Encountering the Medieval in Modern Jewish Thought

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PART FOUR

VENTURING BEYOND

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CHAPTER TEN

ECHO OF THE OTHERWISE: ETHICS OF TRANSCENDENCE AND THE LURE OF THEOLATRY

Elliot R. Wolfson

We'll climb that bridge after it's gone
After we're way past it
—Bob Dylan

Introduction

In the introduction to *Crossover Queries: Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy's Others*, Edith Wyschogrod remarked that the challenge of the essays included in her collection was to promote "further inquiry into theological, ethical, and aesthetic interpretations of negatives."[1] Philosophical accounts of the negative are seen as a complex of crossings, oscillating between efforts to overcome manifestations of the negative and claims about its irrevocability. The mandate set for postmodern thought is to persevere in tarrying with the negative à la Hegel while still seeking to erect temporary conduits in the vein of Nietzsche's vision of the "between," to set a bridge by means of which one crosses over in the negation to be affirmed in the affirmation of what is negated.[2]

In this study, I would like to focus on one of the principal crossings that resonate in *Crossing Queries*, the crossing that the author herself refers to as the passage from the Derridean *erotics of transcendence* to the Levinasian *ethics of transcendence*.[3] To attend properly to

[1] Edith Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries: Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy's Others* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 2.

[2] Ibid., 4. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets de captivité suivi de Écrits sur la captivité et Notes philosophiques diverses*, edited and annotated by Rodolphe Calin, preface and explanatory notes by Rodolphe Calin and Catherine Chalier, general preface by Jean-Luc Marion, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2009), 324.

[3] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 15.

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this crossing, I will explore the intricacies of Levinas's reflections on transcendence in the various stages of his intellectual biography. Let me commence by citing a critical passage from Wyschogrod:

> But a transcendent Absolute that is beyond consciousness necessitates an apophatic theology that may be disclosed as an unremitting yearning *for* an absent Other or as a divestiture of self *on behalf of* an Other who, as Other, never appears. Derrida's account of naming and negative theology is essentially transgressive, an *erotics* of transcendence. When the sheer contingency of fact leads neither to an eidetic science, to the certainty of an eidos that remains invariant through all of an object's variations, nor to an erotic desire for the Other, but rather to an alterity that is beyond consciousness, the way is open for a Levinasian *ethics* of transcendence.[4]

Wyschogrod perceptively frames the innovation of Levinas, particularly the tropes of the infinite and illeity that are essential to his conception of alterity, in terms of a somewhat neglected aspect of Husserl's phenomenology that relates specifically to his discussion of God. According to Husserl, the notion of divine transcendence creates something of a phenomenological crisis because it raises the possibility of an empty intuition, that is, an intentional act of consciousness whose meaning is not determined by the plenary presence of what is intended, an intentionality that has no object of thought to which it is adequated. In Husserl's own language, the "*theological principle…could not be assumed as something transcendent in the sense in which the world is something transcendent*; for…that would involve a countersensical circularity. The ordering principle of the absolute must be found in the absolute itself, considered purely as absolute."[5] Insofar as the divine transcendence makes it impossible to speak of a "worldly God," it follows that the "immanence of God in absolute consciousness cannot be taken as immanence in the sense of being as a mental process." Consequently, there must be "within the absolute stream of consciousness and its infinities, modes in which transcendencies are made known other than the constituting of physical realities as unities of harmonious appearances."[6] The "transcendency

[4] Ibid.

[5] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, translated by F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), § 51, 116.

[6] Ibid., 117.

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pertaining to God" stands "in polar contrast to the transcendency pertaining to the world," since with respect to the latter we can speak of "*factual* concatenations of mental processes of consciousness…in which a *morphologically ordered* world in the sphere of empirical intuition becomes constituted as their intentional correlate, i.e., a world concerning which there can be classifying and describing sciences." By contrast, an extra-worldly divine being lacks an intentional correlate and thus eludes any scientific classification. Indeed, such a being as God imagined "would obviously transcend not merely the world but 'absolute' consciousness. It would therefore be an '*absolute' in the sense totally different from that in which consciousness is* an absolute, just as it would be *something transcendent in a sense totally different* from that in which the world is something transcendent."[7] Husserl provides the foundation for Levinas's own reflections on the idea of infinity and the exclusion of transcendence, the wholly other, from the domain of phenomenology and the criterion of truth as the showing of what comes to light.

Intentionality and Transcendence

To understand this one must consider more carefully the transcendence of pure consciousness affirmed by Husserl. As Levinas observed in his study on Husserl published in 1930, "*Intentionality is, for Husserl, a genuine act of transcendence and the very prototype of any transcendence.*"[8] The transcendence to which Levinas alludes denotes the bestowing of meaning of the mind on the hyletic phenomena of the external world. We can speak, therefore, of consciousness transcending itself, since its innate structure is such that what is "perceivable immanently" is given always as "a being *for* an Ego."[9] Husserl thus identifies the transcendence of the pure Ego—that is, the egological

[7] Ibid., § 58, 133–134 (emphasis in original). See the detailed study of Damian Byers, *Intentionality and Transcendence: Closure and Openness in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), and the discussion of divine transcendence in Husserl's phenomenology in Claudia Welz, *Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 30–57.

[8] Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, translated by André Orianne (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 40 (emphasis in original).

[9] Husserl, *Ideas*, § 44, 95 (emphasis in original).

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transcendental consciousness that emerges after the phenomenological bracketing of the world and of the empirical subjectivity—as a *transcendency within immanency*.[10] Drawing out the implications of the Husserlian conception of intentionality, Levinas notes that the "very reality of subjects consists in their transcending themselves,"[11] for being in "contact with the world" is placed "at the very heart of the being of consciousness."[12] This is not to say that every act of intentionality is identical; on the contrary, intentionality is different in every case, but what is constant is that, inasmuch as it is directed toward an outside object, it entails self-transcendence. According to Levinas's interpretation of Husserl, moreover, intentionality is first and foremost a mode of affectivity and not a mode of representation. The break with Husserl is felt most acutely at precisely this pressure point. Levinas thus commented in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* (1961):

> This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated. Hence intentionality, where thought remains an *adequation* with the object, does not define consciousness at its fundamental level. All knowing qua intentionality already presupposes the idea of infinity, which is preeminently *non-adequation*.... Consciousness then does not consist in equaling being with representation, in tending to the full light in which this adequation is to be sought, but rather in overflowing this play of lights—this phenomenology.[13]

At a later juncture in the book, Levinas acknowledged that the promotion of the idea of the horizon in Husserl's phenomenology imparted to philosophical thinking the presupposition that "the truth of an existent proceeds from the openness of Being" (*la vérité de l'étant tient à l'ouverture de l'être*), whence we may infer that the "intelligibility" of that existent "is due not to our coinciding, but to our non-coinciding with it. An existent is comprehended in the measure that thought transcends it, measuring it against the horizon whereupon it is profiled."[14] The real world, therefore, "is not simply a world of things correlative to perceptive acts (purely theoretical acts); the real world is

[10] Ibid., § 57, 133.
[11] Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition*, 41.
[12] Ibid., 43.
[13] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), 27; *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), xvi.
[14] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44; *Totalité et infini*, 15.

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a world of objects of practical use and values."[15] The determination of the transcendence of the subject from the standpoint of the practical intentionality of affective life set Levinas on a course of thinking from which he never diverged, culminating in his more advanced articulations of ethics as first philosophy and the emphasis he placed on the alterity of the other.[16]

A succinct formulation of the matter of intentionality and transcendence is offered by Levinas in his 1932 essay "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," a fragment of the projected work on Heidegger that was abandoned once the latter became committed to National Socialism:

> The problem of correspondence between thing and thought presupposes a free activity of thought and its isolation in relation to the object. It is precisely this presupposition which renders their harmony and even their contact problematic. "How does the subject take leave of itself to attain the object?" is what the problem of knowledge, in the last analysis, boils down to. Its true source is thus the concept of 'subject' as elaborated by modern philosophy. The *cogito* presided over the subject's birth. The cogito was the affirmation of the privileged nature of the subject's immanent sphere, of its unique place in existence; hence, the *cogito* was the *specificity* of the subject's connection to the rest of reality, the *sui generis* nature which opens up the passage from immanence to transcendence, the passage from ideas contained in the thinking substance to their "formal existence."…We know that in intentionality Husserl saw the very essence of consciousness. The originality of this view consisted in affirming not only that all consciousness is consciousness of something but that this striving toward something else constituted the entire nature of consciousness; that we must not imagine consciousness as something that first is and that then transcends itself, but that consciousness transcends itself throughout its existence.[17]

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[15] Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition*, 44.

[16] John E. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 3. See as well the analysis of alterity and transcendence in Natalie Depraz, *Transcendance et incarnation: Le statut de l'intersubjectivité comme altérité à soi chez Husserl* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1995), 91–124.

[17] Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," *Diacritics* 26 (1996): 12, 17. The original French essay, "Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie," was published in *La Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'êtranger* 57 (1932): 395–431. An abridged and modified version appeared in Emmanuel Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1949), 53–76. I have consulted the third edition of this collection (Paris: J. Vrin, 2001); the essay appears on 77–109. For a subtle discussion of the different versions of this study, particularly how they relate to Levinas's analysis of Heidegger's reflections on the nature of time and human existence, see

The Husserlian conception provides a model of opposing the idea of consciousness as an ego-substance, but to the extent that intentionality necessitates a relation to objects constituted as ontological structures within the mind—consciousness is always consciousness of something—we can speak of the intentional character of consciousness at best as a form of "psychological transcendence."[18] By contrast, the absolute transcendence of the divine—the "transcendent Absolute that is beyond consciousness"—would of necessity stand over and against the transcendence of the world as well as the transcendence in immanence ascribed to the absolute consciousness of the Pure Ego, the living presence of self present to itself in the prereflective experience of *Erlebnis*.[19] Husserl's transcendental phenomenology lays the foundation for the notion of reflexive subjectivity elaborated in post-Husserlian philosophical hermeneutics because it recognizes that the identity of the subject cannot be deciphered apart from the dialogical relation to what is more and other than itself,[20] but it is not sufficient to account for the radical transcendence necessary to establish the ground for genuine alterity, since what is configured as "outside" consciousness is always and already a being that is exterior from the perspective of the interior.[21]

In an essay tellingly entitled "The Ruin of Representation" (1959), Levinas argued that the innovation of Husserl's notion of intentionality was a "double perspective" within which objects are constituted by the subject that is itself constituted by the objects it constitutes.[22] Based on this insight, he discerned the following inevitable quandary: if phenomenology ceases to be a philosophy of consciousness, then it self-destructs as phenomenology, but if it persists as phenomenology, it sublates transcendence inasmuch as there can be no given that is not an aspect of the intuitive content of the imaginative representa-

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Tina Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 170–188.

[18] Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition*, 42–43.

[19] Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, translated by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 176.

[20] For an analysis of this theme, see Nicholas Dewey, "Truth, Method, and Transcendence," in *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years after Gadamer's Truth and Method*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 25–44.

[21] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 14.

[22] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 118–119.

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tion through which the world is constructed.[23] To the extent that the emphasis on intentionality construes the elemental event of being as disclosure on the part of the cogito—the I that thinks itself in thinking the other—phenomenology can be considered a method that reveals the revelation of beings and, as such, it is fundamentally inadequate to unveil transcendence, which cannot be unveiled except through some veil.[24] In "Enigma and Phenomenon" (1965), Levinas returned to the reluctance of the invisible, which is "beyond-being," to exhibit itself phenomenologically. The nonmanifestation of God precludes the possibility of the subject-object correlation that is inherent to the "structure of all thought." The holiness and transcendence of divinity invariably dissipate in the light of the chain of significations that make up the universe.[25]

Phenomenology of the Inapparent: Ontological Residuals in Levinas and Heidegger

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that the phenomenological fascination with the nonphenomenalizable can be pinpointed as the essential thought that informed Levinas's critique of ontological realism—the narcissistic reduction of the other to the same[26]—throughout his life, the philosophical venture toward transcendence[27] that is

[23] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 14, 40.

[24] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 97.

[25] Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adrianne T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, translated by Alphonso Lingis and Richard A. Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 67.

[26] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42; *Totalité et infini*, 13. On narcissism and the primacy of the same, related especially to Heidegger's analysis of Dasein, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 49–53.

[27] Many scholars have discussed the idea of transcendence in Levinas. Here I note a few of the studies that I have consulted: Etienne Feron, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage: L'itinéraire philosophique de Levinas* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1982); Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 72–120, 162–170; Theodore de Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1997); Rudi Visker, *Truth and Singularity: Taking Foucault into Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 235–273; Francis Guibal, "La transcendance," in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Positivité et transcendance*, edited by Jean-Luc Marion (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 209–238; Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, 43–81; Catherine Chalier, *La Trace de l'infini: Emmanuel Levinas et*

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referred to early on as the "matter of getting out of being by a new path."[28] Although Levinas does not give ample credit to Heidegger, his pushing phenomenology to the limits of the phenomenological, establishing the criteria, as it were, for a postphenomenological phenomenology that stands upon but overturns the Husserlian notion of phenomenology as the eidetic science that interrogates the intentional structures of the apparent, is indebted to, or at the very least demonstrates a strong affinity with, a crucial dimension of Heidegger's attempt to think the idea of phenomenology through to its end.[29] Already in a passage in *Being and Time*, Heidegger made the following observation regarding the phenomenological concept of the phenomenon: "Manifestly it is something that does not *show* itself initially and for the most part, something that is *concealed*, in contrast to what initially and for the most part shows itself, indeed in such a way that it constitutes its meaning and ground."[30] That which remains concealed in every act of self-showing (*Sichzeigen*), which Heidegger contrasts with the act of appearing (*Erscheinen*), is not any particular being but the

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la source hébraïque (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 77–106, 253–267; Robert Bernasconi, "No Exit: Levinas' Aporetic Account of Transcendence," *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005): 101–117; Bettina Bergo, "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophy," *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005): 141–177; Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 182–186; Catherine Keller, "Rumors of Transcendence: The Movement, State, and Sex of 'Beyond,'" in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 129–150, esp. 133–134, 137–139; Sarah Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving beyond Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009).

[28] Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 73.

[29] John Sallis, "Imagination and the Meaning of Being," in *Heidegger et l'idée de la phénoménologie* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 127. Sallis does not draw the comparison between Heidegger and Levinas, but I find his depiction of the former useful. Levinas's indebtedness to the post-metaphysical or non-metaphysical implications of the hermeneutical turn in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which provide the ground for a radical interrogation of the philosophical heritage of the West, is duly noted by Michael Fagenblatt, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), xii–xiii, 14–20, 27. For the influence of Heidegger on Levinas, see ibid., 156–162, and see the comparison of Levinas's *il y a* and Heidegger's notion of everydayness in Michael Fagenblatt, "Il y a quotidian: Levinas and Heidegger on the Self," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28 (2002): 578–604, esp. 583–589. See, however, Fagenblatt, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 79–84.

[30] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), § 7, 31 (emphasis in original); *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), § 7, 35.

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"being of beings" (*Sein des Seienden*). Although Heidegger does speak of ontology in this context—indeed, he states explicitly that phenomenology is the "way of access to, and the demonstrative determination of, what is to become the theme of ontology"—still he leaves no room for ambiguity with regard to the nature of the being of beings that is always covered up or distorted: "The being of beings can least of all be something 'behind which' something else stands, something that 'does not appear.'" Nothing, quite literally, stands behind the phenomena of phenomenology, and precisely because this is so, we can assert that "what is to become a phenomenon can be concealed." The covering-up (*Verdecktheit*), which is the "counterconcept" (*Gegenbegriff*) to the self-showing, is what makes phenomenology necessary,[31] and the ultimate phenomenological datum is the invisible, which is not to be construed as a potentially visible phenomenon that is presently not manifesting itself, but rather as the dimension that always evades visibility, the nonphenomenalizable condition of all phenomenality, the unseeing that enframes every act of seeing.[32]

Many years later, in the conclusion of the Zähringen seminar (1973), Heidegger depicted his own phenomenology as "a path that leads away to come before…, and it lets that before which it is led show itself. This phenomenology is a phenomenology of the inapparent."[33] In the same seminar, Heidegger explained the "domain of the inapparent" in terms of the Parmenidean comment *esti gar einai*, "There is being," which he renders as "presencing itself presences" (*anwest nämlich Anwesen*). Acceptance of this statement leads Heidegger to call his phenomenology a "tautological thinking."[34] The matter is clarified by a comment in a letter that Heidegger wrote to Roger Munier on February 22, 1974:

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[31] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 7, 31 (emphasis in original); *Sein und Zeit*, § 7, 35–36.

