

## A SURVIVOR'S ETHICS: LEVINAS'S CHALLENGE TO PHILOSOPHY

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If Heidegger's ontology is a modernist philosophy of disenchantment informed by a belligerent desire for authenticity<sup>1</sup> and if Sartre's existentialism is a philosophy of and for those who are caught up in the very struggle of survival,<sup>2</sup> Levinas's ethics can be viewed as a survivor's philosophy. Rather than merely theorizing and denouncing the dialectic of enlightenment and its cataclysmic denouement in the holocaust, Levinas relentlessly and uncompromisingly performs the subversion and displacement of reason and rationality in and through the very fabric of his ethical discourse. No doubt, Levinas's ethics will have emerged as one of the most complex, poignant, and responsible philosophical pronouncements on this century's darkest moments.

In this essay, I trace Levinas's ethics, focusing in particular on his uneasy relation to and problematic place within the "Western" philosophical tradition, on his idiosyncratic ethical functionalization and conceptualization of language, and, finally, on his valorization of poetry as an outstandingly salient manifestation of and testimony to the ethical.<sup>3</sup>

### **Situating Levinas**

Levinas's ethics is neither normative (material) nor formal, nor based on "reason as the faculty of the universal" ("Le dialogue" p. 228). It contrasts with such post-Kantian endeavors as Husserl's scientific foundation of a "formal axiology as an a priori formal discipline of values and value contents"<sup>4</sup> (*Vorlesungen* pp. 3-4) or Scheler's project of "a strictly scientific and positive foundation for philosophical ethics" understood as a systematized, general hierarchy of values.<sup>5</sup> Levinas advances an ethics of singular

responsibility, in which the unique ethical subject—as the condition of its universal epistemological correlate—is dialogically constituted: “Ethics as . . . responsibility toward the other . . . far from dissolving you within generality, singularizes you, posits you as . . . unique . . . , as an I” (“À propos de ‘Kierkegaard vivant’” p. 90).<sup>6</sup>

Levinas’s ethics equally departs from its eudaimonistic, Stoic, and pragmatico-scientific conceptions, which are informed by Aristotle’s emphasis on praxis as the path to happiness.<sup>7</sup> However, Aristotle’s insistence on the principally non-cognitive character of the ethical,<sup>8</sup> which only “occurs” between concrete human beings in concrete situations already points to one of Levinas’s central claims, namely, that ethics transpires in the “concreteness of the encounter” with the uniquely other (“De l’unicité” pp. 200-202).<sup>9</sup> Levinas’s indebtedness to Aristotle is most visible in his adoption *and* displacement of Aristotle’s term for ontology, “first philosophy”<sup>10</sup>:

The intellectual, and even spiritual life, of the West . . . demonstrates its fidelity to the first philosophy of Aristotle, whether one interprets the latter according to the ontology of book G of the *Metaphysics* or according to the theology or onto-theology of book L where the ultimate explanation of intelligibility in terms of the primary causality of God is a reference to a God defined by being qua being. . . . It is in the laying down [of this preoccupation with being], that we find ethics [as] first philosophy” (“Ethics as First Philosophy” pp. 76, 85).<sup>11</sup>

Levinas’s insistence on the non-ontological character of ethics is directed against contemporary ontology and existential phenomenology, that is, in particular, against Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>12</sup> As the following passage indicates, Levinas’s opposition to contemporary ontology is philosophically and politically motivated:

A philosophy of power, ontology, as first philosophy, which does not question the Same, is a philosophy of injustice. Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relation to the other human being [*Autruï*] to the relation to being in general . . . persists in the obedience to the anonymous and leads, fatally, to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny (*Totalité* p. 38).<sup>13</sup>

Levinas’s subversion of existential ontology is most poignantly articulated in such aphorisms as: “responsibility precedes Essence” (*Autrement* p. 180) and “signification [that is, ethics] precedes essence” (p. 29).<sup>14</sup> These parodic reformulations of Heidegger’s

stipulation of the “precedence of existence over essence”<sup>15</sup> and its restatement by Sartre (“the primacy of existence over essence”),<sup>16</sup> culminate in the programmatic claim that “ethics is before ontology” (“La proximité de l’autre” p. 109), which reiterates with regard to Heidegger and Sartre what has already been advanced with regard to Aristotle and the “intellectual, and . . . spiritual life, of the West” in general.

