longer accommodate the concept of history such as it has always functioned, and which it is difficult, if not impossible, to lift from its teleological or eschatological horizon.*

The ahistoricity of meaning at its origin is what profoundly separates Levinas from Heidegger, therefore. Since Being is history for the latter, it is *not* outside difference, and thus, it originally occurs as (nonethical) violence, as dissimulation of itself in its own unveiling. That language, thereby, always hides its own origin is not a contradiction, but history itself. In the ontological-historical<sup>87</sup> violence which permits the thinking of ethical violence, in economy as the

thought of Being, Being is necessarily dissimulated. The first violence is this dissimulation, but it is also the first defeat of nihilistic violence, and the first epiphany of Being. Being, thus, is less the *primum cognitum*, as was said, than the *first dissimulated*, and these two propositions are not contradictory. For Levinas, on the contrary, Being (understood as concept) is the *first dissimulating*, and the ontico-ontological difference thereby would neutralize difference, the infinite alterity of the totally-other. The ontico-ontological difference, moreover, would be conceivable only on the basis of the idea of the Infinite, of the unanticipated irruption of the totally-other existent. For Levinas, as for Heidegger, language would be at once a coming forth and a holding back [*réserve*], enlightenment and obscurity; and for both, dissimulation would be a conceptual gesture. But for Levinas, the concept is on the plane of Being; for Heidegger it is on the plane of ontic determination.

This schema accentuates their opposition but, as is often the case, also permits one to conjecture about their proximity: the proximity of two "eschatologies" which by opposed routes repeat and put into question the entire "philosophical" adventure issued from Platonism. Interrogate it simultaneously from within and without, in the form of a question to Hegel, in whom this adventure is thought and recapitulated. This proximity would be indicated in questions of this type: *on the one hand*, is God (the infinite-other-existent) still an existent which can be precomprehended on the basis of a thought of Being (singularly, of divinity)? In other words, can infinity be called an ontic determination? Has not God always been thought of as the name of that which is not a supreme existent precomprehended on the basis of a thought of Being? Is not God the name of that which cannot be anticipated on the basis of the dimension of the divine? Is not God the other name of Being (name because nonconcept), the thinking of which would open difference and the ontological horizon, instead of being indicated in them only? Opening of the horizon, and not *in* the horizon. Through the thought of infinity, the ontic enclosure would have already been broken—but in a sense of the unthought that would have to be examined more closely—by means of what Heidegger calls metaphysics and onto-theology. *On the other hand*: is not the thought of Being the thought of the other before being the homogeneous identity of the concept, and the asphyxiation of the same? Is not the beyond-history of eschatology the other name of the transition to a more profound history, to History itself? But to a history which, unable any longer to be *itself* in any original or final *presence*, would have to change its name?

In other words, perhaps one might say that ontology precedes theology *only* by putting between brackets the content of the ontic determination which, in post-Hellenic philosophical thought, is called God: to wit, the positive infinity. The positive infinity would only have the (nominal) appearance of what is called an ontic determination. In truth, it would be that which refuses to be an ontic determination which is included as such in the thought of Being, that is, on the