[32] The implications of Heidegger's phenomenological critique of phenomenology with its emphasis on the inapparent influenced a number of other phenomenologists, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Henry. See Don Zahavi, "Subjectivity and Immanence in Michel Henry," in *Subjectivity and Transcendence*, edited by Arne Grøn, Iben Damgaard, and Søren Overgaard (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 143–145. Zahavi also duly notes the reverberation of the Heideggerian phenomenology of the invisible in Derrida and Levinas.

[33] Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 80.

[34] Ibid., 79. On Heidegger's "tautological phenomenology," see the analysis in Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate*, translated by Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham, 2005), 72–75.

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the one thing that is necessary is to bring thought "into the clearing of the appearing of the unapparent" (*in die Lichtung des Scheinens des Unscheinbaren*).[35] A similar theme was already implicit in Heidegger's comment in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (*Vom Ereignis*) that the "essential swaying" of *Ereignis* "can be known only by that thinking which must venture what is non-ordinary [*das Ungewöhnliche*], not as particularity of what is conspicuous, but rather as the necessity of what is most nonappearing [*Notwendigkeit des Unscheinbarsten*], in which the ground that holds to abground and is the ground of gods' lacking the ground and of man's foundership is opened."[36]

Levinas would doubtlessly still see these passages as indicative of what he refers to in *Totality and Infinity* as the "one sole thesis" of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: "Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being (which unfolds as time); Being is already an appeal to subjectivity.... To affirm the priority of *Being* over *existents* is to already 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 existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom."[37] However, a less prejudicial reading of these texts (not to mention a plethora of others that could have been marshaled as evidence) should give one pause regarding the alleged subordination

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[35] Martin Heidegger, *Heidegger: Cahiers de l'Herne* (Paris: L'Herne, 1983), 114–115, cited in Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 110.

[36] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), § 267, 332; *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* [GA 65] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 471–472.

[37] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45 (emphasis in original); *Totalité et infini*, 15–16. Compare Levinas's observation in Florian Rötzer, *Conversations with French Philosophers*, foreword by Rainer Rochlitz, translated by Gary E. Aylesworth (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 58: "[I]t seems to me that the relation to the other, even in Heidegger, is always present only at a moment of being-in-the-world. This strange relation to other humans as the beginning of new concepts and a new attitude and a new finality of thinking is absent in Heidegger. The purely ethical has always had a bad reputation. It was always disputed by ontology or religion." And the further comments about Heidegger in ibid., 62: "Dasein is a being who, in being, is concerned with its own being. Later, in the exchange with Beaufret…he says Dasein is a being concerned with the meaning of this being.... The whole book *Being and Time* was so out of the ordinary, where this being exposed to being, this being concerned with being, leads to the meaningfulness of everything." For a clear and concise summary of Levinas's reading of Heidegger's alleged ontology, see Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 9–16.

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of the relation with the Other to ontology.[38] What comes to presence is absence, and not an absence that is a nonpresence, that is, the negation of presence, but rather an absence rendered even more absent in the coming to presence of its absence. What Heidegger demands by his phenomenology of the inapparent is the paradox of needing to be "attentive to what in the appearing does not appear,"[39] a "phenomenality that is itself non-phenomenal, beyond phenomenality."[40] The appearance of the inapparent, accordingly, is not simply the surfacing of something previously imperceptible, but rather the appearance of nonappearance as such,[41] that is, the inapparent that resides in and facilitates the appearing of all things apparent,[42] the unconcealment

[38] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 89; *Totalité et infini*, 61. On Levinas's misreading of Heidegger's intentions regarding ontology in *Being and Time* and in the later work, see Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*, 200n13. It is worth noting that according to Welz, *Love's Transcendence*, 277–282, the "philosophical background" of Levinas is Heidegger's criticism of the metaphysics of presence. She correctly considers the Heideggerian challenge of how to elude an ontotheology to be Levinas's project.

[39] Janicaud, *Phenomenology "Wide Open,"* 73. On the phenomenology of the inapparent, see Dominique Janicaud, *Chronos: Pour l'intelligence du partage temporel* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), 157–171.

[40] Miguel de Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 115.

[41] Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 60. See also Gérard Guest, "Aux confins de l'inapparent: l'extrême phénoménologie de Heidegger," *Existentia* 12 (2002): 113–141; Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's Contribution to Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 102–103. On the depiction of Heidegger's "move from a transcendental-aesthetic to a mythical-poetic figure of imagination" as the "ab-sence of phenomenology," see Brian Elliot, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2005), 137–154, esp. 140–141.

[42] Françoise Dastur, "La pensée à venir: Une phénoménologie de l'inapparent?" in *L'avenir de la philosophie est-il grec?* edited by Catherine Collobert (Saint-Laurent, QC: Fides, 2002), 146. Heidegger's view, it seems, is close to the position of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Invisible and the Visible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 151, regarding the invisible "which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being." See Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 41. Based on Merleau-Ponty's insights, I write that "the universe can be envisaged chiasmically as the invisibly visible specter of the visibly invisible, provided that invisibility is not construed in substantialist terms, whether understood innately or relationally. For it is not a something (or, for that matter, a nothing) with or without essential or accidental properties, but rather the nonphenomenalizability that is the epistemic condition of all phenomenality, the unseeing that enframes every act of seeing." This corresponds to my presentation of Habad cosmology in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menaḥem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 66–129. I neglected

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of the concealment concealed in the concealment of the unconcealment. Presencing, for Heidegger, does not entail a presence subject to representation that embraces the subject-object relation. On the contrary, the coming to presence (*An-wesen*) is a turning toward the human essence (*Menschenwesen*) that finds its consummation in the thinking of being that calls forth the crossing out of being (*der kreuzweisen Durchstreichung des Seins*), and hence, as Heidegger graphically illustrated, the "thoughtful look" into the realm wherein being "dissolves into the turning" that is "worthy of question" requires that the word "being" be written in such a way that it is crossed out.[43] It is in this sense of surpassing—to which the label "meta-physics" can be applied—that the being of beings is given, and thus we can say that "nothing belongs, in its being absent, to presencing."[44] Levinas surely considered his own thinking about infinity, transcendence, and alterity as a move beyond Heidegger's concern with the truth of being to the eventual affirmation of what is otherwise than being. Heidegger may have heralded the end of the metaphysical notion of presence (*Vorhanden*), but continuing to think of being as a coming-into-presence (*Anwesen*) made it impossible for him to break away from the hegemony of the very orientation he denounced.[45]

Levinas's criticism of Heidegger notwithstanding, a careful attunement to what Heidegger actually thought about the subtle relationship of presence and absence, concealment and disclosure, sufficiently narrows the gap between them.[46] Even in what was his last reflections on

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to discuss Heidegger's phenomenology of the inapparent, but clearly this would have only strengthened my analysis. For references to the invisible and visibility in Merleau-Ponty, see Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream*, 312n112, to which I would add Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 122–155.

[43] Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 310–311; German edition, *Wegmarken* [GA 9] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), 410–411.

[44] Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 312; *Wegmarken*, 413.

[45] Richard A. Cohen, ed., *Face to Face with Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 20.

[46] This example, and others that could have been cited, renders questionable the categorical statement of Samuel Moyn, "Judaism against Paganism: Emmanuel Levinas's Response to Heidegger and Nazism in the 1930s," *History and Memory* 10 (1998): 26, that the thought of Levinas vis-à-vis Heidegger is "an independent and unique philosophical stance." It is ludicrous to deny the innovations of Levinas, and surely his view in relation to Heidegger conforms to Moyn's characterization, but careful textual scrutiny of their respective writings might yield a different picture. It is relevant here to recall Levinas's response to a question he received from Philippe Nemo regarding the

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Heidegger, the lecture "Dying For…," delivered in March 1987 at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris, Levinas concentrated solely on Heidegger's early treatise.[47] Levinas does occasionally mention "the late philosophy" (*la dernière philosophie*) of Heidegger, and from the recently published notebooks of Levinas there is ample evidence that he was reading works composed after Heidegger's so-called turn,[48] but he dismisses the more mature thinking summarily as more evidence of the ontological suppression of the ethical and the demarcation of human existence in terms of the mystery that is defined solely by the issue of power.[49] Thus, in a passage from his notebooks, he affirms that, for Heidegger, speech (*la parole*) already presupposed a "co-presence" and "preliminary relationship with others" in the "same world" as that of the speaker, but the "essence of language" was still located in the act of "signification," which is further described as the ontological demarcation of the "something as something" (*etwas als etwas*), a point that Levinas supports by referring to Heidegger's *Holzwege* and to his interpretation of Hölderlin,[50] a likely reference to *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*.[51] What is noteworthy for our purposes, however, is that the Heideggerian expression cited by Levinas, *etwas als etwas*, is actually from *Being and Time*, including the very section of the text[52] that Levinas engages in the next paragraph

"absolute novelty" of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* when it appeared in 1927: "That is in any case the impression that I have maintained of it. To be sure, in the history of philosophy it happens that after the fact one rediscovers the tendencies which retrospectively seem to announce the great innovations of today; but these consist at least in thematizing something which it was not beforehand. A thematization which requires genius and offers a new language" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard A. Cohen [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985], 39). This is a far more nuanced understanding of the novelty of Levinas in relation to Heidegger than the words of Moyn would suggest.

[47] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 207–217. The French text of the lecture, "Mourir pour…," was first published in *Heidegger: Questions ouvertes*, edited by Eliane Escoubas (Paris: Éditions Osiris, 1988), 255–264.

[48] For instance, see Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 362.

[49] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 275–276; *Totalité et infini*, 252–253.

[50] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 375: "*Chez Heidegger la parole suppose certes déjà la coprésence et le rapport préalable avec autrui et d'autrui avec le monde même que vise la parole de celui qui parle—mais l'essentiel de la parole est dans la signification, dans le* 'etwas als etwas' *(voir surtout* Holzwege *et interpretation de Hölderlin). La parole ne joue donc pas—en tant que invocation—de rôle dans le rapport même avec le monde.*"

[51] See the note of the editors, ibid., 497n20.

[52] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 33, 149; *Sein und Zeit*, § 33, 159.

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in the notebooks.[53] It seems reasonable to me to offer this as evidence that Levinas read later works of Heidegger through the lens of his first philosophical monograph.

Levinas does not delve into the intricacies and complexities of the later work of Heidegger, which offers a perspective that is much closer to Levinas's own criticisms of ontology and the attempt to ground the meaning of human existence in a saying—"the primordial belonging of the word to being" (*die anfängliche Zugehörigkeit des Wortes zum Sein*)[54]—that gestures toward the Being that is otherwise than being.[55] In the case of both thinkers, the endeavor to break with ontology is a deeply ontological gesture, a point unfortunately missed by many interpreters. It is worth recalling the observation of Derrida:

> 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." …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 *epekeina tes ousias* in order to announce ontological transcendence, but he also shows that the undetermined *agathon* toward which transcendence breaks through has been determined too quickly.[56]

The issue for Levinas was not a wholesale rejection of ontology, but rather the need to avoid the realist position. As he stated in the beginning of the four lectures entitled "Time and the Other," which were delivered in 1946–47 and published in 1947 in the collection edited by Jean Wahl, *Le Choix, le Monde, l'Existence* (Cahiers du College Philosophique), "The analyses that I am about to undertake will not be anthropological but ontological. I do believe in the existence of ontological problems and structures, but not in the sense that realists—

[53] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 376. The correct source for the expression *etwas als etwas* was already noted by the editors, ibid., 498n20.

[54] Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 243; *Wegmarken*, 318.

[55] A similar argument has been proffered by Adam Konopka, "The 'Inversions' of Intentionality in Levinas and the Later Heidegger," *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory of Culture* 4 (2009): 146–162.

[56] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 141–142.

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purely and simply describing given being—ascribe to ontology."[57] In the preface to the second printing of these lectures in 1979 under the title *Le temps et l'autre*, Levinas wrote that he approved the idea of republication because he still adhered "to the main project of which it is—in the midst of diverse movements of thought—the birth and first formulation."[58] The project to which he hints is the exposition of the ontological in terms of what he calls the "dialectic of being," which involves escaping through solitude from the "general economy of being."[59] In the 1981 interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas summed up his efforts in the following way: "I am trying to show that man's ethical relation to the other is ultimately prior to his ontological relation to himself (egology) or to the totality of things that we call the world (cosmology)."[60] But, shortly after making this comment, he readily admits, "We can never completely escape from the language of ontology and politics. Even when we deconstruct ontology we are obliged to use its language."[61]

Levinas continued to think the thought of what cannot be thought—the unthought as opposed to the unthinkable—from a multiplicity of perspectives, since no one perspective is adequate to articulate the full reverberation of a thinking whose task it is to surpass thinking. This is not to deny that there were conceptual and terminological shifts in Levinas over the course of time, especially from the first major treatise, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), to the second, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), but this should not be overstated to the point of positing a turn that would preclude the threads of continuity that tie together the different segments of his intellectual evolution. Consider Levinas's remark in the preface to the German translation of *Totality and Infinity*, written on January 18, 1987:

> *Totality and Infinity, an Essay on Exteriority*, which appeared in 1961, opens a philosophical discourse which was continued in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* in 1974, and *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* [On God Who Comes to the Mind] in 1982. Certain themes of the first work are repeated or renewed, or return in other forms, in the last two; certain intentions are specified in them. For the substance of this discourse,

[57] Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 39.
[58] Ibid., 30.
[59] Ibid., 39.
[60] Cohen, *Face to Face with Levinas*, 21.
[61] Ibid., 22.

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> which began twenty-five years ago and which forms a whole, these are non-contingent and no doubt instructive variations, but it is not possible to give an account of them in the brevity of a preface.[62]

Levinas goes on to note two crucial differences between the discourse in the early and later works, and especially pertinent to our discussion is the first of these, which consists of the fact that *Otherwise than Being* "avoids the ontological—or more exactly, *eidetic*—language which *Totality and Infinity* incessantly resorts to in order to keep its analyses…from being considered as dependent on the empiricism of a psychology."[63] In spite of this shift, Levinas insists on the integrity of vision that runs throughout his works. Along similar lines, it is worth recalling Levinas's words in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*: "The ontological language employed in *Totality and Infinity* is ontological because it wants above all not to be psychological. But in reality, it is already a search for what I call 'the beyond being,' the tearing of this equality to self which is always being—the *Sein*—whatever the attempts to separate it from the present."[64]

From Excendence to Transcendence

The effort to move beyond the Heideggerian sense of transcendence—in Levinas's mind a continuation of Husserl's phenomenological investigations[65]—as the subjective self-relation linked to Dasein's understanding of its own being as primarily a verbal possibility, a conception of the human condition that dictates enclosure in a world without any possibility of transcendence that is not a transcendent immanence,[66] the subordination of the infinite to the finite that Levinas

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[62] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 197. See Salomon Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy*, foreword by Philippe Nemo, translated by Michael Kigel and Sara M. Embree (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 285.

[63] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 197–198 (emphasis in original).

[64] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 82. Concerning this passage, see the remarks of Jacques Derrida, *Adieu To Emmanuel Levinas*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 143n62.

[65] Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition*, xxxiv.

[66] For a concise account of Heidegger's view, see Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, translated by Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 15: "Heidegger observes the word 'transcendence' ought to

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eventually framed as the "outcome of a long tradition of pride, heroism, domination, and cruelty," which found its sociopolitical expression in National Socialism,[67] is already evident in "Martin Heidegger and Ontology." Criticizing the idealist position in both its Kantian and Hegelian dimensions, Levinas insists that the relation of subject to object cannot be reduced such that the "object is encompassed in consciousness, to one of these supertemporal relations we know in an ideal world." This "decisive step" facilitates the "true passage into subjectivity—in all its opposition to being, that is to say, in its opposition to temporal substance.… This step is taken by means of an evasion of time."[68] Challenging the philosophical systems that conceal the subject from its "true subjectivity," Levinas notes that for Heidegger time "is not a characteristic of the essence of reality, a something, or a property; it is the expression of the fact of being [*fait d'être*] or, rather, it is that *fact of being* itself. In a way it is the very dimension in which the existence of being comes about. *To exist is to be 'temporalized'* [*se temporalizer*]."[69] The French *se temporalizer* renders the German *sich zeitigen*, "which serves to highlight better the specific sense of time, which is not a 'something' that exists or unfolds, but which is the very 'effectuating' of existence."[70]

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denote the end towards which we are going; properly speaking, to transcend is to rise towards. Thus, a being such as God could never be a transcendent being. Only man can transcend." In the continuation of his analysis, Wahl delineates five "movements of transcendence" in Heidegger's thought: (1) transcendence towards the world; (2) transcendence towards other human beings; (3) transcendence towards the future; (4) transcendence towards Being; and (5) transcendence out of Nothingness (pp. 15–17). See also Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 88–90.