Aside from its overall anti-ontological purport, Levinas’s critique is specifically geared toward Sartre’s concept of “engagement” as an ordinary mode of existence:

It is in a responsibility which does not justify itself by any prior engagement—in the responsibility for the other—in an ethical situation—that the meta-ontological and meta-logical structure of [ethics] . . . emerges, . . . of a responsibility anterior to engagement . . . (*Autrement* pp. 162-163).<sup>17</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Levinas crowns his polemic against Sartre by undermining the latter’s proverbial dictum that “we are condemned to freedom.”<sup>18</sup> “This [ethical] mode of responding without anterior engagement . . . is . . . anterior to liberty” (*Autrement* p.184).<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Levinas’s ethics must be distinguished from Jürgen Habermas’s and Karl-Otto Apel’s “discourse ethics” as well as from Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis. Although Levinas frequently designates the dialogic dynamics of ethics as “discours,”<sup>20</sup> the term implies neither Habermas’s and Apel’s formal concept of discourse as a practical, intersubjective, consensus-oriented “procedure [*Verfahren*]” based on universalizability and informed by an universal or transcendental pragmatics<sup>21</sup> nor the complex semantic cluster of Foucault’s “discours.”<sup>22</sup>

### **The Meanings of “Ethics” in the Writings of Levinas**

What does “ethics” mean in Levinas’s writings?

Any critical response to this question must not fail to acknowledge *and* suspend Jacques Derrida’s (performatively contradictory)<sup>23</sup> injunction that “Levinas’s writing . . . forbids *this* [that is, first and foremost, Derrida’s own] prosaic disincarnation into the conceptual schema, which is the first violence of all commentary.”<sup>24</sup> After all, the bare fact of Derrida’s own

philosophical commentary demonstrates that the imputed interdiction is ineffective. In a later text in response to Levinas, Derrida suggests that in order to engage Levinas's text at all "[t]here would have to be a writing that performs . . . a performative heretofore never described . . ." <sup>25</sup> While Derrida obviously attempts to enact such a performance, he can neither dispense with Levinas's conceptuality nor with his own conceptual grasp of Levinas's discourse, which underlies and conditions the performance. The commentator's dependence and reliance on "the conceptual schema" is (at least partially) due to the fact that Levinas's writing is avowedly philosophical (*Autrement* p. 262) and as such— notwithstanding its "stylistic" idiosyncrasies <sup>26</sup>—characterized by—as Jean Greisch underscores in opposition to Derrida—"specifically philosophical [modes of] problematization or thematization." <sup>27</sup> Levinas himself explicitly states that *Totalité et infini* "opens a philosophical discourse" (*Totalité* i); he also characterizes his writings in such scientifico-philosophical terms as "analyses" (ii, p. 41) and "investigation [recherche]" (iii), and admits that his philosophical writings rely on a phenomenological methodology. <sup>28</sup> Indeed, Levinas's repetitive, reiterative, and multi-perspectival approach to the ethical methodically enacts Husserl's "eidetic reduction" as a means of grasping the essential structure of a phenomenon by intuiting its diverse appearances or aspects ("Abschattungen"). <sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Levinas's discourse is overtly apophantic and posits the universal primacy of ethics <sup>30</sup>; both of these aspects (apophansis and universality) have been noted as characteristic of scientifico-philosophical "speech genres." <sup>31</sup>

What then, to resume the question, does "ethics" mean in Levinas's writings? Above all, it is important to note its contextual polysemy. At least three of its multiple meanings are mobilized by Levinas: "ethics" as a traditional philosophical discipline and "ethics" as his own philosophical discourse on ethics as (and this is its third meaning) a fundamental relation to the other. <sup>32</sup>

Levinas explicitly situates his discourse on ethics *within* the philosophical tradition of the "West" (*Autrement* pp. 262-263). <sup>33</sup> Furthermore, his specific field of inquiry, that is, ethics, places *his* philosophical texts within the Socratic discipline which has come to be known as ethics. <sup>34</sup> This does not prevent Levinas from working against and beyond ethics as a traditional philosophical discipline (which, however, he thus *ex negativo* only corroborates as the interpretative backdrop for his own inquiry): while his "philosophy

of dialogue” (“La proximité de l’autre” p. 108) aims at “a concept of ethics . . . which departs from tradition” (“Le dialogue” p 228),<sup>35</sup> it needs its philosophical other as a constitutive horizon. As Jill Robbins<sup>36</sup> points out, “in order to pose [the question of the ethical, Levinas] must (re)read and repeat a philosophical tradition.”<sup>37</sup>

The historico-semantic enmeshment of the first two senses of “ethics”—qua *philosophical discourse* on ethics Levinas’s texts have always already placed themselves within an historically constituted discipline and, consequently, within a tradition—raises the question of the possibility of breaking with tradition within traditional discourse at all, since in the very attempt at its dislocation or, to use Levinas’s term, “interruption,” philosophical tradition is being reaffirmed and continued within the ‘sub-narrative’ of its presumed dislocation. Levinas notes:

Any contestation or interruption of the power [of the tradition of philosophical discourse] is immediately related and inverted by [philosophical] discourse. It recommences as soon as it is interrupted. . . . The philosophical discourse of the Occident . . . reaffirms itself as coherent and unitary. By relating the interruption of [philosophical] discourse . . . I retie its thread. [Philosophical] discourse is capable of saying all its ruptures, of consuming them as [their] silent origin or eschatology. Even if philosophical discourse breaks . . . it continues to speak, to speak about/from within that discourse within which it had been speaking just now and to which it reverts in order to say its provisional retreat (*Autrement* p. 262).<sup>38</sup>

The inescapability of philosophical tradition has at least one crucial corollary for an “ethically adequate” assessment of Levinas’s own philosophical discourse: as philosophical discourse it perforce remains the “work of discursive reason” in the “order of philosophical demonstration . . . and thematization.”<sup>39</sup> It is precisely this insight, which lies at the root of Levinas’s careful distinction between philosophical and poetic language and their respective significance with regard to ethics (in the third sense).<sup>40</sup> Philosophical discourse, even in its specifically Levinasian variant, may very well operate against a philosophical order and (attempt to) displace its constitutive generic and semantic frameworks; it nevertheless remains caught within the latter—in Levinas’s case admittedly so: ethics (as the philosophical discourse on ethics) assumes the role of first *philosophy*. For its “interruption” it depends on (an)other discourse: poetry.<sup>41</sup>

The plausibility of Levinas's insistence on the philosophical primacy of ethics over ontology is based on the precedence of my relation to the other over my Being, understood as intentional and intelligible existence.<sup>42</sup> It is in this sense only that, according to Levinas, ethics (in the third sense) interrupts and precedes essence/Being (*Autrement* p. 75-76): insofar as Being "transpires" as the human being's intentional correlate, that is, in Heidegger's terms, as the always already comprehended ground of Dasein's "care [Sorge],"<sup>43</sup> and as such figures as the "object" of ontology, it is, according to Levinas, always already preceded and anticipated by the accusative "interpellation" (*Totalité* p. 65) of me by the other, that is, by ethics (in the third sense).<sup>44</sup> Levinas subverts Heideggerian ontology, which "subordinates the relation to the Other [Autre] to the relation with . . . Being"<sup>45</sup> in a double sense: by situating ontology as the (human) *logos* on Being within ethics (in the first and second senses) and by grounding existence as Dasein's (intentional) relation to Being in the meta-ontological structure of ethics in the third sense (*Autrement* p. 162).<sup>46</sup>

#### "L'Éthique en L'Humain"<sup>47</sup>

By positing the precedence of ethics over ontology as an explicit reversal of Heidegger's (and Sartre's) existentialism, Levinas underscores the interhuman significance of ethics as "an irreducible structure on which depend all other structures" (*Totalité* p. 77), including the "structure of the Being of Dasein,"<sup>48</sup> that is, existence. Ethics,<sup>49</sup> Levinas stresses, is an interhuman dynamics transpiring in the "concreteness of the encounter" ("De L'unicité" p. 200) with the other human being, in which I bear witness ("témoignage") to and for the other (*Autrement* 223-239)<sup>50</sup>:

I analyze the interhuman relation as if, in the proximity of the other . . . the other . . . were *ordering* me to serve him ... (*Éthique* p. 94). [H]e calls on my response (*Totalité* 271). [H]e calls on my responsibility (p.229). The establishment of this primacy of ethics [primat de l'éthique], that is, of the relation between one human being and another human being . . . is one of [my] goals (p. 77).

As this passage indicates, ethics is a fundamentally asymmetrical and non-reciprocal dynamics: in contrast to Buber's formal concept of dialogic "reciprocity" (p. 149) and in line with Husserl's

asymmetrical conception of pre-linguistic communication based on indication, ethics transpires asymmetrically and non-reciprocally—my obligation to the other is “gratuitous [gratuit],” a “radical generosity.”<sup>51</sup>

Levinas’s ethical subversion of ontology must not be mistaken for any kind of ‘mystical’ or quasi-“mystical” endeavor: insofar as Levinas contends that ontology, in Heidegger’s double sense as the theoretical interrogation of Being and the human being’s ontological constitution,<sup>52</sup> is posterior to the human being’s relation to the other human being, ethics, conceived as an interhuman relation of response-ability,<sup>53</sup> necessarily precedes ontology. In other words, my comprehension of my own Being and, consequently, my theoretical interrogation of my own existence always already occur against the backdrop of and within my relation to the other.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to Heidegger’s Dasein, which is originally responsible to and for itself,<sup>55</sup> that is, liable to assume an authentic existence, Levinas posits the primacy of my ethical response-ability to and for the other. This is precisely what Levinas means when he defines ethics as (inter)human: the “human begins when the vitality [of my existence], innocent in appearance but potentially murderous, is curbed [by and for the other]” (“De la lecture juive des Ecritures” p. 131).