basis and in the light of a thought of Being. On the contrary, it is infinity—as nondetermination and concrete operation—which would permit the thinking of the difference between Being and ontic determination. The ontic content of infinity would destroy ontic closure. Implicitly or not, the thought of infinity would open the question, and the ontico-ontological difference. Paradoxically, it would be this thought of infinity (what is called the thought of God) which would permit one to affirm the priority of ontology over theology, and to affirm that the thought of Being is presupposed by the thought of God. Doubtless, it is for this reason that Duns Scotus or Malebranche, respectful of the presence in all thought of *uniform* Being, or Being in general, did not believe it necessary to distinguish between the levels of ontology (or metaphysics) and theology. Heidegger often reminds us of the “strange simplicity” of the thought of Being; this is both its difficulty and that which properly touches upon the “unknowable.” For Heidegger, infinity would be only one eventual determination of this simplicity. For Malebranche, infinity is its very form: “The idea of the extended infinite thus encloses more reality than that of the heavens; and the idea of the infinite in all genres of Being, that which corresponds to this word, *Being*, the infinitely perfect being, contains infinitely more [reality], although the perception with which this idea affects us is the slightest of all; and is slighter to the extent that it is more vast, and consequently infinitely slight because infinite” (*Entretien d'un philosophe chrétien avec un philosophe chinois*.) Since Being is nothing (determined), it is necessarily produced in difference (*as* difference). Is, on the one hand, to say that Being is infinite, or to say, on the other, that it is revealed as produced only “in simultaneity with” (*in eins mit*) Nothingness (*What Is Metaphysics?*)—which means that it is “finite in its essence” (*ibid.*)—fundamentally to say anything else? But one would have to show that Heidegger never meant “anything else” than classical metaphysics, and that the transgression of metaphysics is not a new metaphysical or onto-theological thesis. Thus, the question about the Being of the existent would not only introduce—among others—the question about the existent-God; it already *would suppose* God as the very possibility of its question, and as the answer within its question. God always would be implied in every question about God, and would precede every “method.” The very content of the thought of God is that of a being *about* which no question could be asked (except by being asked by it), and which cannot be determined as an existent. *The Idiot (Idiota)*, an admirable meditation by Nicholas of Cusa, develops this implication of God in every question, and first in the question of God. For example:

*The Idiot*: See how easie the difficultie is in divine things, that it always offers it self to the seeker, in the same manner that it is sought for. *The Orator*: Without doubt, there is nothing more wonderfull. *Id*: Every question concerning God presupposeth the thing questioned; and that must be answered, which in every question concerning God, the question presupposeth

for God, although he be unsignifiable, is signified in every signification of terms. *Or*: Declare thy self more at large . . . *Id*: Doth not the question, whether a thing be or no, presuppose the Entitie? *Or*: Yes. *Id*: Therefore when it is demanded of thee, whether God be, (or whether there be a God?) answer that which is presupposed, namely that he is; because that is the Entitie presupposed in the question. So, if any man shall ask thee, what is God? considering that this question presupposeth a quidditie to be; thou shalt answer, that God is absolute quiddity itself. And so for all things. Nor need there be any hesitation or doubt in this; for God is the absolute presupposition itself, of all things, which (after what manner soever) are presupposed as in every effect the cause is presupposed. See therefore, Oratour, how easie Theologicall difficulty is . . . If that which in every question is presupposed, be in divine matters an answer unto the question, then of God there can be no proper question, because the answer coincides with it.<sup>68</sup>

By making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other, Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse. The latter is understood, and instructs, only by first permitting the same and Being to circulate within it. A classical schema here complicated by a metaphysics of dialogue and instruction, of a demonstration which contradicts what is demonstrated by the very rigor and truth of its development. The thousand-times-denounced circle of historicism, psychologism, relativism, etc. But the true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the “logic” of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the *a priori*s and transcendental horizons of language, is *empiricism*. For the latter, at bottom, has ever committed but one fault: the fault of presenting itself as a philosophy. And the profundity of the empiricist intention must be recognized beneath the naïveté of certain of its historical expressions. It is the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference. Empiricism is its philosophical name, its metaphysical pretention or modesty. We say the *dream* because it must vanish *at daybreak*, as soon as language awakens. But perhaps one will object that it is language which is sleeping. Doubtless, but then one must, in a certain way, become classical once more, and again find other grounds for the divorce between speech and thought. This route is quite, perhaps too, abandoned today. Among others, by Levinas.