[67] Levinas, *Collected Papers*, 52–53: "Heideggerian philosophy precisely marks the apogee of a thought in which the finite does not refer to the infinite (prolonging certain tendencies of Kantian philosophy: the separation between the understanding and reason, diverse themes of transcendental dialectics), in which every deficiency is but weakness and every fault committed against oneself—the outcome of a long tradition of pride, heroism, domination, and cruelty. Heideggerian ontology subordinates the relation with the other to the relation with the neuter, Being, and it this continues to exalt the will to power, whose legitimacy the other alone can unsettle, troubling good conscience.… Heidegger does not only sum up a whole evolution of Western philosophy. He exalts it by showing in the most pathetic way its anti-religious essence become a religion in reverse.… In Heidegger atheism is a paganism, the presocratic texts anti-Scriptures. Heidegger shows in what intoxication the lucid sobriety of philosophers is steeped."

[68] Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," 12–13.

[69] Ibid., 13.

[70] Ibid., 13n5.

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At this incipient phase, Levinas anticipated his later thinking by maintaining, in the wake of Heidegger, that traditional philosophy excluded the matter of time from the purview of the transcendent being. Even Husserl's transcendental phenomenology falls short, for while he may have well established the dynamics of internal time-consciousness, not enough attention is paid to the alterity of the other person, which, in the mind of Levinas from early on, is far more important in the shaping of one's experience of time than the self-temporalization of intentional consciousness.[71] The term "ontology" can be used to depict the theory of time, but Levinas makes clear that this is not to be identified either with realism or with the study of the essence of being. Indeed, the Heideggerian connotation of ontology "is opposed to that-which-is in the very sense of *the fact that it is* and its specific mode of being," and hence it results in discerning the difference between the subject and object as it pertains to existence, that is, "the very manner of being-there [*être-là*]," which is not to be conflated with the sense of that which is, literally, the existing object (*l'objet étant*). To progress beyond the epistemological to the ontological outlook, from the indifference to time in the subject-object relation to an appreciation of the temporal comportment of human consciousness as the being who understands the "being of a-being" (*das Sein des Seienden*), it is necessary that the "ontological determination of the subject…must seek a temporal sense in the transcendence of the subject in relation to itself."[72] The "ontological foundation of the contemporary notion of subjectivity," therefore, contests the claim, which can be traced to Plato, that the subject/object structure is the "originary form of the transcendence of soul through self-relation." By taking time more seriously in assessing the nature of being, one will "better understand this proximity of the existential determination of man—through the fall, through finitude—to his determination as an immanence having to transcend itself."[73] Levinas displayed a keen understanding of Heidegger's anthropology: the essence of being human is simultaneously his existence, his way of being, but his way of being is essentially his being-there, a mode of self-temporalizing, which is designated by the

[71] See Rudolf Bernet, "Levinas's Critique of Husserl," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82–99, esp. 86–89.

[72] Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," 13 (emphasis in original).

[73] Ibid., 14.

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term *Dasein* (being right-there, *l'être ici-bas*) rather than *Daseiendes* (a being right-there, *l'étant ici-bas*).[74] The term "transcendence," for Heidegger, is reserved for this "act of taking leave of oneself to reach objects," the "leap accomplished beyond 'be-ings' [*étants*] understood in an *ontic* sense toward ontological being." The very structure of being in the world, consequently, is to transcend oneself (*Être dans le monde c'est se transcender*).[75]

In the essay "On Escape" (1935), Levinas coined the neologism *excendence* to denote the rudimentary event of being human as the need to break free from the imprisonment of being, to flee from the absoluteness of existence without the telos of a final destination[76]—even the possibility of taking refuge in either the traditional sense of the transcendent God or in nothingness is not adequate, since the former is the infinite and self-sufficient being, but a being nonetheless, and the latter, too, is the "work of a thinking essentially turned toward being."[77] The paradox for Levinas, accordingly, is that we are compelled to get out of the confines of the self but there is nowhere to go, a condition that demarcates the existential status of the human being exemplified especially in the case of the Jew—Levinas repeatedly emphasizes in his so-called confessional writings that the Jewish predicament is the human predicament and thus his concern with the specificity of the Jew is meant to illumine the universal status of humanity—who is a stranger in this world.[78] Even more poignantly, the paradox entails the

[74] Ibid., 15–16.

[75] Ibid., 22.

[76] Levinas, *On Escape*, 54–56. See Bernasconi, "No Exit," 102–106; Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence*, 56; Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 175, 177, 194–200.

[77] Levinas, *On Escape*, 70.

[78] See the comments of Levinas on the text of *De l'évasion* in the interview with François Poirié published in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 39. See also the remarks on the "Jewish condition" in the 1966 address "Honneur sans Drapeau," rendered into English as "Nameless," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 122–123: "The Jews are a people like all other peoples.… But by a strange election, they are a people conditioned and situated among the nations in such a way (is this sociology or metaphysics?) that it is liable to find itself, overnight and without forewarning, in the wretchedness of its exile, its desert, ghetto or concentration camp—all the splendors of life swept away like tinsel, the Temple in flames, the prophets without vision, reduced to an inner morality that is belied by the universe." On the question of Jewish universalism in Levinas, see Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics*

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awareness that escape is possible because of its very impossibility, not in the Heideggerian sense that death is the possibility of impossibility, but in the sense that the possible as it relates to the constitution of self is possible only to the extent that it is impossible—to be oneself entails the discernment that one is never free to be oneself apart from a complex network of intersubjective relationships.

One year prior to "On Escape," Levinas had already observed in "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" that in the current political atmosphere the essence of being human "no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [*enchaînement*]. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self's freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining."[79] The escape is understood in terms of the conception of destiny that sets one free from the limitation of history by embracing the "true present" in and through which the past can be modified or effaced. Levinas looks to Judaism as the cultural formation that singularly bears this message, and particularly the notion of "repentance that generates the pardon that redeems." In light of this possibility, time "loses its very irreversibility."[80] The prospect of repentance champions the reversibility of time insofar as it is predicated on the viability of wiping the past clean to generate a genuinely novel beginning. The novelty of the present is not at variance with the past; on the contrary, newness is feasible only to the extent that the past is retrieved so that it may be altered. The Jewish ideal is the basis for the "mystical drama" put forth by Christianity: "The Cross sets one free; and through the Eucharist, which triumphs over time, this emancipation takes place every day. The salvation that Christianity wishes to bring us lies in the way it promises to reopen the finality brought about by the flow of moments of a past that is forever challenged, forever called into question, to go beyond the absolute contradiction of a past that is subordinate to the present."[81] The religious basis for liberalism, the political antidote to fascism, is the Jewish

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and Identity in Postwar French Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 117–165, esp. 144–154.

[79] Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1990): 69.

[80] Ibid., 65.

[81] Ibid.

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notion of repentance and its mystical embellishment in the Christian doctrine of the suffering of the savior on the cross. Human freedom, "which is infinite with regard to any attachment and through which no attachment is ultimately definitive,"[82] must be based on a genuinely open future, but the latter depends on the possibility of escaping from the encumbrance of the past by altering it in the present.

In the preface to *Existence and Existents* (1947), Levinas deployed the term *excendence* again but in a manner that resounds to some extent with the apophaticism of the Neoplatonic tradition:[83] "The Platonic formula that situates the Good beyond being…signifies that the movement which leads an existent toward the Good is not a transcendence by which that existent raises itself to a higher existence, but a departure from Being and from the categories which describe it: an *ex-cendence*. But excendence and the Good necessarily have a foothold in being, and that is why Being is better than non-being."[84] Being is still privileged to nonbeing, but the aim is to be transported away from being, not to the transcendence of a higher existence, whether understood in the traditional theological sense or in the Heideggerian positing of a Being beyond beings. Levinas is notably critical of Heidegger's notion of transcendence as ecstasy, the "being out of oneself," since this entails the "leaving of an inwardness for an exteriority," the "movement of the inside toward the outside" that may not be the "original mode of existence."[85] The latter, which is signified by Levinas's signature expression *il y a*, "there is," is the "apparition of

[82] Ibid. For an amplification of Levinas's views, see Edith Wyschogrod, "Repentance and Forgiveness: The Undoing of Time," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60 (2006): 157–168.

[83] Numerous scholars have discussed the Platonic and Neoplatonic influence on the apophatic dimensions of Levinas's thought. For example, see Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Levinas and the Greek Heritage* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); John Izzi, "Proximity in Distance: Levinas and Plotinus," in *Levinas and the Ancients*, edited by Brian Schroeder and Silvia Benso (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 196–209, and in the same volume the chapter by Brian Schroeder, "A Trace of the Eternal Return? Levinas and Neoplatonism," 210–229; Allen, *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence*; Tanja Staehler, *Plato and Levinas: The Ambiguous Out-Side of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2010). For a critique of the Levinasian attempt to deploy phenomenology in the service of retrieving the Platonic metaphysics of transcendence, see Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 1–32.

[84] Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, foreword by Robert Bernasconi (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), xxvii. See Bernasconi, "No Exit," 106–107.

[85] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 81–82.

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an existent," an impersonal existence to which no name can be affixed because it is a "pure verb," the function of which "does not consist in naming, but in producing language, that is, in bringing forth the seeds of poetry which overwhelm 'existents' in their position and their very positivity."[86] The time of the verb is the "absolute character of the present," the presence that is constituted by its evanescence rather than its duration.[87] Poetry, above all forms of art, divulges this tensiveness of articulation, for, as Levinas later expressed the matter in "Paul Celan: From Being to the Other" (1972), rather than occupying place, the poet is burdened with evading place, or what he calls embracing the "opening of space," and hence the inspiration of the poetic saying is the "de-claustration of all things, the de-nucleation of being,"[88] an idea that anticipates his depiction of poetry (in contradistinction to Heidegger)[89] as the Saying that is a solicitation of and speaking to the other, a movement "from place to the non-place," the "attempt to think transcendence," which unfolds in the antimony of "a leap over the chasm opened in being, to whom the very identity of the leaper inflicts a refutation."[90] The poem, in other words, facilitates the "infinite adventure" of transcendence insofar as the poet grasps himself or herself as a stranger, the "de-substantiation of the I" that allows for the recognition of the other, which, in turn, engenders the saying without a said.[91]

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[86] Ibid., 82.

[87] Ibid., 86. In *Otherwise than Being*, 34–35, Levinas reiterates the essential connection of the verb and the temporalization of time, inspired most likely by the German word for verb *Zeitwort*, literally, time-word: "Essence, temporalization, is the verbalness of a verb. To suggest the difference between Being and entities, and the strange temporal itch, a modification without change, one resorts to metaphors taken from the temporal and not from time.… But being is the verb itself. Temporalization is the verb form to be. Language issued from the verbalness of a verb would then not only consist in making being understood, but also in making its essence vibrate." The attuned ear will discern an implicit critique of Heidegger here.

[88] Levinas, *Proper Names*, 63 (in that context, Levinas is describing Edmond Jabès, but his words can be applied to the poet more generally).

[89] Edith Wyschogrod, "Language and Alterity in the Thought of Levinas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 200–201. I note, parenthetically, that with regard to the distinction between the saying and the said there are interesting parallels to Heidegger, a topic that I hope to address elsewhere.

[90] Levinas, *Proper Names*, 41–43. Compare Gerald L. Bruns, "The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 216–220.

[91] Levinas, *Proper Names*, 43.

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The work of art typifies Levinas's notion of *il y a* as an encounter with the "bare fact of presence" that "arises behind nothingness . . . neither a being, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses things and consciousness." In this ecstasy, the ego "is swept away by the fatality of being," and there "is no longer any outside or any inside."[92] The complete exposure to being in the vigilance of the night—Levinas relates this phenomenologically to the state of insomnia—results in the depersonalization of the self.[93] But this is not to be identified completely with the obfuscation of boundaries associated with the oneiric: "The *there is*, the play of being, is not played out across oblivion, does not encase itself in sleep like a dream. . . . This reverting of presence into absence does not occur in distinct instants, like an ebb and flow."[94] In an essay published in 1948, "Reality and Its Shadow," Levinas seems to have modified his view somewhat, for he utilizes the dream metaphor to depict the nature of the experience of *il y a* both as an aesthetic object and as an ontic paradigm to circumscribe the materialization of what is real:

> To be "among things" is different from Heidegger's "being-in-the-world"; it constitutes the pathos of the imaginary world of dreams—the subject is among things not only by virtue of its density of being, requiring a "here," a "somewhere," and retaining its freedom; it is among things as a thing, as part of the spectacle. It is exterior to itself, but with an exteriority which is not that of a body, since the pain of the I-actor is felt by the I-spectator, and not through compassion. Here we have really an exteriority of the inward.[95]

The "pathos of the imaginary world of dreams" is an especially suitable way to express the characteristic of "there is"—the quality of being "among things"—for within the dreamscape exteriority cannot be imagined except from the standpoint of interiority, since the phantasmagoria of the dream are indistinguishable from the identity of the

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[92] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 61.

[93] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 49, thus summarized this discussion in *Existence and Existents* in the interview with Nemo: "Other experiences, all close to the 'there is,' are described in this book, notably that of insomnia. In insomnia one can and one cannot say that there is an 'I' which cannot manage to fall asleep. The impossibility of escaping wakefulness is something 'objective,' independent of my initiative. This impersonality absorbs my consciousness; consciousness is depersonalized. I do not stay awake: 'it' stays awake."

[94] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 62.

[95] Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 4.

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dreamer. Conversely, insofar as the dreamer cannot be distinguished from the phantasmagoria of the dream, we should speak of the disappearance of the dreamer's subjectivity in the folds of the dream.[96] The intent of Levinas's comments may be elicited from the eloquently expressed observation of Nancy:

> The sleeping *self* does not appear: it is not phenomenalized, and if it dreams of itself, that is…according to an appearing that leaves no room for a distinction between being and appearing. Sleep does authorize the analysis of any form of appearance whatsoever, since it shows itself to itself as this appearance that appears only as non-appearing.… In this non-appearing, one single thing shows itself. But it does not show itself to others, and in this precise sense it does not appear.… The sleeping self is the self of the thing in itself: a self that cannot even distinguish *itself* from what is not "self," a self without self, in a way, but that finds or touches in this being-without-self its most genuine autonomous existence.[97]

The model of the *self without self* can be applied to the *il y a*, which is the ground whence being arises, the event through which the act expressed by the verb "to be" becomes a being designated by a substantive.[98] In the first lecture included in *Time and the Other*, Levinas characterizes the "fact that there is [*il y a*]" as the "absence of everything" that "returns as a presence, as the place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plentitude of the void, or the murmur of silence."[99] The *il y a* denotes the "indeterminate ground," the "ambience of being," the anonymous "field of every affirmation and negation," which "cannot be expressed by a substantive

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[96] Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream*, 74–90.

[97] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 13–15 (emphasis in original).

[98] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 83. Compare the comments of Levinas included in Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, 50: "Well, I think that the new philosophical 'twist' originated by Heidegger consists in distinguishing between *Being* and *being* (thing or person), and in giving to *Being* the relation, the movement, the efficacy which until then resided in the existent. Existentialism is to experience and think existence—the verb 'to be'—as event, an event which neither produces that which exists, nor is the action of what exists upon another object. It is the pure fact of existing which is event" (emphasis in original). See, however, Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 44. After rendering Heidegger's distinction between *Sein* and *Seiendes* respectively as "existing" and "existent," Levinas notes that he does not intend to ascribe a "specifically existentialist meaning to these terms."

[99] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 46.

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but is verbal," the "existing without existents" that is the "absence of all self, a without-self [*sans-soi*]."[100]

Positivity, therefore, lies in its negativity—a quality that Levinas assigns to love, an "essential and insatiable hunger," illustrated by the scriptural image (Exod. 3:2) of the burning bush that feeds the flames but is not consumed.[101] The event of *there is* takes place always in the present, the time that is the "negation or ignorance of time, a pure self-reference, a hypostasis." In this hypostatic present, wherein the subject is free with regard to the past and the future, freedom consists of responsibility, a "positive enchainment to one's self.... the impossibility of getting rid of oneself."[102] Hence, in contrast to Heidegger, Levinas maintains that freedom is not "an event of *nihilation*; it is produced in the very 'plenum' of being through the ontological situation of the subject."[103] The flight from being is the freedom that comes about through being enchained to the self whence one aspires to flee, the dialectic of the presence of absence implied in the conception of excendence: exiting from being while retaining a foothold in being, striving for what is both totally other than and the same as the self.