The primacy of ethics, however, is (at least) doubly motivated: the systematic subversion of ontology is complemented by Levinas’s philosophical reappropriation of another “tradition,” which is “at least as old” as the philosophical tradition of the “West” but “does not reduce every other to the same” (“La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini” p.47). Levinas has the biblical, Judaic tradition in mind: “The interhuman relationship . . . can . . . be construed as part of [existence]. But it can also be considered from another perspective—the ethical or biblical perspective that transcends the . . . language of intelligibility . . .” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 20).<sup>56</sup>

What does Levinas mean by the formulaic “reduction of the other to the same?” The combination of the terms “other [autre]” and “same [même]” in Levinas’s texts *philosophically formalizes* the intuited concrete ethical dynamics between “the other human being [autrui]” and “me [moi].”<sup>57</sup> The reductive relationship between other and same, or “totality,” as Levinas also calls it by way of a polemic response to Hegel,<sup>58</sup> refers to any structure or dynamics in which one of the constituents is subjected to inclusion, subsumption, or sublation, and is thereby deprived of its singularity or unicity.<sup>59</sup>

From within this “Greek” tradition of the primacy of the “same” in its various manifestations,<sup>60</sup> Levinas reverts to the biblical, Judaic “perspective that transcends the Greek language of intelligibility” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 20) and emphasizes heteronomy and heterology (p. 27).<sup>61</sup> Levinas’s ethical revaluation of Judaism is socio-politically motivated: only if I do not reduce the other, if I realize that “my freedom is anteceded by an obligation to the other” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 27) can a “fascist or totalitarian” politics be prevented (p. 30). In view of the socio-political disaster of National Socialism, which (for both Levinas and Celan) exacerbates the “philosophy of the same” in all its facets by literally converting the philosophical “reduction of the other to the same” into the factual annihilation of the other *tout court*, that is, into the “holocaust of millions of victims under Hitler” (“La poésie et l’impossible” p. 186), Levinas relentlessly expounds the rights of the other: only if my subjectivity is always already dependent upon the other, if my subjectivity is constituted in response to the other’s demand, if *my* autonomy is heteronomous, can socio-political “reduction,” that is, domination and, ultimately, annihilation be counteracted (pp. 26-27); only if the other “orders me to serve” will I question my “autonomy” (p. 27) and “feed [him]” (p. 28), will I let the other be. “If the moral-political order,” Levinas summarizes, “totally relinquishes its ethical foundation, it must accept all forms of society, including the fascist or totalitarian, for it can no longer evaluate or discriminate between them. . . . This is why ethical philosophy must remain the first philosophy” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 30).<sup>62</sup>

Levinas’s concept of ethical substitution<sup>63</sup> must thematically be interpreted against this socio-political backdrop. What does Levinas mean by “substitution?” Through the other’s interpellation I become response-able; the other forces me to assume responsibility for “the other’s misery and failure and even the responsibility which the other may have for me” (*Autrement* p. 185). My response-ability and, consequently, my factual responsibility to and for the other are always greater than the other’s response-ability and responsibility for me: “[B]eing oneself . . . always means to be more response-able [than the other(s)], to be responsible for the responsibility of the other” (pp.185-186). Levinas calls this insurmountable surplus of response-ability “substitution.” Ethically, I substitute myself for, that is, I am always more response-able than, the other(s), while remaining infinitely separated from the other(s).<sup>64</sup> (Philosophically,



“substitution” is rooted in Levinas’s relentless polemic against Heidegger. “Substitution,” in its ethical use, literally translates and displaces Heidegger’s concept of “Vertretbarkeit” as one of the characteristics of Dasein’s “Everydayness [Alltäglichkeit]”<sup>65</sup> “Dasein’s substitution by another belongs to the possibilities of Being-with. In Everydayness . . . substitution is not only possible in general, but it constitutes Being-with.”<sup>66</sup> However, Heidegger disavows the possibility of substitution with regard to existence, which singularizes each person.<sup>67</sup> Levinas, conversely, locates the ethical principium individuationis precisely in my ethical substitution for the other.)