By radicalizing the theme of the infinite exteriority of the other, Levinas thereby assumes the aim which has more or less secretly animated all the philosophical gestures which have been called *empiricisms* in the history of philosophy. He does so with an audacity, a profundity, and a resoluteness never before attained. By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverts it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics. Despite the Husserlian and Heideggerean stages of his thought, Levinas does not even seek to draw back

from the word *empiricism*. On two occasions, at least, he speaks for "the radical empiricism confident in the instruction of exteriority" (*TI*). The experience of the other (of the infinite) is irreducible, and is therefore "the experience par excellence" (*TI*). And, concerning death which is indeed its irreducible resource, Levinas speaks of an "empiricism which is in no way a positivism."<sup>89</sup> But can one speak of an *experience* of the other or of difference? Has not the concept of experience always been determined by the metaphysics of presence? Is not experience always an encountering of an irreducible presence, the perception of a phenomenality?

This complicity between empiricism and metaphysics is in no way surprising. By criticizing them, or rather by limiting them with one and the same gesture, Kant and Husserl indeed had recognized their solidarity. It calls for closer meditation. Schelling went quite far in this direction.<sup>90</sup>

But empiricism always has been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*: as the philosophical pretention to nonphilosophy, the inability to justify oneself, to come to one's own aid as speech. But this incapacitation, when resolutely assumed, contests the resolution and coherence of the logos (philosophy) at its root, instead of letting itself be questioned by the logos. Therefore, nothing can so profoundly *solicit* the Greek logos—philosophy—than this irruption of the totally-other; and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other.

But if one calls this experience of the infinitely other Judaism (which is only a hypothesis for us), one must reflect upon the necessity in which this experience finds itself, the injunction by which it is ordered to occur as logos, and to reawaken the Greek in the autistic syntax of his own dream. The necessity to avoid the worst violence, which threatens when one silently delivers oneself into the hands of the other in the night. The necessity to borrow the ways of the unique philosophical logos, which can only invert the "curvature of space" for the benefit of the same. A same which is not the identical, and which does not enclose the other. It was a Greek who said, "If one has to philosophize, one has to philosophize; if one does not have to philosophize, one still has to philosophize (to say it and think it). One always has to philosophize." Levinas knows this better than others: "One could not possibly reject the Scriptures without knowing how to read them, nor say philology without philosophy, nor, if need be, arrest philosophical discourse without philosophizing" (*DL*). "One must refer—I am convinced—to the medium of all comprehension and of all understanding in which all truth is reflected—precisely to Greek civilization, and to what it produced: to the logos, to the coherent discourse of reason, to life in a reasonable State. This is the true grounds of all understanding" (*DL*). Such a site of encounter cannot only offer *occasional* hospitality to a thought which would remain foreign to it. And still less may the Greek absent himself, having loaned his house and his language, while the Jew and the Christian meet in his home (for

this is the encounter in question in the text just cited). Greece is not a neutral, provisional territory, beyond borders. The history in which the Greek logos is produced cannot be a happy accident providing grounds for understanding to those who understand eschatological prophecy, and to those who do not understand it at all. It cannot be *outside* and *accidental* for any thought. The Greek miracle is not this or that, such and such astonishing success; it is the impossibility for any thought ever to treat its sages as "sages of the outside," according to the expression of Saint John Chrysostom. In having proffered the *epekeina tes ousias*, in having recognized from its second word (for example, in the *Sophist*) that alterity had to circulate at the origin of meaning, in welcoming alterity in general into the heart of the logos, the Greek thought of Being forever has protected itself against every absolutely *surprising* convocation.

Are we Jews? Are we Greeks? We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history. We live in and of difference, that is, in *hypocrisy*, about which Levinas so profoundly says that it is "not only a base contingent defect of man, but the underlying rending of a world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets" (*TI*, p. 24).

Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? But who, we? Are we (not a chronological, but a pre-logical question) *first* Jews or *first* Greeks? And does the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which *reconciles* formal tautology and empirical heterology<sup>91</sup> after having *thought* prophetic discourse in the preface to the *Phenomenology of the Mind*? Or, on the contrary, does this peace have the form of infinite separation and of the unthinkable, unsayable transcendence of the other? To what horizon of peace does the language which asks this question belong? From whence does it draw the energy of its question? Can it account for the historical *coupling* of Judaism and Hellenism? And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the *copula* in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet"<sup>92</sup>