Awaiting Without an Awaited: Messianic Patience and the Futural Undergoing

In the aforementioned lectures on time and the other delivered in 1946–47, Levinas set out to demonstrate that "time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but that it is the very relationship of the subject with the Other."[104] The intrinsic nexus between time and the other is summarized by Levinas in the 1979 preface to *Le temps et l'autre*:

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[100] Ibid., 47–50. Tellingly, Levinas invokes the teaching of Heraclitus offered by Cratalyus—reality may be compared to the river in which one cannot bathe even once—as an analogue to his conception of the there is, which lacks any "fixity of unity" (49), a radical notion of becoming that undermines the idea of being affirmed by the Parmenidean monism. Compare Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 60; *Totalité et infini*, 31.

[101] Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 35.

[102] Ibid., 88–89.

[103] Ibid., 90 (emphasis in original).

[104] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 39.

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> *Time and the Other* presents time not as the ontological horizon of the *being of a being* [*l'être de l'étant*] but as a mode of the *beyond being* [*l'au delà de l'être*], as the relationship of "thought" to the other [*Autre*], and—through the diverse figures of the sociality facing the face of the other person: eroticism, paternity, responsibility for the neighbor—as the relationship to the Wholely other [*Tout Autre*], the Transcendent, the Infinite. It is a relation or religion that is not structured like knowing—that is, an intentionality. Knowing conceals re-presentation and reduces the *other* to presence and co-presence. Time, on the contrary, in its dia-chrony, would signify a relationship that does not compromise the other's alterity, while still assuring its non-indifference to "thought."[105]

In contrast to the traditional conception of the abstract eternity of God, an intemporal mode of being that confers upon the "lived duration" (*la durée vécue*) of the present its full sense by "dissimulating the fulguration of the instant,"[106] Levinas insists on "thinking time not as a degradation of eternity, but as the relationship to *that* which—of itself unassimilable, absolutely other—would not allow itself to be assimilated by experience; or to *that* which—of itself infinite—would not allow itself to be com-prehended.... It is a relationship with the In-visible, where invisibility results not from some incapacity of human knowledge, but from the inaptitude of knowledge as such—from its in-adequation—to the Infinity of the absolutely other, and from the absurdity that an event such as coincidence would have here. The impossibility of coinciding and this inadequation are not simply negative notions, but have a meaning in the *phenomenon* of noncoincidence *given* in the dia-chrony of time."[107]

For Levinas, time is beset by the paradox of "a distance that is also a proximity." The temporal is determined principally by the relationship to the other,[108] but that relationship can never be an event wherein the self and the other coincide, since the other to which the self is related always exceeds the capacity of that self to know or to experience.[109] The perpetual motion of the temporal torrent is an expres-

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[105] Ibid., 30–31.
[106] Ibid., 31.
[107] Ibid., 32 (emphasis in original).
[108] On the ethical relation and time, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 220–247; *Totalité et infini*, 195–225.
[109] Needless to say, there are numerous studies on the dimension of time in Levinas's thought of which I will here mention a few representative examples: Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University

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sion of the desire that is engendered by the transcendence of the other transcending itself, the "true adventure of paternity," which Levinas calls "trans-substantiation," the process that "permits going beyond the simple renewal of the possible in the inevitable senescence of the subject. Transcendence, the for the Other, the goodness correlative of the face, founds a more profound relation: the goodness of goodness."[110] In an obviously polemical tactic, Levinas chooses the term "trans-substantiation" to criticize the Christian idea of the host bread and sacramental wine changing into the body and blood of Jesus. For Levinas, this expression denotes the relation to the other, which is not "an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place." The other resembles us, but the alterity of the other is always constituted by its exteriority, and hence "the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery,"[111] which Levinas further relates to the nature of eros[112] and to the quality of modesty that is associated with the feminine.[113] Analogously, the responsibility implied by the diachronic demands "allegiance to the unequalled." It is in this sense of noncoincidence that time is understood as the relationship with the invisible, the infinity of the absolutely other, which occasions "an awaiting without an awaited, an insatiable aspiration."[114]

Press, 1991), 11–48; Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 133–161; Shaun Gallagher, *The Inordinance of Time* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 108–126; Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 113–140; Rudolf Bernet, "L'autre du temps," in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Positivité et transcendance*, 143–163; Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*; Rudolf Bernet, "Conditions: The Politics of Ontology and the Temporality of the Feminine," in *Addressing Levinas*, edited by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 310–337. See the brief analysis in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 51–53.

[110] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 269; *Totalité et infini*, 247.

[111] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 75.

[112] Ibid., 76.

[113] Ibid., 87.

[114] Ibid., 32. The themes of eros, femininity, mystery, and modesty are explored in more detail in Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256–266; *Totalité et infini*, 233–244. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine: Kabbalistic Traces in the Thought of Levinas," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 14 (2006): 195–224, reprinted with slight emendations in Kevin Hart and Michael Signer, eds., *The Exorbitant: Emmanuel Levinas Between Jews and Christians* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 52–73.

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One can decode this description as a phenomenological recasting of the traditional requirement imposed on the Jew to wait temporally for the redemption that apparently cannot transpire in time. The messianic ideal, on this score, induces the longing for the advent of the (non)event,[115] the present that Levinas depicts as the "mastery of the existent over existing," an occurrence that "can no longer be qualified as experience," a phenomenon that is, technically speaking, "beyond phenomenology."[116] It is for this reason that in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas writes that the "real import" of prophetic eschatology

> does not introduce a teleological system into the totality; it does not consist in teaching the orientation of history. Eschatology institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and present.… It is a relationship with *a surplus always exterior to the totality*, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of infinity, were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality.[117]

The eschatological vision does not foretell the end of history, as it is conventionally understood, but rather the "relation with the infinity of being," "the breach of the totality, the possibility of a *signification without a context*."[118] This is not to say that Levinas entirely abandoned the teleological aspect of Jewish messianism. On the contrary, he alludes to it when he writes in *Totality and Infinity* of "the infinite triumph of time without which goodness would be subjectivity and folly."[119] That the "infinite triumph of time" is indeed a messianic reference is confirmed by another, less cryptic statement from the same treatise: "Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit."[120] On the one hand, the messianic triumph, which demands an infinity of time to be instantiated, consists in the victory of good over evil, but, on the other hand, not even infinite time can categorically prevent the

[115] For a fuller discussion of this theme, see Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 265–300.
[116] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 54.
[117] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 22–23 (emphasis in original); *Totalité et infini*, xi.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 280; *Totalité et infini*, 257.
[120] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 285; *Totalité et infini*, 261. See Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002), 97–98; Welz, *Love's Transcendence*, 302–303.

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return of evil. Without the infinite triumph of time there would be no objective standard of the good; however, even if one posits such a triumph there is no guarantee that evil will be utterly conquered.

Fundamental to—even if not universally or monolithically affirmed—the rabbinic sensibility is the belief in the Messiah's impending coming at any moment; this moment, however, is a "now" that does not belong to the ordinary calibration of time—the now that is awaited is awaited because it can never take place and hence deferment is endemic to messianic consciousness.[121] Many have expressed this peculiar and paradoxical dimension of Jewish soteriology, but for our purposes I will cite Steven Schwarzschild, whose views reflect the influence of Hermann Cohen's asymptotic notion of the messianic future,[122] which involves the perpetual delay of the occurrence even as it secures its constant potentiality. Commenting on the twelfth of the thirteen Maimonidean principles, "I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I anticipate him, nonetheless, on every day, when he may come," Schwarzschild noted that "the logic of this formulation entails that… the Messiah will always not yet have come, into all historical eternity. It is his coming, or rather the expectation of his coming, not his arrival, his 'advent,' that is obligatory Jewish faith.… Jewishly, the Messiah not only has not come but also will never have come—that he will always be coming."[123] In my estimation, this corresponds to Levinas's notion of diachrony as the "matter of waiting without an awaited," the aspiration that grows stronger in its insatiability the more it is fulfilled.[124]

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[121] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 141–142.

[122] Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides and Hermann Cohen on Messianism," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 380.

[123] Steven Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal: Jewish Writings of Steven Schwarzschild*, edited by Menachem Kellner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 209–211.

[124] The similarity between Cohen and Levinas is noted by Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 312–313n76. For discussion of the messianic idea of the infinite in Cohen and Levinas, see Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 419–422. Affinities between Cohen and Levinas are noted in Hermann Cohen, *Ethics of Maimonides*, translated with commentary by Almut Sh. Bruckstein, foreword by Robert Gibbs (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), xxviii, xxix, xxxiv, 51, 82, 142, 175. See also Ze'ev Levy, "Hermann Cohen and Emmanuel Lévinas," in *Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Religion: International Conference in Jerusalem 1996*, edited by Stéphane Moses and Hartwig Wiedebach (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1997), 133–143; Dana Hollander, "Is the Other My Neighbor? Reading Levinas Alongside Hermann Cohen," in Hart and Signer, *The Exorbitant*, 90–107.

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It lies beyond the scope of this essay to delve into the minutiae of Levinas's understanding of messianic politics,[125] but let me state briefly that his rejection of the portrayal of the savior "as a person who comes to put a miraculous end to the violence in the world, the injustice and contradictions which destroy humanity,"[126] lends support to my conjecture that his conception of diachrony is a philosophical appropriation of the traditional Jewish dogma. From a close reading of several talmudic texts speculating on the nature of the Messiah in the chapter "Messianic Texts" in *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas infers the following: "Judaism does not therefore carry with it a doctrine of an end to History which dominates individual destiny. Salvation does not stand as an end to History, or act as its conclusion. It remains at *every moment* possible."[127] That the messianic deliverance does not summon the cessation of historical time is precisely what makes its eventuality viable at every moment, but this entails a radical transformation of the eschatological ideal: "Judaism, reaching out for the coming of the Messiah, has already gone beyond the notion of a mythical Messiah appearing at the end of History, and conceives of messianism as a

[125] See Graham Ward, "On Time and Salvation: The Eschatology of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Seán Hand (Surrey: Curzon, 1996), 153–172; Robert Bernasconi, "Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida's Take on Levinas' Political Messianism," *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 3–19; Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 194–207; Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, 166–172; Elias Bongmba, "Eschatology: Levinasian Hints in a Preface," in *Levinas and Biblical Studies*, edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Gary A. Phillips, and David Jobling (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 75–90; Martin Kavka, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129–192; Catherine Chalier, "The Messianic Utopia," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vol. 3, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Claire Elise Katz (New York: Routledge, 2005), 44–58; Catherine Chalier, *La Trace de l'infini*, 168–169; Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 208–227; Bettina Bergo, "The Time and Language of Messianism: Levinas and Saint Paul," in Schroeder and Benso, *Levinas and the Ancients*, 178–195; Ephraim Meir, *Levinas's Jewish Thought: Between Jerusalem and Athens* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2008), 116–119, 201–204; Fagenblatt, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 94–96; Pierre Bouretz, *Witness for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 647–719. Also pertinent are the intermittent comments on the subject of messianism in the conversation between David Kangas and Martin Kavka, "Hearing, Patiently: Time and Salvation in Kierkegaard and Levinas," in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, edited by J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 125–152.

[126] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 59.

[127] Ibid., 84 (emphasis in original).

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personal vocation among men."[128] The shift from Messiah as a distinct person to messianism as a personal vocation for all of humanity—the traditional image of the suffering of the redeemer is expanded to each individual's duty to bear responsibility for the suffering of others and in this sense, as Levinas interprets a dictum attributed to R. Naḥman, "If he [the Messiah] is among the living, he could be someone like me,"[129] as "to be Myself is to be the Messiah," for only one who can say "Me" is capable of taking on the suffering of the world,[130] and thus "each person acts as though he were the Messiah"[131]—is an outcome of the diachronic conception of temporal transcendence as a movement toward the infinity of the wholly other, the "ethical adventure of the relationship to the other person,"[132] a course set forth by a "pluralism that does not merge into unity."[133]

Salvation, Levinas wryly remarked, "does not require the satisfaction of need, like a higher principle that would require the solidity of its bases to be secured."[134] Significantly, the need to be saved and the need to be satisfied are correlated respectively with Jacob and Esau. One wonders if Levinas tacitly has in mind the traditional typological understanding of these figures as Judaism or the Synagogue (Israel) and Christianity or the Church (Edom). Be that as it may, the main point is that, for Levinas, there is no presumption of a termination of suffering in history. In the lecture "The State of Caesar and the State of David" (1971), Levinas aligns himself with the "non-apocalyptic Messianism" of Maimonides.[135] The rabbinic-philosophical viewpoint sheds light on the implausibility of dreaming that the ideal can be

[128] Ibid., 88.

[129] Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b. See the analysis of Levinas's reading of this rabbinic text in Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 204–206. Wyschogrod notes the similarity of Levinas's interpretation and the response of Jesus (Luke 17:20–21) to the query of the Pharisees regarding the coming of the kingdom of God to the effect that it is not an observable phenomenon on the historical plane but an internal shift within each person.

[130] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 89.

[131] Ibid., 90.

[132] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 33.

[133] Ibid., 42. For an analysis that complements the Levinasian perspective, see John D. Caputo, "Temporal Transcendence: The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida," in *Transcendence and Beyond*, 188–203. See also Joanna Hodge, *Derrida on Time* (London: Routledge, 2007), 196–214.

[134] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 61.

[135] On the "messianic naturalism" in Maimonides and Levinas, see Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 94–96, 225n60.

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fulfilled in events promised by a state. The perspective of Judaism shatters the "Platonic confidence in the possibility that the rational political order would have in ensuring the end of all exile and all violence and, in peacetime, bringing about the happiness of contemplation."[136] That there can be no climax to the historical process implies that the possibility for salvation is always real. The term "always" (*toujours*), as Levinas remarked in "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition" (1977), signifies natively "the sense of great patience. Of its dia-chrony and temporal transcendence. A sobering up that is 'always' deeper and, in this sense, the spirituality of the spirit in obedience."[137] The hope of the "temporal transcendence toward the mystery of the future"[138] depends on letting go of the belief that an eschaton may be reached and a new era without affliction and misfortune ushered in. Messianic awakening consists of being liberated from this expectation and realizing that the consummation of the goal is in the waiting for the goal to be consummated, a truism that conveys the secret of the nature of time:[139]

> Waiting for the Messiah is the actual duration of time. Or waiting for God. But now waiting no longer testifies to an absence of Godot who will never come. It testifies, rather, to the relation with something that cannot enter into the present, because the present is too small for the Infinite.[140]

To wait for the Messiah is not to wait for something or someone; it is to wait for the sake of waiting, and hence it requires the patience that is the *length of time*, "an awaiting without anything being awaited, without the intention of awaiting." In swallowing its own intention,

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[136] Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, translated by Gary D. Mole (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 181.

[137] Ibid., 150.

[138] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 94.

[139] Compare Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 173: "*La messianisme est plus qu'une 'creation' parfaite. Et il n'y aurait pas de Messie sans temps. Temps condition de la 'consommation.'*"

[140] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 143. Levinas's views can be profitably compared to Yeshayahu Leibowitz's rejection of a literal understanding of the messianic redeemer, but this is a matter that lies beyond the scope of this study. See the preliminary remarks of Adam Zachary Newton, *The Fence and the Neighbor: Emmanuel Levinas, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Israel among the Nations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 95–96; Michael Fagenblat, "Lacking All Interest: Levinas, Leibowitz, and the Pure Practice of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review* 97 (2004): 7n18. See below, n. 210.

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patience attests to the inevitable deferral of the temporal: "Time is deferred, is transcended to the Infinite. And the awaiting without something awaited (time itself) is turned onto responsibility for another."[141]

The messianic promise shares with death the qualities of being an "affectivity without intentionality,"[142] an "awaiting or anticipation, without any anticipating aiming; it must thus be considered as having engulfed its intentionality of awaiting, in an awaiting that is patience or pure passivity…a non-taking upon oneself or a non-assumption of what is equivalent to no content,"[143] the "affection of the present by the nonpresent."[144] Levinas's portrayal of Eros in its "feminine epiphany" can be applied to his idea of messianic time: "The violence of this revelation marks precisely the *force* of this absence, this *not yet*, this less than nothing, audaciously torn up from its modesty, from its essence of being hidden. A *not yet* more remote than a future, a temporal *not yet*, evincing degrees in nothingness."[145] Can we imagine a not yet that is not temporal? What, then, does Levinas wish to impart by referring to a temporal not yet that is more remote than a future? These words portend that transcendence and not immanence constitutes the essence of temporality. As he writes in the essay "Intentionality and Sensation" (1965), "Should we not understand transcendence in the etymological sense of the term, as a passing over, an overstepping, a gait, rather than as a representation, without thereby destroying the essential of the metaphorical sense of this term? Transcendence is produced by kinaesthesis: thought goes beyond itself not by encountering an objective reality, but by entering into this allegedly distant world.… A diachrony stronger than structural synchronism."[146]

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[141] Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 139.