In Genesis, Levinas finds the paradigmatic ethical foundation for a viable socio-politics (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 30). Without “theologizing” the philosophical description of ethics, Levinas mobilizes the ethical and socio-political potential of biblical discourse.<sup>68</sup> The concept of creation implies the subject’s dependence on the other for the gift of Being and, simultaneously, the irreducible separation between creator and creature. For Levinas, the biblical accounts of human creation (Gen. 1: 27, 2: 7) present the “blueprint” for a factually plausible subversion of any (philosophical) attempt to perceive the relation to the other as ontologically secondary:

The wonder of creation does not solely consist in being a creation *ex nihilo* . . . but in the creation of a being capable of . . . learning that he or she is created and of questioning him- or herself. The miracle of creation consists in creating a moral being. . . . We thus radically oppose Heidegger, who subordinates the relation with the Other to ontology . . . (*Totalité* p. 88-89).<sup>69</sup>

Before existence as comprehension of Being, Levinas suggests, is the bare fact of being created, that is, of being always already related to and dependent on the other(s).<sup>70</sup> Transposing the paradigmatic structure of biblical creation onto the interhuman plain, Levinas underscores the primacy of filiation (and parenthood) as the paradigmatic relation to the other(s)<sup>71</sup>: birth (conception) precedes existence (in Heidegger’s and Sartre’s senses), the gift of life/Being precedes the condemnation to freedom. The human being is always already ethical, insofar as he or she is related, obligated, and thus response-able to and for (an)other human being(s). Levinas is factually justified in writing that the “ethical relation does not graft itself onto an antecedent relation. . . . It is foundation and not

superstructure” (“La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini” p. 249). Parenthood and filiation, furthermore, enact *the* originary form of ethical substitution:

The father does not simply cause the son. *To be* one’s son means to be in one’s son, substantially, without, however, being identical with him .... The son assumes the father’s unicity while remaining exterior to him (*Totalité* 311).

By foregrounding filiation, the originary relation to the other, or, what he calls, by way of a neologism, “créaturalité [creaturiality]” (*Autrement* p. 147),<sup>72</sup> Levinas subtly emphasizes the literal inhumanity of Heidegger’s concept of “Geworfenheit [thrownness],” thereby, subtextually, continuing his critique of ontology on socio-political grounds<sup>73</sup>: humans are (ethically) created, born-humans are not “thrown” [geworfen]. It is also important to note that, in light of Genesis 2: 7, Levinas depicts ethics as “deep breathing” (*Autrement* p. 277), as “my inspiration by the other” (*ibid.*).<sup>74</sup>

Levinas’s concept of “créaturalité” can, furthermore, be interpreted as a dislocation of Rudolf Otto’s restriction of “creatureness” to the relation to the “holy,” or “god.” While Otto conceives the human being as a “creature” in the face of the “holy,” or “numinous,” which is “beyond all creatures,”<sup>75</sup> Levinas contends that “ethics [does not] contain any trace of the ‘numinous’” (*Totalité* p. 213). That Levinas does in fact refer to Otto is corroborated—aside from the quotational use of “‘numinous’”—by his observation that “[t]he ethical relation defines itself in opposition to the relation to the holy” (*Totalité* pp. 77-78). Levinas’s most significant polemical response to Otto, however, consists in the appropriation and simultaneous displacement of Otto’s influential concept of “das ganz Andere [the wholly/absolutely Other]” (p. 30), “the absolutely other [l’absolument autre].”<sup>76</sup> In contrast to Otto, who introduced “das ganz Andere” to designate an aspect of the experience of the numinous, thus automatically emptying it of the ethical in favor of the “religiously mysterious [Das religiös Mysteriöse]” (pp. 6, 27), Levinas reinvests the “wholly other” with and reinscribes it within the ethical by situating it on the interhuman plain in reference to the other human being: “The absolute Other is the other human being [L’absolument Autre, c’est Autrui]” (*Totalité* p. 28).<sup>77</sup>

### **Ethics as Language**

Levinas conceives my relation to the other as a discursive relation anterior to the systematic mode of signification:

[T]he *relation* between the Same and the Other [Autre] . . . is language. Language, in fact, accomplishes a relation in such a way that . . . the Other [Autre], notwithstanding the relation with the Same, remains transcendent with regard to the Same. The relation between the Same and the Other [Autre] . . . originally transpires as discourse (*Totalité* pp. 28-29). It is before the negative or affirmative proposition, it inaugurates language [as system], in which neither the “no” nor the “yes” is the first word (p. 32).<sup>78</sup>

This “[o]riginal language . . . of the unheard [of], . . . of the non-said” (iii) is a “movement of transcendence” (p. 29) toward the other human being, which traces “a profound distance . . . irreducible to the . . . synthesizing activity of understanding” (*ibid.*):

Discourse . . . maintains the distance between me [moi] and the Other [Autrui], the radical separation which hinders the reconstitution of totality . . . (pp. 28-29). An interrogation of the Same . . . is brought about by the Other [Autre]. This interrogation of my spontaneity by . . . the Other [Autrui] is called ethics. . . . [T]ranscendence, the reception of the Other [l’Autre] by the Same, of the Other [Autrui] by Me concretely transpires as the interrogation of the Same by the Other [Autre], that is, as ethics (p. 33).

Aside from its thematic relevance, this passage exemplarily demonstrates Levinas’s alternating use of formulaic and phenomenologically descriptive discourse: the formulaic “reception of the Other [Autre] by the Same” concretely occurs as the reception “of the Other [Autrui] by Me,” which is immediately reformalized as “the interrogation of the Same by the Other [Autre].” Levinas continues:

The relation with the other, which transpires as language, is essentially interpellation, the vocative (p. 65). Language—the relation with the Other [Autrui] . . . is . . . transcendence (p. 66). Language, far from depending on universality and generality, makes them possible. Language involves interlocutors, a plurality. Their [originary] commerce does not consist in mutual representation, nor is it a participation in universality, in the common domain of language [as a system]. Their [originary] commerce . . . is ethics. . . . Language implies transcendence, radical separation, the interlocutors’ mutual strangeness (p. 70).

Insofar as ethical dialogue conditions the realm of the general and universal *tout court*, it necessarily also conditions language as a system and its manifestations in human speech.<sup>79</sup>

In order to account for the specific “mode in which the Other [Autre]” addresses me “surpassing *my idea of the Other [Autre]*” Levinas introduces one of his ethical master concepts, the “visage”:

The visage . . . is expression. . . . The visage speaks. The manifestation of the visage is already discourse. The one who manifests himself continuously undoes the form which he presents. This way of undoing the form adequate to the Same in order to present oneself as Other [Autre] is to signify, to have a sense, or direction. To present oneself as signifying/as a signifier is to speak. . . . Discourse . . . is . . . an original relation with [the other]. It is the production of sense (p. 61). The exceptionality of this mode of sign[ifying] consists in ordering me toward the visage of the other [autre] . . . in response-ability—in a response responding to a non thematizable provocation . . . prior to all understanding, bound prior to all freedom, prior to consciousness . . . (*Autrement* p. 26). The visage, expression par excellence, formulates the first word: the signifier emerging at the tip of his sign . . . (*Totalité* p. 193).

The language of the visage is an “assignation which identifies me as the unique” (*Autrement* p. 83) infinitely response-able human being: “The other human being’s visage signifies a response-ability to me which is irrecusable and precedes my free consent, any pact or contract” (*Autrement* p. 141). The other’s visage solicits a response (*Totalité* p. 249). “Visage” does not designate the human face “in the narrow sense” (“L’Autre, Utopie et Justice” p. 244). “Visage” is “the expressive in [the other] (and the entire human body is . . . visage in this sense) (*Éthique* p. 94).<sup>80</sup> In light of the concept of visage as the other’s mode of interpellation, Levinas defines ethics as a “‘vision’ without image, devoid of the objectifying synoptic and totalizing virtues of vision, . . . intentionality of a completely different kind” (*Totalité* p. 8).

While in *Totalité* Levinas describes ethics as a pre-systematic “*language before words, original language*” (*Totalité* iii) in general, and concentrates on the other’s mode of ethical signification, in *Autrement* he devotes particular attention to the specific mode of signification of my response to the other’s visage. It is to this appeal or “call of the other as visage” (“L’Autre, Utopie et Justice” p. 239) that I respond in what Levinas calls “Saying [Dire]”<sup>81</sup> before using any language whatsoever. In Saying I do not say anything, I signify

my response-ability in response to the other's assignation, in a "passivity more passive than any passivity" (*Autrement* p. 170) "despite its apparent activity" (p. 239).<sup>82</sup>

Whereas a language of the non-said, a "communication . . . as the condition of all communication" (p. 82) can be explicated in terms of Husserlian semiotics,<sup>83</sup> it is not philosophically obvious why Levinas conceptualizes pre-linguistic dialogue<sup>84</sup> between singularities in such ethical terms as response-ability, absolute asymmetry, and responsiveness "preceding all questions . . . to the other's proximity" (p. 47). Here again, recourse to the Judaic tradition illuminates Levinas's thought.