[142] Ibid., 17.

[143] Ibid., 29.

[144] Ibid., 15.

[145] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 264 (emphasis in original); *Totalité et infini*, 242.

[146] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 148; see Bernet, "Levinas's Critique," 92. And compare Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 155. Commenting on Bergson's notion of *durée* as "pure change" and the "bursting forth of incessant novelty," Levinas writes: "Does not temporality itself announce itself here as a transcendence, as a thinking under which, independently of any experience, the alterity of absolute novelty, the absolute in the etymological sense of the term, would burst forth?"

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Temporal Transcendence, Death, and the Diachrony of Noncoincidence

The connection between transcendence and time, essential to Levinas's critique of both Husserl and Heidegger, rests on the following paradox: death is the presence of the future in the present because the future is always to come and therefore can never be now.[147] Rather than viewing the essence of being human as the being-toward-death, the possibility of impossibility, death cannot be but as the "phenomenon of the end" that is the "end of the phenomenon"[148]—this is its interminable way of being—and thus "it is always possible, possible at each moment.... Such will be the complete concept of death, the most proper possibility, an unsurpassable possibility, isolating, certain, indeterminate.... It is a matter of maintaining this possibility *as* a possibility; one must maintain it without transforming it into a reality."[149] Death points to the "pure future,"[150] the "unlimited infinity of the future,"[151] the "impossible thought,"[152] that is, the thought of the impossible possibility, the pure possibility, the possibility of possibility that actualizes the transcendence of the fecundity of there being (*il y a*) in the relation to a future that is "irreducible to the power over possibles."[153] It follows that the essence of time is not, as Heidegger thought, the "finitude of being" but rather "its infinity."[154] To express the matter in a different terminological register, the possibility of death is the possibility of the possible that materializes in the plurality of existents that express an existing that is not in conformity with the logic of a monadic unity.[155] Transcendence is the very *consciousness of the possible*, the "original iteration" insinuated in the observation of Husserl that what temporalizes is already temporalized.[156] A more robust and seemingly less critical

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[147] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 71–72.
[148] Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 50.
[149] Ibid., 52 (emphasis in original).
[150] The expression appears in the 1982 essay "Diachrony and Representation," in Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 114.
[151] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 282; *Totalité et infini*, 258.
[152] Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 33.
[153] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 267; *Totalité et infini*, 245.
[154] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 284; *Totalité et infini*, 260.
[155] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 275; *Totalité et infini*, 252. See Yael Lin, "Finding Time for a Fecund Feminine in Levinas's Thought," *Philosophy Today* 53 (2009): 179–190.
[156] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 148.

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formulation of this facet of Husserl's internal time consciousness is given by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being*:

> This specific intentionality is time itself. There is consciousness insofar as the sensible impression differs from itself without differing; it differs without differing, is other within identity.… Differing within identity, modifying itself without changing, consciousness glows in an impression inasmuch as it diverges from itself, to *still* be expecting itself, or *already* recuperating itself. Still, already—are time, time in which nothing is lost. The past itself is modified without changing its identity, diverges from itself without letting go of itself…To speak of consciousness is to speak of time.[157]

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas similarly expounded the nature of time as the *other within identity* in conversation with Bergson's notion of the *élan vital* as the continuous duration: "The work of time goes beyond the suspension of the definitive which the continuity of duration makes possible. There must be a rupture of continuity, and continuation across this rupture.… Reality is what it is, but will be once again, another time freely resumed and pardoned."[158] There is continuity, but there is also rupture; indeed, embracing a logic of the excluded middle, Levinas states that *there must be a rupture of continuity, and continuation across this rupture*. The "ultimate and living metaphor" (*la métaphore ultime ou vive*) that may be elicited from the Bergsonian idea of *durée* is that the flow of time cannot be captured (as Husserl maintained) in the reminiscence of the past or expectation of the future in the imagination; the temporality of time is the always-present future that can never be exhausted by the anticipation of its coming (*à-venir*), the going toward the God of time that is prophecy (*prophétie qu'il faut entendre comme l'à-Dieu du temps*).[159]

It is curious that he expresses the nature of the flux in the religious or legal terms of being pardoned. The use of theological language is even more poignant in the continuation of the passage from

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[157] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 32 (emphasis in original); *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 40–41.

[158] *Totality and Infinity*, 283–284; *Totalité et infini*, 260. See the discussion of Bergson and Heidegger in Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 54–56, and compare the passage from *Basic Philosophical Writings* cited above, n. 146.

[159] Emmanuel Levinas, *Transcendance et intelligibilité*: *Suivi d'un entretien* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 35–36.

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Totality and Infinity: "Resurrection constitutes the principal event of time. There is therefore no continuity in being. Time is discontinuous; one instant does not come out of another without interruption, by an ecstasy."[160] The theme of resurrection, one might say, is here resurrected to enunciate that the principal event of time is a matter of discontinuity and the ecstasy of interruption.[161] The balance achieved previously is here abandoned for a more one-sided characterization: time is inherently discontinuous. The diremptive nature of time is reinforced by the observation that "death and resurrection constitute time," a "formal structure" that "presupposes the relation of the I with the Other and, at its basis, fecundity across the discontinuous which constitutes time." Levinas redresses the imbalance to some degree by portraying the fecundity of the "infinition of time" as the "recommencement in discontinuous time that brings youth." For Levinas, the temporal cannot be separated from the anthropological insofar as the metrics of time is measured in the ethical relation to the other. Hence it is not surprising that he immediately returns to religious and legal language: "Time's infinite existing ensures the situation of judgment, condition of truth, behind the failure of the goodness of today."[162] If it will take an infinite time for the truth to be told, then we can presume there can be no getting to the terminus of having told the truth. To this dilemma, Levinas responds: "Truth requires both an infinite time and a time it will be able to seal, a completed time. The completion of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal.... Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness?"[163] Levinas does not answer the question. But, as we have seen, the messianic truth he is prepared to embrace is dependent on accepting that there is no end to history. Eternity, therefore, would have to be a structure of time rather than its deconstruction.[164]

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[160] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 284; *Totalité et infini*, 261.

[161] See Françoise Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise," *Hypatia* 15 (2000): 178–189, esp. 182.

[162] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 284; *Totalité et infini*, 261.

[163] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 284–285; *Totalité et infini*, 261.

[164] Compare my summation of Levinas's view in Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, 158: "The sign at the end signifies that which (properly speaking) cannot be signified, the transcendent alterity opening time to eternity, not to be rendered in the Platonic sense of an immutable realm that stands over and against the temporal, but rather in the apprehension of the eternality of time and the temporality of eternity, a middle way that renders the traditional binary between evanescence and permanence obsolete."

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It is apposite to mention a passage in *Otherwise than Being* in which Levinas avails himself of messianic language to characterize the temporal sway of being:

> The diachrony of time is not due to the length of the interval, which representation would not be able to take in. It is a disjunction of identity where the same does not rejoin the same: there is non-synthesis, lassitude. The for-oneself of identity is now no longer for itself.… The subject is for another; its own being turns into for another, its being dies away turning into signification.… In such a resolution not a world but a kingdom is signified. But a kingdom of an invisible king, the kingdom of the Good whose idea is already an eon. The Good that reigns in its goodness cannot enter into the present of consciousness, even if it would be remembered. In consciousness it is an anarchy. The Biblical notion of the Kingdom of God—kingdom of a non-thematizable God, a non-contemporaneous, that is, non-present, God—must not be conceived as an ontic image of a certain "époque" of the "history of Being," as a modality of essence. Rather, essence is already an Eon of the Kingdom.… It signifies in the form of the proximity of a neighbor and the duty of an unpayable debt, the form of a finite condition. Temporality as ageing and death of the unique one signifies an obedience where there is no desertion.[165]

The gauge of the diachronic is not the duration of the interval but the disjunction of identity that transforms the for-oneself of subjectivity into the for-another of intersubjectivity, a resolution that signifies the kingdom of the Good, which is identified as the biblical Kingdom of God, that is, the kingdom of an invisible king, a non-thematizable God that cannot be present or contemporaneous. The transcendence of this God is signified in the responsibilities one harbors in relation to the immanence of the neighbor. The finitude of temporality is measured by the yardstick of the duties that the subject bears infinitely for the proximate other, an obedience from which there can be no absconding.

Epiphany of the Face / Echo of the Otherwise

Many of the themes outlined above regarding the nature of transcendence are developed in greater detail in the two major works of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. As he expressed

[165] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 52; *Autrement qu'être*, 67.

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the matter in the former composition, the face of the other, which is manifest in the voice that comes from "another shore," teaches about transcendence, the "presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality."[166] Transcendence is the alterity that "does not shine forth in the *form* by which things are given to us," and as such it is "the vision of the very openness of being" that "cuts across the vision of forms and can be stated neither in terms of contemplation nor in terms of practice. It is the face; its revelation is speech."[167] Whereas vision is "essentially an adequation of exteriority with interiority," the "exteriority of discourse cannot be converted into interiority. The interlocutor can have no place in an inwardness; he is forever outside."[168]

The shift from image to discourse in Levinas's post-phenomenological phenomenology—a phenomenology that moves beyond the understanding of truth as disclosure, a bringing to light of presence, the end of metaphysics, and in its place upholds the alterity of transcendence not as "a simple dissimulation to be unveiled by the gaze but a non-in-difference,"[169] the welcoming of the face and the doing of justice as the ultimate events that reveal the non-adequation of the idea of infinity vis-à-vis consciousness[170]—is rooted in an adaptation of the biblical and rabbinic suspicion of images as a means of promoting idolatry.[171] Eschewing the traditional apophaticism, Levinas notes that the "incomprehensible nature of the presence of the Other . . . is not to be described negatively. Better than comprehension, *discourse* relates with what remains essentially transcendent."[172] Through discourse we find a bridge to the other. In what appears to be a veiled criticism of Heidegger, Levinas writes, "Speaking, rather than 'letting be,' solicits the Other. Speech cuts across vision."[173] The face of the other that is absolutely other—the presence that always overflows the sphere of the same, "the infinitely more contained in the less" (*l'infiniment plus contenu dans le moins*)[174]—is not visible to my gaze, but it can be

[166] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171; *Totalité et infini*, 146.
[167] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 192–193; *Totalité et infini*, 166–167.
[168] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 295; *Totalité et infini*, 271.
[169] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 154.
[170] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27–28; *Totalité et infini*, xvi. Levinas's intellectual relationship to phenomenology has been the focus of many studies. See Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity*, and references to other scholars noted by the author.
[171] Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, xxii.
[172] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 195; *Totalité et infini*, 169.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 196; *Totalité et infini*, 170.

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addressed by me in the verbal gesticulation of saying (*le Dire*), which, as Levinas repeatedly reminds the reader, is never identical to what is said (*le Dit*).[175] The epiphany of the face is thus an act of linguistication that turns the "sensible, still graspable…into total resistance to the grasp…. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it."[176]

Levinas is likely to have been influenced as well by the Maimonidean translation of visuality into discourse. For Maimonides, the masses require the figural imagination to convey truth—they cannot entertain the existence of something that is not a body—but this very figuration disfigures the truth insofar as the truth is beyond configuration.[177] For the philosophically enlightened, figurative images are to be read figuratively. A striking example of this strategy is found in Maimonides' explanation of the scriptural claim that God spoke to Moses face to face, *we-dibber yhwh el mosheh panim el panim* (Exod. 33:11) as "the hearing of a speech without the intermediary of an angel," that is, without the intervention of the imaginative faculty.[178] Maimonides adduces this by citing two other verses, one that describes God's speaking to the people of Israel face to face (Deut. 5:4) and another that describes the Israelites hearing the voice of words but seeing no figure (ibid., 4:12). In a second passage, Maimonides explains the depiction of Moses knowing God face to face, *we-lo qam navi od be-yisra'el ke-mosheh asher yeda'o yhwh panim el panim* (Deut. 34:10), as denoting an unmediated encounter, which is not the case with all other prophets.[179] Wyschogrod insightfully observed that Levinas's use of the image of the face to mark the relation with the other beyond imagistic representation is based on Maimonides' "metonymic expansion" of the term *panim*.[180] She notes, however, that while Levinas is indebted to the aniconicity endorsed by Maimonides, he does not

[175] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 37–38; *Autrement qu'être*, 47–48. See Bernhard Waldenfels, "Levinas on the Saying and the Said," in *Addressing Levinas*, 86–97.

[176] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197–198; *Totalité et infini*, 172.

[177] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 363. Wyschogrod's approach is confirmed by the recent analysis of the Levinasian "ethical negative theology" in light of the Maimonidean *via negativa* in Fagenblatt, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 111–139.

[178] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated with an introduction and notes by Shlomo Pines, with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), I.37, 86.

[179] *Guide* II.35, 368.

[180] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 32.

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presume that we can ascertain knowledge of the other through rational intuition and inference.

I would add, parenthetically, that there seems to be operative in both Maimonides and Levinas a presumed correlation between space and vision, on one hand, and time and hearing, on the other. In what sense can the privileging of the temporal-aural over the spatial-ocular secure the possibility of accessing the infinite other as the trace of transcendence that is disruptive of the sphere of being? From the Maimonidean perspective, there is a transmutation of the visual into the verbal, but even the latter should be insufficient to speak of the transcendent. Attributing speech to God is no less problematic for Maimonides (or, for that matter, Levinas) than imagining the possibility of seeing an image of God; both equally take on a form of anthropomorphization that is idolatrous when literalized or ontologized as real. Nevertheless, reflecting the longstanding bias in Jewish sources, both Maimonides and Levinas view the visual as more dangerous than the auditory, and hence they interpret the scriptural account of Moses speaking to God face to face as a metaphoric denotation of the dialogic relationality that in truth defies any figurative representation. Just as Maimonides explained that God's declaration that his face will not be seen signifies that the true reality of the necessary of existence cannot be grasped, so Levinas uses the image of the face to denote the unknowability of what is, strictly speaking, no thing but "the event of being" (*l'événement d'être*) that "passes over to what is other than being" (*l'autre de l'être*), "being's other," the "otherwise than being" (*autrement qu'être*), which is the "very difference of the *beyond*, the difference of transcendence."[181] Levinas opts to reform phenomenology by utilizing language that is replete with aniconic resonances and critical of the ocularcentric tendency to favor vision. The infinite is envisaged in a/theophanic terms as "the echo of the *otherwise*" (*l'echo de l'autrement*) issuing from "the *hither side of ontology*" (*en deça de l'ontologie*),[182] an actuality that can never be actually delimited, as it is always other, always in excess of what we can know or think, the "exorbitant ultramateriality" that is inexhaustible.[183] Even to call it an "it" is misguided and underscores

[181] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 3; *Autrement qu'être*, 3–4.
[182] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 44, 46; *Autrement qu'être*, 57, 58.
[183] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 76.

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the inadequacy of language to convey the nature of the face that repudiates any attempt to contain it imagistically.

The more mature undertaking of Levinas to privilege the metaphysical transcendence beyond ontology flows naturally out of his earlier inquisitiveness concerning the apparent entrapment of human subjectivity in a world without any transcendence other than transcendence within immanence. In *Time and the Other*, he explicitly describes the transcendence of light, which stands metaphorically for reason or consciousness, as being "wrapped in immanence. The exteriority of light does not suffice for the liberation of the ego that is the self's captive."[184] Philosophical idealism has run its course. To approach the infinite, the thought that "withdraws from thought," one must "understand more than one understands" and "think more than one thinks."[185] A particularly bold formulation of this agnosticism—perhaps skepticism would be the better term[186]—is found in the essay "From Consciousness to Wakefulness" (1974), where Levinas questions whether lucidity, generally considered the measure of perfect knowledge, is the "most awakened wakefulness," which he further describes as the "inassimilable disturbance of the Same by the Other—an awakening that shakes the waking state—a disturbance of the Same by the Other in difference." This, he adds, is the appropriate description of transcendence, a "relation between the Same and the Other that cannot be interpreted as a state, not even a state of lucidity, a relation that must be granted to vigilance, which, as anxiety, does not rest in its theme, in representation, in presence, in Being." Transcendence, accordingly, is this "order, or disorder, in which reason is no longer knowledge or action but in which, unseated by the Other from its state—unseated from the Same and from being—it is ethical relation with the other person, proximity of the neighbor."[187] An alternate enunciation of the matter is found in *Otherwise than Being*: "Transcendence, the beyond essence which is also being-in-the-world, requires ambiguity, a blinking of meaning which is not only a chance certainty, but a frontier both ineffaceable

[184] Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 65.
[185] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 76.
[186] On the matter of skepticism, see Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 165–171 (*Autrement qu'être*, 210–218), and the analysis of Jan de Greef, "Skepticism and Reason," in Cohen, *Face to Face*, 158-179. See also Dennis King Keenan, *Death and Responsibility: The "Work" of Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 19–31, and the exchange between Levinas and Wyschogrod in *Crossover Queries*, 291–292.
[187] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 167–168.