Continuing his philosophical reappropriation of the Judaic tradition, Levinas again turns to the *Thora* for the elaboration of his idiosyncratically "visual" conception of ethical language, which, as I illustrate below, is philosophically grounded in Husserlian semiotics:

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see [ere'e] this great sight [mare'e], why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I [hineni] (Exodus 3: 2-4).<sup>85</sup>

Since, as Dante remarks, "God [cannot] have used what we call speech."<sup>86</sup> Moses responds to a non-linguistic call, which addresses him singularly by his proper name, and, thereby, constitutes him as an unique *ethical subject* consigned to a non-transferable socio-political responsibility.<sup>87</sup> The "Here *am* I" [hineni] in response to the call of the absolutely other, the "paradigmatic response of responsibility,"<sup>88</sup> precedes the self-empowerment of the subject in speculative, transcendental, or existential terms. I am I thanks to my relation with and interpellation by the other. The purely grammatical or apophantic function of the copula<sup>89</sup> uncovers its ethical foundation in the interpellation by the other. Furthermore, Moses's exteriorized response, a response already clothed in and thus translated into a communicative language in the linguistico-systematic sense succeeds a non-linguistic response, a "vision"—mark the emphasis on vision in the quoted passage—which, in line with the Judaic proscription of images (Exodus 20: 4), lacks the image of the (divine) interlocutor and is thus a "vision' without image."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the ethical

relation to the other human being transpires “beyond the image that I have of the other human being” (*Totalité* p. 77). It is this non- or pre-linguistic, hence pre-systematic communication with the other which Levinas calls discourse, or language, in the ethical sense.

Dislocating Heidegger’s analyses of authentic and inauthentic existence and his concept of internal, monologic speech as existentially foundational,<sup>91</sup> Levinas stresses that I must be “vigilant [to the] call of the other” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 29). The call of the other, my exposition to the other’s discourse in the vocative case defines me “as a subjectivity, as a singular person, [whose] inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other . . . makes me an ‘I.’ So that I become [an] ‘I’ . . .” (pp. 26-27).<sup>92</sup> Before being able to obey to the “call of [my] conscience” (Heidegger) I must have already been ethically constituted as an “I” by the “call of the other,” which awakens my unique “ethical conscience” (*Totalité* p. 293) in a call for response-ability—in analogy with Abraham’s and Moses’s interpellation by “god.” My ethical obligation to the other, my ethical constitution as a response-able subject in response to the other implies, as I mentioned earlier, a fundamental asymmetry between me and the other, an asymmetry grounded in the paradigmatic asymmetry between creator and creature. In ethics response-abilities are not exchanged: I am always already more response-able to and for the other than the other to and for me.<sup>93</sup>

While the discursivization of ethics conceptually reverses ontology against the backdrop of the biblical paradigm, the “ethicization” of language is based on the observation that speech as parole is always already transcended by the interhuman as ethical.<sup>94</sup> “Transcendence,” however, must not be equated with (the movement toward) the “beyond” or “otherworldly.”<sup>95</sup> Such an understanding of “transcendence” is ruled out by Levinas’s strict distinction between ethics and the realm of the numinous. Even in those instances, in which Levinas describes ethical transcendence as a transcendence toward “god,” it happens between human beings. Since the notion of transcendence is crucial for the ethical stipulation that Saying underlies and conditions the Said, Levinas’s complex notion of “god” as a supreme mode of transcendence must be elucidated.

Levinas’s concept of the “God of ethics” radically differs from the “God of traditional ontology,” understood as “ontological presence” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 31).<sup>96</sup> Levinas

conceives of “god” as the ethical dynamics of response-ability itself (“De la lecture juive des Ecritures” p. 133) and defines “god” as “the civilizing force [la force civilisatrice]” (“Une religion d’adultes” p. 25), whereby “civilizing” idiosyncratically designates the suspension of the other’s reduction to the same and my vigilance to the other’s call to response-ability (“De la lecture juive des Ecritures” p. 133). “God” does not “exist,” “god” *passes* as my infinite ethical relation to the infinitely other human being (p. 133): “The infinite is the radically, the absolutely other human being” (“La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini” p. 247). “Infinity,” the ontologically grounded specification of a presumably *summum ens*,<sup>97</sup> is converted into the other’s infinite otherness with respect to myself and into the concomitant infinity of my response-ability to and for the other: “The positivity of Infinity is the conversion into response-ability” (*Autrement* p. 27).<sup>98</sup> The “God of ethics” designates the dynamics of ethics *tout court*; “god” is the philosophical *chiffre* for my irreducible relation to and infinite response-ability to and for the infinitely other. The conversion of ontological infinity into ethical infinity disseminates the semantics of “infinity.” “Infinity” equally designates: my infinite response-ability to and for the other<sup>99</sup>; my infinite, that is, irreducible separation from the other; the other’s infinite separation from me, that is, absolute otherness<sup>100</sup>; the fact that my idea (thought) of the other is infinitely surpassed by the other, which implies the impossibility of the other’s (ethical) thematization or reduction by me; the fact that the other is an infinite “Stranger” notwithstanding the actual proximity between us<sup>101</sup>; and, finally, the unique Other [Autrui] him- or herself.<sup>102</sup>