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and finer than the tracing of an ideal line."[188] The emphasis on the ethical, therefore, is consequent to the apophatic: ignorance of the divine Other results in the turn toward the human other. In Levinas's interview with Wyschogrod conducted on December 31, 1982, he remarked that it is in virtue of nonappearing, the staging (*mise en scène*) of the infinite in the construction of social relations, that he was willing to call his thinking a form of phenomenology, which he related more specifically to "Husserl's recovery of the concrete horizon."[189]

Imagining Transcendence and the Threat of Theolatry

The critical question I will raise in this section is whether the preference accorded the acoustic over the visual helps one avoid lapsing into the very objectification of the other against which Levinas cautioned frequently in his writings and lectures. Put differently, can we preserve an outside that cannot be rendered phenomenologically accessible from the inside if we presume the ability to "hear" transcendence or the infinity that is otherwise than being? Does such hearing maintain the excess that superintends the totality, the more that is the face, which is both the exposure of the other and its refusal to be exposed? To paraphrase Levinas, the presence of the other would perforce consist in the other divesting itself kenotically of the form in which it is manifest,[190] the showing that is variously expressed as "the face speaks," the "opening in the opening," the "suffering of the eye overtaxed by light," the wakefulness to life, the "transcendence that cannot be reduced to an experience of transcendence, for it is a seizure prior to every *position* of subject and to every perceived or assimilated content."[191] Philosophy itself is transformed by this understanding insofar as it becomes the "language of transcendence and not the tale of experience: a language in which the teller is part of the tale, thus a necessarily personal language, to be understood beyond what it says, that is to be interpreted."[192] Phenomenological attunement gives

[188] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 152; *Autrement qu'être*, 194.
[189] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 292.
[190] For an extensive analysis of this theme, see Renée D. N. van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).
[191] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 179.
[192] Ibid.

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way to a midrashic sensibility: language is determined by the notion of a saying that is always more than what is said and hence elicits endless interpretation, a cornerstone of Levinas's diachronic conception of time, the simultaneity of past and future in the present, which he paradoxically describes as "the relation with God who is in excess of the relation with the Other but is, however, in the relation with the Other."[193] Rabbinic hermeneutic practice, as Levinas describes it, is a mode of interpretation that "necessarily includes that seeking without which the non-said, inherent in the texture of what is declared, would be extinguished by the weight of the texts and sink into their letters."[194]

In line with the longstanding aniconism of the Jewish tradition, Levinas extols sound over light,[195] privileging the auditory to the ocular, and hence, in language that overtly vilifies the incarnational foundation of Christian logocentrism,[196] he notes that "the real presence of the other…is fulfilled in the act of hearing, and derives its meaning from the role of transcendent origin played by the word that is offered. It is to the extent that the word refuses to become flesh that it assumes a presence amongst us."[197] In *Totality and Infinity*, he expresses the matter by noting that the "Transcendent, infinitely Other, solicits us and appeals to us.… The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height by which God is revealed."[198] The Christological doctrine is similarly appropriated and undermined in *Otherwise than Being*: "In the approach of a face the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying."[199] Faithful to this dogma of disincarnation, Levinas would later contrast—in my judgement, somewhat disingenuously—his notion of

[193] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 296. See also Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 24–25 (*Autrement qu'être*, 31); Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 75.

[194] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Jewish Understanding of Scripture," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994): 497. For a different rendering, see Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 110.

[195] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 99.

[196] For a more extended discussion of Levinas's critique of the Christian doctrine of incarnation, see Wolfson, "Secrecy," 57–60, and Robert Gibbs, "The Disincarnation of the Word: The Trace of God in Reading Scripture," in Hart and Signer, *The Exorbitant*, 32–51.

[197] Seán Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 148.

[198] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78–79; *Totalité et infini*, 50–51.

[199] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 94; *Autrement qu'être*, 120.

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il y a, "there is," with Heidegger's *es gibt*, in the following way in an interview with Philippe Nemo:

> For me…"there is" is the phenomenon of impersonal being: "it."… It is something resembling what one hears when one puts an empty shell close to the ear, as if the emptiness were full, as if the silence were a noise. It is something one can also feel when one thinks that even if there were nothing, the fact that "there is" is undeniable. Not that there is this or that; but the very scene of being is open: there is. In the absolute emptiness that one can imagine before creation—there is.[200]

Levinas embraces a paradoxical language that has interesting parallels with both kabbalistic and Buddhist cosmologies: the ultimate source of being, what he calls the "there is," is the impersonal "it," the emptiness that is full, the something that is not this or that, the openness of being that is naught but the rumbling silence. Interestingly, Levinas elucidates this phenomenon from a childhood memory of experiencing the silence of his bedroom as the adults continue in their wakeful life. When pressed by his interlocutor on the comparison to Heidegger's *es gibt* and the sense of generosity implied thereby, Levinas emphatically denies the suitability of such anthropomorphizing:

> I insist in fact on the impersonality of the "there is"; "there is," as "it rains," or "its night." And there is neither joy nor abundance: it is a noise returning after every negation of this noise. Neither nothingness nor being. I sometimes use the expression: the excluded middle. One cannot say of this "there is" which persists that it is an event of being. One can neither say that it is nothingness, even though there is nothing.[201]

The comportment of the *il y a* is such that it violates the Aristotelian logic of the excluded middle: it is neither nothing nor something. One cannot even say of the "there is" that it is an event of being. Indeed, it is too much to say that it is nothingness, even though there is, in truth, nothing. And yet, this nothing is the opposite of the "absolute negation" that is death. The experience of the "there is" is a "maddening" horror from which it is totally impossible to escape, just as it is impossible for the insomniac to escape from the state of wakefulness in which he or she can both say and not say that it is the "I" that cannot fall asleep. In the state of insomnia, consciousness is depersonal-

[200] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 47–48.
[201] Ibid., 48–49.

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ized in a manner that sheds light on the impersonalization of the "it" that is the character of the "there is."[202]

In his 1964 essay "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," Derrida already noted the complex way in which Levinas's thinking about ethics is conditioned by the apophatic tradition of Western philosophy and thus incriminates him in the ontotheology he sought to undermine—the being delineated as beyond being (*epekeina tes ousias*) is a being nonetheless.[203] Is Derrida correct that the "ethical-metaphysical transcendence" articulated by Levinas falls short of an "ontological transcendence"? In an interview conducted in December 1984–January 1985, Levinas insisted that the "original ethical signifying of the face," which is embodied in the twin commandments of the love of God and the love of one's neighbor, is "without any metaphor or figure of speech, in its rigorously proper meaning—the transcendence of a God not objectified in the face in which he speaks; a God who does not 'take on body,' but who approaches precisely through this relay to the neighbor—binding men among one another with obligation, each one answering for the loves of all the others."[204] In conjunction with this view, he notes that the *via negativa* in Maimonides opened the door to casting the positive knowledge of God as the attributes of actions, which are encapsulated in the characteristics of *ḥesed, mishpaṭ*, and *ṣedaqah*, rendered respectively by Levinas as the "ethical behavior" of "good will," "judgment," and "fairness" in relation to the other. This is the highest possible theological knowledge one can have and the means to realize the commandment of *imitatio dei*.[205] The point is reinforced in Levinas's interview with Wyschogrod, wherein he recalled that at the end of the *Guide* (III.54) Maimonides affirmed the supremacy of the ethical ideal anchored in the attributes of divine action in the world, an ideal that Levinas calls the "law of nonreciprocity" or "asymmetry" demanded by the relation with the other.[206]

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[202] Ibid., 49. See above, n. 93.
[203] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 141–142.
[204] Emmanuel Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, translated by Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 171.
[205] Ibid., 172. See recent analysis of this passage in Fagenblatt, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 111–112.
[206] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 288.

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Despite the lofty ambition underlying Levinas's plea to inaugurate ethics rather than ontology as the discursive underpinning for the possibility of the human experience of the divine, as well as the imperative that issues from the infinite responsibility each of us must have for another human being in his or her specificity,[207] the correlation of alterity and transcendence in the manner he conceives it may already be too much of an effacement of the nonphenomenalizable, too much figuring of the unfigurable, too much of a risk of making the anti-idolatry of formlessness into a form of idolatry by incarnating the disincarnate and ascribing interest to the disinterestedness of what is ostensibly beyond being. That Levinas was aware of this possible pitfall is most strikingly attested in the section called "The Metaphysical and the Human" in *Totality and Infinity*.[208]

In a manner similar to Jean-Luc Nancy's claim that "monotheism is in truth atheism,"[209] Levinas asserts that "the monotheist faith" (*la foi monothéiste*), if truly faithful, must eradicate all vestiges of myth and hence, ironically enough, it implies a metaphysical atheism (*l'athéisme métaphysique*).[210] On this accord, the anti-idolatrous and aniconic truth of Judaism is best served by affirming an orthopraxis that requires heeding the demand of holiness without assenting to theological dogma. In what strikes the ear as utopian enthusiasm, Levinas characterizes the idea of infinity, which is set against the God of positive religions, as the *dawn of a humanity without myths*. Transcendence, therefore, is distinguished from a "union with the transcendent by participation," the mythopoeic idea that still informs "believers of positive religions." Following the correlative dialogic of Cohen, Buber, and Rosenzweig, Levinas writes that revelation is "discourse," which requires a "separated being" as the interlocutor. "To hear the divine word," accordingly, "does not amount to knowing an object; it is to be in relation with a substance overflowing its own idea in me.… Discourse, which

[207] Ibid., 29.

[208] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77–79; *Totalité et infini*, 49–52.

[209] Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Deconstruction of Monotheism," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 386. Compare Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, translated by Bettina Bego, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 15.

[210] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77; *Totalité et Infini*, 50. For discussion of the atheistic tendencies in Levinas and Leibowitz, related to a "radicalized Maimonidean negative theology," see Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures*, 142, and in more detail, Fagenblat, "Lacking All Interest," 5–9.

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is at the same time foreign and present, suspends participation and, beyond object-cognition, institutes the pure experience of the social relation, where a being does not draw its existence from its contact with the other." The emphasis on the social relation is meant to highlight that the "dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face," and thus it is a "relation with the Transcendent free from all captivation by the Transcendent" (*Une relation avec le Transcendant—cependant libre de toute emprise du Trancendant*).[211]

On the anthropological level as well, Levinas criticizes the egoistic sense of subjectivity by appealing to "the atheism of the I" (*l'athéisme du moi*), which "marks the break with participation and consequently the possibility of seeking a justification for oneself, that is, a dependence upon an exteriority without this dependence absorbing the dependent being.… In the quest for truth, a work eminently individual, which always, as Descartes saw, comes back to the freedom of the individual, atheism affirms itself as atheism [*l'athéisme s'affirmait comme athéisme*]."[212] What is the import of this tautology? How could atheism affirm itself except as atheism? What Levinas wishes to emphasize is that the "ultimate knowing" of the self is not determined by the egoism of the *for itself*, but rather by the questioning of the self that arises in the turning of the self to what is prior to the self, the presence of the Other. That "privileged heteronomy" of the Other invests the self with the spontaneity of freedom that is essential to the creatureliness of what it is to be human. The "marvel of creation," which Levinas depicts in the traditional idiom of *creatio ex nihilo*, "results in a being capable of receiving a revelation, learning that it is created, and putting itself in question." The formation of "moral being," therefore, implies the atheism of which we spoke, but at the same time extending beyond atheism, which consists of the sense of "shame for the arbitrariness of the freedom that constitutes it."[213]

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[211] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77–78; *Totalité et infini*, 50.

[212] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 88–89; *Totalité et infini*, 61. Compare Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 105 (*Autrement qu'être*, 133): "The oneself is a creature, but an orphan by birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its Creator." On the Levinasian notion of the atheistic self, see Kosky, *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*, 186–188; Nick Mansfield, *The God Who Deconstructs Himself: Sovereignty and Subjectivity Between Freud, Bataille, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 70–71.

[213] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 89; *Totalité et infini*, 61.

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With this turn to the ethical, we can appreciate better the link between monotheism and atheism: "The atheism of the metaphysician means, positively, that our relationship with the Metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology, not a thematization, be it a knowledge by analogy, of the attributes of God." Levinas is willing, therefore, to depict the "total Transcendence of the other" as "the invisible but personal God" (*le Dieu invisible, mais personnel*).[214] The possibility of an invisible being is plausible but it is not easy to conjure the notion of a personal being that is invisible unless one resorts to the positing of spiritual entities that would embroil Levinas in an ontotheological conception of the infinite he sought to avoid in affirming an inapparent illeity that resists representation. To be sure, as Wyschogrod noted, in speaking about the resolute transcendence of the other, Levinas deployed the third-person pronoun *il* rather than the second-person *tu* in order to eschew "the language of intimate relation, thereby distinguishing himself from the interpretation of the divine/human encounter as depicted by Martin Buber."[215] Notwithstanding the legitimacy of this distinction, even according to Levinas, the *invisible but personal God* cannot be approached outside of "human presence"—indeed, divine invisibility implies not only that God is "unimaginable" but that God is accessible only in the pursuit of justice, "the uprightness of the face to face" (*la droiture du face-à-face*) and hence ethics is identified as "the spiritual optics" (*l'optique spirituelle*)[216]—and yet it cannot be reduced to a fabrication of human consciousness without compromising its alterity.

The avowal that God is inextricably bound to the interhuman makes it difficult, if not well nigh impossible, to separate the theocentric and

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[214] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78; *Totalité et infini*, 50–51.

[215] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 42. Compare Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 93–94; Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 12–13 (*Autrement qu'être*, 15–16); Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 106–110; Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul A. Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 133–150, retranslated in Levinas, *Proper Names*, 17–35; Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4–48. On the relationship of Buber and Levinas, see Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 142–145; Cohen, *Elevations*, 90–111; the essays included in *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference*, edited by Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice Friedman (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004); Gregory Kaplan, "Ethics as First Philosophy and the Other's Ambiguity in the Dialogue of Buber and Levinas," *Philosophy Today* 50 (2006): 40–57; Meir, *Levinas's Jewish Thought*, 94–124.

[216] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78; *Totalité et infini*, 51.

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anthropocentric dimensions of the Levinasian project and renders, in my mind, the contention that Levinas assented to a purely secular philosophy of intersubjective transcendence dubious.[217] As Levinas himself observed, "[t]he distinction between transcendence toward the other man and transcendence toward God should not be made too quickly,"[218] even though in the same context, he qualifies this claim by asserting that the term "transcendence" is employed without any "theological presupposition."[219] Elsewhere, however, Levinas observes that "theology or the intelligibility of the transcendent…announces itself in the very wakefulness of insomnia, in the vigil and troubled vigilance of the psyche before the moment when the finitude of being, wounded by the infinite, is prompted to gather itself into the hegemonic and atheist Ego of knowledge."[220] In the interview with Wyschogrod, Levinas approves of the latter's suggestion that "the staging of religion is the same as the staging of ethics," and maintains that his "central thesis" turns on appreciating that the "structure that is divinity" is the constitution of society, for divinity is naught but going toward another human being.[221] Is the price enacted here not the attenuation of transcendence and the adaptation of what should be unknown to the demands of societal norms? The tension of which I speak comes to a head in Levinas's contention that the infinite "speaks" (*il parle*) followed by the disclaimer that "he does not have the mythical format that is impossible to confront."[222] In my judgment, to allege that the infinite speaks, let alone solicits and appeals to human beings, is to implicate the infinite in the very mythmaking that Levinas tries to avoid and thus threatens to entangle ethics in the ontotheological framework.

Metaphoric Incarnation and Poetic Abstraction

Let me reiterate that I am fully aware that the discourse with God, according to Levinas, is a language that "leads above being" (*elle-mène au-dessus de l'être*),[223] engendering, in Wyschogrod's locution, a

[217] Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 186.
[218] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 178.
[219] Ibid., 179.
[220] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 159.
[221] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 286.
[222] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77; *Totalité et infini*, 49.
[223] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 297; *Totalité et infini*, 273.

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"supra-ontological metaphysics."[224] I am also cognizant that the image of the face utilized by Levinas is meant to intimate an alterity that cannot be known or named, the "wholly open" that "is in the trace of illeity," that which "is beyond the visible that offers itself to our gaze, or to the power of representation."[225] The metaphors of discourse and the face nevertheless are modes of personifying infinity that may assault the neutrality and incommensurability of otherness. Consider another comment of Levinas: "The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse.… The eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks."[226] Even if we were to accept the notion that the speaking ascribed to the face or to the eye is not a conventional language made of words but rather the linguistic marking of the relationship of proximity that always contains a surplus of signification—and, consequently, there is no ascription of a special power to language vis-à-vis being as we find in Jewish mysticism or the idea central to Heideggerian poetics that the "whole of language bears the ultimate secret of the absolute"[227]—it is still a mode of figuratively representing the "uncontainable"[228] that theoretically exceeds any figuration. Simply put, the disclosure of transcendence in any form of revelatory giving suggests that the mind submits in the end to imaging the unimaginable rather than remaining speechless in apophatic unknowing and aporetic suspension. It is of interest in this regard to consider the following entry in Levinas's recently published notebooks: "Accomplissement. Symbole. Notions essentielles pour l'évasion de l'existence. Sacrement. Figuration."[229] The way to transcendence—the escape from existence—is accomplished through the figurative confabulation of the symbol, which, for Levinas, is not "an image of a veiled reality" but the "prefiguration of the implementation" (préfiguration de l'accomplissement).[230] The performative nature of the symbolic, which

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[224] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 34.

[225] Levinas, *In the Time*, 171.

[226] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66; *Totalité et infini*, 37–38.

[227] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 291, and see also the comment of Levinas on 283, and compare Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 328: *"Au Liegen heideggérien s'oppose la création: l'idée de fondement est inverse—le commencement qui n'est pas un fondement, mais une parole."*

[228] Levinas, *Discovering Existence*, 179.

[229] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 172.

[230] Ibid., 173: *"Pour le romantisme le symbole vaut comme l'inconnu stimulant une histoire qui vaut indépendamment du symbol. Pour moi l'accomplissement du symbole*

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is expressive of the "wondrous fecundity" (*fécondité miraculeuse*) of time,[231] necessitates the figurative confabulation of the impersonal—or perhaps the transpersonal[232]—transcendence beyond configuration.

That Levinas was acutely aware of this dilemma is evident as well from an additional remark he made to Wyschogrod: "[I]t is absolutely necessary to compare the incomparable, and, in consequence, to think in language. In speech, alongside of Saying there absolutely must be a said."[233] The pre-original saying, which is beyond being, always shows itself enigmatically in the said and it is thus always betrayed by any statement of signification that intends a meaning of being.[234] The true peril, however, is that the said continuously threatens to engulf the Saying, for without the said—a specific cultural demonstration such as the Bible, which Levinas considers an illustration of a "said that is inspired," the "sacred language"[235]—there is no access to the Saying. In kabbalistic terms, there is no seeing without a garment and even the nameless is only accessible through the investiture of the name. For Levinas, the disclosing of the face of the neighbor, which eludes representation, the "very collapse of phenomenality," is "more naked than nudity" (*plus nu que la nudité*).[236] But the face is also "weighted down with a skin" through which it breathes, and this skin, to some extent, enclothes the nakedness of the face. The skin is "the divergency between the visible and the invisible, quasi-transparent, thinner than that which would still justify an expression of the invisible by the visible." The face, therefore, is simultaneously "an enormous presence and the withdrawal of this presence" (*une presence énorme et le retrait de cette presence*). But this retreat is "not a negation of presence" or even "its pure latency," that is, it is not something that is not, a presence that is presently absent, but rather the "alterity" that is

ne saurait se séparer de l'historie qui y mène. C'est par [elle que] l'accomplissement est création.… Symbole—préfiguration de l'accomplissement et non pas image de l'être voile."

[231] Ibid., 176: "*La notion de temps et da sa fécondité miraculeuse—l'essentiel du symbole*."

[232] Ibid., 167–168.

[233] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 284.

[234] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 19 (*Autrement qu'être*, 23), and see 95 (*Autrement qu'être*, 121).

[235] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 292.

[236] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 88; *Autrement qu'être*, 112.

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"without common measure with a presence or a past assembling into a synthesis in the synchrony of the correlative."[237]

Wyschogrod astutely noted that the Levinasian notion of infinity ensures the axiom that the "otherness of the other person cannot be sublated and is construed as a species of an-iconic transcendence.... The submissiveness of the subject becomes, for Levinas, the condition of an ethics that has been theologized and a theology that has been ethicized."[238] The determinant of a moral life rests on this disincarnate notion of alterity and the insurmountable difference between self and other, and yet the business of ethics entails comprehending the other as incarnate, as a corporeal being subject to suffering and death. To cite Wyschogrod again: "If Levinas is to retain the transcendence of alterity while avoiding the pitfalls of noumenality, he must have recourse to phenomena that, as it were, erase their own phenomenality, images given empirically yet apprehended discursively in nonpredicative fashion."[239] The ethics of transcendence may involve an irreconcilable tension between the metaphorical tropes of the face and the trace, the former demarcating the embodied corporeality demanded by the specificity of the other and the latter the disincarnation that is necessary to safeguard the glory of the infinite as the other that is forever beyond our grasp. If spiritual optics is an imageless vision that is "bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision,"[240] should this not culminate in an atheological showing, an apophatic venturing beyond the theomorphic need to configure the transcendent to the disfiguration of facing the face that necessarily is no face because it cannot be faced, the contemplation of the meta/figure, the inessential essence that is (non)human? I am mindful of the fact that in describing the beyond being, Levinas insists that systems are interrupted by the "superlative" that exceeds them rather than by the "negation of concepts."[241] Levinas's ambivalence toward apophasis is evident as well in his statement that the trace left by the infinite is not "the residue of a presence," for if that were so, then "its positivity would not preserve the infinity of the infinite any more than negativity would."[242] Even so, it does appear that just as the idolatrous moment in art occurs

[237] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 89–90; *Autrement qu'être*, 113–114.
[238] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 29.
[239] Ibid., 30.
[240] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 23; *Totalité et infini*, xii.
[241] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 187n5; *Autrement qu'être*, 8n4.
[242] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 12; *Autrement qu'être*, 15.

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when the good is absorbed by the form,[243] so for Levinas the rejection of representation with regard to the face leads him to a figuration of the disfigured through the utilization of copious images to underscore the insufficiency of imagery.[244] Can there be a way to accommodate in resemblance the positive theistic depictions of the divine without succumbing to idolatry? Is the human imagination capable of escaping the web of metaphoricity, or will it continue to be coerced into constructing images of the unimaginable in the sublime hope of representing the unrepresentable and thinking the unthinkable?

A meticulous scrutiny of Levinas's comments on the nature of metaphor scattered in his writings indicates that he would respond negatively to my rhetorical query. He was keenly aware that metaphor, which is labeled the form of "poetic abstraction" through which the "innumerable significations" of an object of representation are incarnated,[245] is the only vehicle of language available to us that leads beyond experience to the relationship with the Other (*relation avec l'Autre*), theologically rendered as "being with God" (*être avec Dieu*)[246] or as an "orientation toward God" (*orientation vers Dieu*).[247] Levinas began his lecture on metaphor in the Collège philosophique on February 26, 1962, by noting that the word—derived from the Greek *metapherein*, to put one thing in place of another—etymologically indicates the "transfer of meaning" (*un transfert du sens*), which he explicates as the "semantic elevation" (*une élévation sémantique*) that entails "the passage from a basic and down to earth sense to a more nuanced and more noble sense, a miraculous surplus" (*le passage d'un sens élémentaire*

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[243] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 293.

[244] For a similar argument regarding the persistence of images in Levinas, see Phillipe Crignon, "Figuration: Emmanuel Levinas and the Image," *Yale French Studies* 104 (2004): 100–125, esp. 122–124.

[245] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 229: *"La métaphore se détache de la représentation sensible pour dégager les significations que les objects incarnent. Certes cette incarnation est autre chose que la réalisation d'un concept dans l'individu, puisque cette signification ne se laisse pas définir comme le concept en dehors de la représentation qui l'incarne. Significations innombrables. Abstraction poétique."* See *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 232: *"Toute signification—en tant que signification—est métaphorique, elle mène vers là-haut."*

[246] Ibid., 329: *"Métaphore: Le fait du langage qui mène au-delà de l'expérience—n'est pas une prevue de l'existence de Dieu. Certes. Mais c'est que 'être avec Dieu' ou 'monter', ou 's'élever'—ou 'religion' ou 'langage'—ou 'relation avec l'Autre' conditionnent seulement la recherche de l'existence."*

[247] Ibid., 351–352: *"La métaphore comme sens figure qui s'ajoute au pretend sens littéral—c'est le sens qu'un terme prend dans un context humain: là où l'objet par le langage est offert à Autrui.… Les objects reçoivent des significations du fait de se placer dans la transcendance d'Autrui: orientation vers Dieu."* See ibid., 267: *"Le pouvoir métaphorique des mots comme 'au-delà', 'transcendant', 'à l'infini', Dieu."*

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et terre à terre à un sens plus nuancé et plus noble, un miraculeux surplus),[248] the excess (*dépassement*) of the trace that is "the essential event of language in-the-face-of-the-Other" (*l'événement essentiel du langage est en-face-de-l'Autre*).[249] Years before, Levinas remarked that metaphor is the "essence of language" that resides in the "impulsion to the extreme in the superlative that is always more superlative than transcendence."[250] All linguistic signification is metaphorical insofar as it "leads upward" (*elle mène vers là-haut*), the "irreducible movement" that transports one beyond to "the infinity of the Other" (*l'infini de l'Autre*), which is the "foundation of human spirituality."[251] Just as one could not hear the voice of God without metaphor, so there would be no metaphor without God (*Sans métaphore on ne peut pas entendre la voix de Dieu.… Il faut retourner la reflexion: sans Dieu il n'y aurait pas de métaphore*). God, on this account, can be designated the "very metaphor of language," the "thought that rises above itself" (*Dieu est la métaphore même du langage—it fait d'une pensée qui se hausse au-dessus d'elle-même*). This is not to say that God is merely a metaphor but rather that there is no movement toward him except through metaphor (*Ce qui ne veut pas dire que Dieu n'est qu'une métaphore. Car il n'y a d'autre métaphore que le mouvement vers Lui*),[252] and thus God can be depicted as the metaphor par excellence[253] or as the metaphor of metaphors.[254] By speaking of the Absolute that is beyond being in

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[248] Emmanuel Levinas, *Oeuvres 2: Parole et silence et autres conferences inédites au Collège philosophique*, edited by Rodolphe Calin, preface and explanatory notes by Rodolphe Calin and Catherine Chalier (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2009), 325.

[249] Ibid., 241–242.

[250] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 229: *"La métaphore, essence du langage, résiderait dans cette poussée à l'extrême dans ce superlatif toujours plus superlatif qu'est la transcendance."*

[251] Ibid., 232–233: *"Parole dit l'être—parole est métaphore.… Toute signification—en tant que signification—est métaphorique, elle mène vers là-haut.… Mener vers là-haut, est un movement irreducible, le fond de la spiritualité humaine—de l'être qui parle.… La signification comme signification est dans cet au-delà. Cet au-delà est-il l'infini de l'Autre."* See ibid., 234: *"La métaphore est un au-delà, la transcendance."*

[252] Ibid., 233.

[253] Ibid., 236–237: *"La métaphore par excellence est Dieu.… Termes métaphoriques par excellence—dont le contenu même est métaphore: Dieu, Absolu, au-delà de l'Être, au-delà."* Compare Levinas, *Oeuvres 2: Parole et silence*, 328: *"Certain termes philosophiques comme transcendance, comme au-dessus de l'être, peut-être Dieu—ce sont des métaphores par excellence."*

[254] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 240: *"La métaphore des métaphores—Dieu."* And Levinas, *Oeuvres 2: Parole et silence*, 346: "*Le métaphore = idée de l'infini = Dieu est*

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this manner, Levinas is affirming both the intractable metaphoricity of theological discourse and its ineludible demetaphorization, the double sense captured in the word *à-Dieu*, going toward God that is at the same time bidding farewell to the world,[255] being transported elsewhere that is nowhere at all. Metaphor can be defined as "the reference to absence," if it is understood that this absence is not "another given" that is either "still to come" or "already past," but an absence that can never be present, the imperceptible meaning that "would not be the consolation for a delusive perception but would only *make perception possible*,"[256] the illeity that is "situated beyond the calculations and reciprocities of economy and of the world," an illeity whose presence is determined by an absence on account of which we can assert that "being has a sense," albeit a sense "which is not a finality."[257] Based on this manner of reckoning, the quintessential metaphor is the idea of infinity, for to think this term is to refuse its very thinkability.[258] In the end, metaphor is the ultimate measure of human thought—indeed, the superhuman element in language (*le surhumain dans le langage*)[259]—and the only way to overcome metaphor is through metaphor, as Levinas remarked, "*La métaphore—le dépassement métaphorique—reste cependant à la mesure de la pensée*."[260] Metaphor signifies the movement in language toward infinity about which there is no language, the response to the other that always exceeds what is said.[261] Levinas alludes to the same paradox years later when he noted that metaphor is the "amplification of thought" (*une amplification de la pensée*), the movement "that persists as movement while no longer being movement" ("*Mouvement de la pensée*" *reste du mouvement tout en n'étant plus mouvement*).[262]

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la métaphore des métaphores et qui apporte le 'transport' nécessaire pour poser 'absolument' les significations."

[255] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 50.

[256] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 36 (emphasis in original).

[257] Ibid., 64. On Levinas's idea of God's transcendence as absent presence or (non)presence, see Welz, *Love's Transcendence*, 293–297.

[258] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 242: "*Penser—mouvement qui a un term. Idée de l'infini: dans le term pensé, refuse du terme. Métaphore*."

[259] Ibid., 235.

[260] Ibid., 331.

[261] Ibid., 241: "*De sorte que dans le langage il y a ce mouvement vers l'infini et il n'existe pas de langage ce mouvement. Et ce mouvement vient l'autre, en tant que le langage est réponse à un autre et dépassement de ce qui est dit. [Cette dernière chose n'est pas sure. Le dépassement de la métaphore ne vient-il pas de la trace?]*".

[262] Levinas, *Oeuvres 2: Parole et silence*, 326.

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Embodied Naked and the Demetaphorization of the Face

By identifying metaphor as the impulse in language that guides one to the transcendent other beyond language, one might be tempted to assume that Levinas is guilty of the position epitomized in the well-known statement of Heidegger: "The metaphorical exists only within metaphysics" (*Das Metaphorische gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik*),[263] and implied as well in the last section of Derrida's "White Mythology," which is entitled *La métaphysique—relève de la métaphore*.[264] A thorough exposition of the role of metaphor in Heidegger and Derrida is a topic that is obviously too vast and complex to treat adequately here.[265] What I would emphasize, however, is that even though Levinas characterized metaphor as a form of transposing or carrying over, the link he forges between the metaphorical and what might be called the metaphysical is not indicative of the representationalism that has informed the metaphysical bias of Western philosophy based on a binary distinction between the literal and the figurative meanings, which corresponds to the distinction between the sensible and the nonsensible realms. [266] For Levinas, the movement

[263] Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, translated by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 48; *Der Satz vom Grund* [GA 10] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), 72. Compare Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 100; *Unterwegs zur Sprache* [GA 12] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 195.

[264] On the two possible meanings implied in this subtitle, see Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated, with additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 258n61.

[265] See the comprehensive analysis of Giuseppe Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2000). Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 163–179, also compares Levinas's view on metaphor with Derrida and Heidegger, but reaches a different conclusion than my own. Llewelyn surmises that Levinas is caught in the predicament that to deny metaphoricity he must think it, and by thinking it, he must also think of being again, and thus he seems "unable to evade the Parmenidean-Heideggerian thesis that being and thinking are one." I concur that Levinas is still trapped in the snare of ontology, but it is not because he denies metaphoricity. On the contrary, it is due to his affirming the metaphorical as the linguistic mode of signification by which one can approach the unapproachable and speak the unspeakable.

[266] On the alleged collusion between metaphor and metaphysics in Heidegger and Derrida, see Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 280–295; Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida*, 83–84, 130–132. For an extensive analysis of the debate between Derrida and Ricoeur on the status of metaphor, see Leonard Lawlor,

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of metaphor is the act of signification by which one has recourse to the Infinite, an "infinity that does not present itself to a transcendental thought, nor even to meaningful activity, but presents itself in the Other; the Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me by his essence qua infinity. That 'something' we call signification arises in being with language because the essence of language is the relation with the Other."[267] Through metaphor one is transported to the "hither side," the beyond essence or otherwise than being, the movement of language that starts "from the trace retained by the said, in which everything shows itself," and through which the "indescribable is described."[268] This trace, which is the face of the Other, is a "trace of itself," a "trace expelled in a trace," the doubling of the trace, which is "the very signifyingness of signification" (*la signifiance même de la signification*) that "does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon" but rather the "non-indifference to another" (*non-indifférence pour l'autre*), "the one-for-the other" (*l'un-pour-l'autre*),[269] an invitation to be exposed to the other, an "exposure of the exposedness," which is exposed in the "expression of exposure", the "saying."[270] Metaphor is the mode of ambiguity by which the presence of the face signifies its absence and the absence of the face its presence, the gesture of saying that marks the breaking point (*rupture*) where the "essence is exceeded by the infinite" but also the place of binding (*nouement*).[271] "The "glow of the trace" is thus distinguished from the "appearing of phenomena," for the "trace is sketched out [*se dessine*] and effaced [*s'efface*] in a face in the equivocation of a saying. In this way it modulates the modality of the transcendent."[272] The transport of the metaphoric facilitates this modulation on the basis of an essential complicity between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown: the Infinite "is revealed without appearing, without *showing* itself as Infinite,"[273] the imagelessness that haunts every image, the face that is concomitantly

Imagination and Change: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 11–50.

[267] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 207; *Totalité et infini*, 181–182.
[268] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 53; *Autrement qu'être*, 69.
[269] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 178; *Autrement qu'être*, 224.
[270] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 94; *Autrement qu'être*, 119–120.
[271] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 12; *Autrement qu'être*, 15.
[272] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 12; *Autrement qu'être*, 15.
[273] Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 197 (emphasis in original).

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the trace of the nonmanifest in the manifest and of the manifest in the nonmanifest.

Hent De Vries has argued that the perspective on transcendence to be elicited from the writings of Adorno and Levinas "is more paradoxical—indeed, is surreptitious—and permanently runs the risk of idolatry and blasphemy. This is not due to a lack of consistency or rigor in their philosophical projects: rather, of the *tertium datur* there can be neither truth or falsity, since this dimension is at once indestructible or irrepressible and undecidable or aporetic. It can only be 'said' through 'unsaying' and cannot be 'unsaid' without entangling it—once again—in the 'said' that the 'unsaying' interrupts, only immediately to betray itself in turn, ad infinitum."[274] While de Vries acknowledges the "echo" or "resonance" of monotheistic religion in Levinas's characterization of the infinitely Other and thus accepts that this "central motif" in Judaism "in part determines the tone and texture of his philosophical thinking," he nonetheless insists that Levinas did not construct, reconstruct, or deconstruct "a religious philosophy in the systematic, let alone dogmatic, theological sense. Therefore, religious tradition cannot weigh decisively in an evaluation of the contribution of his figures of thought to a minimal theology whose modus operandi lies in the diminishing yet still remaining dimension of the almost invisible, the nearly untouchable, the scarcely audible, *in pianissimo*."[275] While I agree that one cannot elicit a systematic or dogmatic theology from Levinas, I do not concur that the impact of his Jewish faith was as limited as de Vries argues. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is precisely this commitment that renders his metaphysics of transcendence problematic and suspect of succumbing to theolatry. I thus respectfully take issue with the conclusion reached by de Vries:

> Levinas's late work consistently explores a modality of transcendence which can dispense with the complementary false affirmatives of a complete negativity of the same (and hence absence of the other) or an unambiguous positivity (and hence presence) of the other. The trace makes plausible the diminishing but still remaining intelligibility of the discourse concerning transcendence in general and God in particular without once again burdening philosophy with a questionable ontothe-

[274] Hent de Vries, *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas*, translated by Geoffrey Hale (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 533–534.

[275] Ibid., 351.

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> ology, the metaphysics of presence or absence to which theism and its analogues, yet likewise atheism with its naturalisms and humanisms, fall prey. A far more complicated relationship between infinity and fulfillment holds among all these historical, traditional and modern, dogmatic and enlightened, doctrines.[276]

I do not accept the surmise of de Vries that Levinas's thought "touches profoundly on that of an open, that is to say, negative dialectical speculation: micrologically encircling a transcendence in immanence or immanence in transcendence that is, at the same time, a transcendence of transcendence and, hence, an immanence thought and experienced *otherwise*."[277] I do not see evidence for the transcendence of transcendence that would lead to the immanent positivity without recourse to the positing of the negative qua negative, that is, the negative that in no way is reduced to the positive, the transcendence that is transcendentally immanent by being immanently transcendent. Only in relation to this surplus can we speak of the creation as a "transcendental condition."[278] It seems to me this move is absolutely necessary to preserve Levinas's insistence that the "encounter in dialogue" is a "thought thinking beyond the world."[279]

The "glory of the Infinite" to be staged in the social domain implies that transcendence, the beyond essence, is concurrently a being-in-the-world (*A la transcendance—à l'au-delà de l'essence qui est aussi être-au-monde*),[280] but the diachronic nature of transcendence nevertheless necessitates that it "is not convertible into immanence."[281] It is on this very point that Levinas breaks with the correlation between thought and the world posited by Husserl and the phenomenological assumption that "appearing" is a "giving itself" to intentional

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[276] Ibid., 533.

[277] Ibid., 480 (emphasis in original). For another attempt to diminish the opposition between transcendence and immanence in Levinas, see Benso, *The Face of Things*, 141. I do concur with Benso that, for Levinas, we would do well to avoid rendering the difference as dichotomous or antinomical.

[278] Levinas, *Oeuvres 1: Carnets*, 236.

[279] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 146.

[280] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 152; *Autrement qu'être*, 194. A similar point, albeit in a different terminological register, was already made in Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 23 (*Totalité et infini*, xi): "This 'beyond' the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. The eschatological, as the 'beyond' of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility" (emphasis in original).

[281] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 140; *Autrement qu'être*, 179.

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consciousness.[282] The "thought awakened to God" is described by Levinas as a thought that "aspires to a *beyond*, to a *deeper than oneself*—aspiring to a transcendence different from the *out-of-oneself* that the intentional consciousness opens and traverses."[283] The thinking he is seeking "is neither assimilation of the Other to the Same nor integration of the Other into the Same, a thinking which does not bring all transcendence back to immanence.... What is needed is a thought which is no longer constructed as a relation of thinking to what is thought about, in the domination of thinking over what is thought about; what is needed is a thought which is not restricted to the rigorous correspondence between noesis and noema and not restricted to the adequation where the visible must be equal to the intentional aim (*la visée*), to which the visible would have to respond in the intuition of truth; what is needed is a thought for which the very metaphor of vision and aim (*visée*) is no longer legitimate."[284]

In taking issue with the implicit solipsism of Husserlian intentionality, Levinas was undoubtedly influenced by the ruminations on transcendence proffered by his close friend and colleague Jean Wahl.[285] According to Wahl, there is a form of transcendence (or, to be more precise,

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[282] Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 139.

[283] Ibid., 100.

[284] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 155.

[285] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35; *Totalité et infini*, 5. The author appropriates the term "transascendence" from Wahl to designate the "metaphysical movement" toward the transcendent, and as he openly acknowledges in n. 2, ad locum, he has "drawn much inspiration from the themes evoked" in *Existence humaine et transcendance*. Wahl is referred to as well in *Totality and Infinity*, 61n6; *Totalité et infini*, 32n1. It is worth recalling that Levinas dedicated this work to Marcelle and Jean Wahl. The friendship between Levinas and Wahl is discussed by Malka, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 149–151, 153–155, 158–160, 191–192. See also Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 8; "Jean Wahl et le sentiment," *Cahiers du Sud* 42 (1955): 453–459, English version in Levinas, *Proper Names*, 110–118, and the paper given by Levinas subsequent to Wahl's death, "Jean Wahl: Sans avoir ni être," in *Jean Wahl et Gabriel Marcel*, edited by Jeanne Hersch (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1976), 13–31, English version in Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, 67–83. Levinas's indebtedness to Wahl's idea of transcendence and the quest for the "theological other" is discussed by Samuel Moyn, "Transcendence, Morality, and History: Emmanuel Levinas and the Discovery of Søren Kierkegaard in France," *Yale French Studies* 104 (2004): 37–46; Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 177–186. Obviously central to Moyn's argument is the impact of and reaction to Kierkegaard in Wahl, Levinas, and other French intellectuals. Levinas's engagement with Kierkegaard has been the subject of other studies as well. Most important for the theme of this chapter is J. Aaron Simmons, "Existential Appropriations: The Influence of Jean Wahl on Levinas's Reading of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard and Levinas*, 41–66. On the theme of transcendence in these two thinkers, see also the essays of Merold Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

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transdescendence as opposed to *transascendence*) that is a movement "directed toward immanence, whereby the transcendence transcends itself (*lorsque la transcendance se transcende elle-même*). Perhaps the greatest transcendence is that which consists of transcending the transcendence, that is to say, of falling back into immanence (*Peut-être la plus grande transcendance est-elle celle qui consiste à transcender la transcendance, c'est-à-dire à retomber dans l'immanence*)." The attainment of the "second immanence" appears "after the destroyed transcendence" (*après la transcendance détruite*), but that transcendence "is never completely destroyed, never completely transcended," resting in the "background of spirit like the idea of a lost paradise," the bereavement for which generates the hope and longing for a presence that constitutes the "value of our attachment to the here-below."[286] Immanence is valorized as something positive only insofar as it points to the absolute, nameless one, the mystery that transcends all existing realities in the world. Utilizing another terminological distinction made by Wahl, we can differentiate between the "transcendent immanence of perception" and the "immanent transcendence of ecstasy." The former is correlated with the silence of positive ontology "in which the mind is nourished by things," and the latter with the silence of negative ontology, the "mystical event," wherein the "mind achieves union with its own highest point, which is at the same time the highest point of the world."[287] In this highest point, objectivity and subjectivity converge in their mutual dissolution, and one is led dialectically to the self-transcending transcendence, the transcendence that transcends and thereby preserves itself in the immanence that is the web of inter-relational entities.[288]

One can easily detect the importance of these reflections on Levinas's ongoing endeavor to communicate as effectively as possible his theory of transcendence. As I have emphasized, it cannot be denied that he sought to affirm a transcendence that is not to be relocated absolutely in the domain of immanence—neither transcendent immanence nor immanent transcendence captures the drift of Levinas's insight. I accept the need to contrast the metaphysical transcendence

[286] Jean Wahl, *Existence humaine et transcendance* (Neuchatel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1944), 38.

[287] Jean Wahl, "Realism, Dialectic, and the Transcendent," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944): 498–500; Wahl, *Existence humaine*, 10–11.

[288] See Keller, "Rumors of Transcendence," 140–141.

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affirmed by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* and the transcendence without metaphysics in *Otherwise than Being*,[289] but the notion of illeity of the latter is analogous to the *invisible but personal God* of the former. Indeed, already in the former work, Levinas wrote about the "beyond being" (*au-delà de l'être*), the "relationship with exteriority," which "consists not in being presented as a theme but in being open to desire [*à se laisser désirer*]; the existence of the separated being which desires exteriority no longer consists in caring for Being. To exist has a meaning in another dimension than that of the perduration of the totality; it can go beyond being."[290] The relation with this exteriority is not realized in the Spinozistic monism, the "universality of thought," but in the pluralism that ensues from the "goodness of being for the Other, in justice."[291] Even so, the desire for the dimension of what is beyond being—the desire that consists of being open to desire, "the metaphysical desire" (*le désir métaphysique*) to which Levinas refers in the very beginning of the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, a "desire for the invisible" (*le désir de l'invisible*), a tending "toward *something else entirely* [*tout autre chose*], toward the *absolutely other* [*l'absolument autre*]"[292]—necessitates the "surpassing of being starting from being" (*le dépassement de l'être à partir de l'être*).[293] That other must persist in its otherness and therefore alterity defies an immanentization that would do away with transcendence. It is from this standpoint, as I noted above,[294] that Levinas deploys language that is tacitly critical of the incarnational foundation of Christian logocentrism and affirmative of the traditional Jewish aniconism.

Whatever his ultimate aspiration, the rhetoric of his texts and his existential decision to affirm ritual observance indicate that he could not avoid characterizing transcendence in personal terms that efface the clear distinction between human and divine and thus threaten the concept of alterity as the transcendent that is truly other. As I have argued elsewhere,[295] the epochal duty before us is not to expand the analogical imagination in envisioning transcendence—in Freudian terms, we must cease idealizing the father in the image of ourselves,

[289] Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Conversion*, 101–106.
[290] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 301; *Totalité et infini*, 278.
[291] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 301–302; *Totalité et infini*, 278.
[292] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33; *Totalité et infini*, 3.
[293] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 302; *Totalité et infini*, 278.
[294] See above at nn. 197–198.
[295] Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream*, 30–32.

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to which we might add that the problem has only been amplified by idealizing the mother in an incontestably noble effort to redress gender imbalance by positing images of the feminine to signify the heterogeneity intended to liberate transcendence from a dominative and homogenous masculinity—but to rise above it, to rid monotheism not only of the psychological tug to personify the impersonal but also of what Corbin called the "pious illusion of negative theology" and the pitfall of "metaphysical idolatry."[296] Quite nobly and admirably, Levinas described monotheism as a "supernatural gift" of seeing that beneath the variety of the different historical traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), one person is absolutely like another person and thus the word of one God is what "obliges us to enter into discourse" in the hopes of forming a "homogeneous humanity." From Levinas's perspective, tolerance issues from the power of monotheism and this is what has made the "economy of solidarity" possible.[297] Lamentably, it is not clear that the current sociopolitical state of the world leaves much hope that this kind of cohesion can be realized on the basis of monotheism, and this in spite of what we today call the global economy.

The exigency of the moment may call for the need to subjugate the monotheistic personification of God and the corresponding egoistic depiction of self, and this would demand a sweeping and uncompromising purification of the idea of the infinite from all predication. Would this not fulfill Levinas's own aspiration for a heterological thought of pure difference, the "thinking of the absolute without this absolute being reached as an end?"[298] Might this not finally prompt the dawning of a humanity without myths, an era in which the three Abrahamic religions could all accept that the monotheist faith in its deepest assonance implies a metaphysical atheism? Only then would our notion of God be liberated from the last remnants of a phenomenological theology such that we may discard all metaphorical language, even the nonmetaphorical metaphoricization of the face as the nonappearing of the infinite other. Perhaps in this undoing we can genuinely

[296] Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 268–269. See Henry Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: Éditions de L'Herne, 2003), 24–27, and the analysis in Christian Jambet, *Le caché et l'apparent* (Paris: L'Herne, 2003), 64–65.

[297] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 178–179.

[298] Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 156.

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welcome the enigma of illeity, the "way of the Ab-solute" that is "foreign to cognition"[299]—the dissolution of the belief in a face that is not itself a mask that justifies the continued use of theistic images to depict transcendence[300]—and thereby open the possibility to the "blessing of multiplicity" referred to by Levinas in the Wyschogrod interview, the conviction that "there are many more relations of love in the world when there is plurality."[301] Within the confines of this difference—to discern that Jew, Christian, and Muslim are the same in virtue of being different—we can find the stirrings of the difficult freedom that is the burden and honor of the "universalist particularism" at the heart of Israel's messianic mission, which may in fact be the persistent resistance to any messianic fulfillment. Here we may recall the aphorism of Kafka, cited already in a Levinasian sense by Blanchot,[302] that the Messiah will come on the day after he has arrived, not the last day but on the very last day.[303] The *very last day*—the day that can never come to pass in the wavering of time, the day that succeeds the last day, the day whose awaiting requires the pure patience of awaiting without something awaited.

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[299] Ibid., 75.

[300] It is of interest to recall the words of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198 (*Totalité et infini*, 172): "The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it.… The permanent openness of the contours of its form in expression imprisons this openness which breaks up form in a caricature. The face at the limit of holiness and caricature is thus still in a sense exposed to powers." And compare the interpretation of this passage in Edith Wyschogrod, "Doing before Hearing: On the Primacy of Touch," in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, edited by François Laruelle (Paris: Collections Surfaces, 1980), 184: "The equivocacy of the Face is evident for its alterity remains founded upon exteriority rather than the converse. Therefore Levinas is forced to describe the Face as hovering between 'sanctity and caricature', as breaking the form that delimits it, as a metaphor for the idea of the infinite which is always too constricting for its content, etc. The Face as form must be presented as a fractured image. As epiphany it establishes the parameters of ethical life and attests the vulnerability of flesh but must remain a mask since the ethical cannot appear; as *imago* it shares the limits of the represented and loses the otherness of interiority." Wyschogrod's observation that, for Levinas, *the face must remain a mask* anticipates my own view.

[301] Wyschogrod, *Crossover Queries*, 284.

[302] Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*, 143.

[303] Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 81. See analysis in Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 268.

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