Consequently, Levinas’s distinction between ethics and religion is informed by oscillating perspectives on the interhuman dynamics rather than by an ontological dichotomy between two ontological realms of intelligibility: while “ethics”—the concrete “interrogation of my spontaneity by . . . the Other human being” (*Totalité* p. 33)—captures the actual “dynamics” of response-ability, etc., “religion”—defined by Levinas as “the tie that establishes itself between the Same and the Other without forming a totality” (*Totalité* p. 30)—formally designates the infinity of ethical transcendence.<sup>103</sup> Levinas calls this the “double structure of infinity” (*Totalité* p. 232), which implies that the “relation with the infinite” (pp. 7, 232) is both ethical and religious and transpires as the religious and vice versa.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, Levinas is justified in depicting “god” as a “happening” or “occurrence”: “[Dieu] *se passe* [god happens]”

(“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 31).<sup>105</sup> Analogically, Levinas implies a double notion of transcendence: the ethical transcendence toward the other human being and the transcendence of the formal structure of ethics with regard to the concretely ethical.<sup>106</sup>

If religion, the formal structure of ethics, that is, ethically speaking, a “post-facto” formal extrapolation, retroactively informs and motivates that which it is grounded in, then ethics must proleptically always already transpire within the relation to the infinite. The infinite will have always already traced ethics.<sup>107</sup> Ethics, the enactment of religion, although logically posterior, is “factually” anterior to its own formalization. “Ethics,” Levinas stresses, “is not the simple corollary of the religious; it is, in itself, the element in which religious transcendence receives its original sense” (“De la lecture juive des Ecritures” p.133).<sup>108</sup> This metalepsis echoes Levinas’s equally metaleptic dislocation of the primacy of ontology.<sup>109</sup> Insofar as ethics, the interhuman relation par excellence will have always already been traced by the infinite, Levinas is justified in saying that the other’s visage appears “in the trace” of the infinite (“La trace de l’autre” p. 202). The infinite will have always already informed my interpellation by the other, who calls on me from within its trace, that is, from within the trace of the formal structure of ethics. This fundamentally temporal structure of ethics and, by extension, of the dialogic constitution of subjectivity, radically contrasts with Augustine’s “monologic” conception of time as originating *within* rather than *between* human beings, which informs Husserl’s and Heidegger’s concepts of temporality.<sup>110</sup> Time, considered from within the ethical attitude, originates as my relation to the other.<sup>111</sup> Levinas asks:

How could time possibly emerge in a single subject? . . . . The absolute alterity of the other instant . . . cannot be found in the subject . . . . This alterity comes to me from the other . . . . Is not sociality . . . time itself? [T]ime is constituted by my relation with the other human being . . . , that is, [within] dialogue . . . (*De l’existence* pp. 159-160). [T]he relation with the Other . . . opens time . . . (*Totalité* p. 249). The response-ability for the other human being, responding . . . for the other human being . . . is time (“Diachronie et représentation” p. 180).

My ethical relation to the other always already involves diachrony, my “passage to the time of the Other” (“La trace de l’autre” p. 192), or, to speak with Celan, to “that which is most his [or her],



the Other's, own: his [or her] time" (III: p. 199). Levinas's emphasis on diachrony must be understood along the lines of his overall opposition to totality, to the reduction of the other to the same, which would inevitably happen in the synchronic conceptualization, that is, identification of my relation to the other in terms of reciprocity by a third party's thetic consciousness: "Diachrony is . . . the non-totalizable, and, in this precise sense, the Infinite [La diachronie, c'est . . . le non-totalisable et, en ce sens précis, Infini]" (*Autrement* p. 26).<sup>112</sup> Aside from being necessarily diachronic—by virtue of being (proleptically) informed by the infinite—, ethics is, of course, always already diachronic by virtue of its discursivity.

### Ethics and Poetry

Among Levinas's many pronouncements on poetry and art in general,<sup>113</sup> his essay on Celan stands out as a sustained attempt to capture the relation between poetry and the ethical. Although disguised as a commentary,<sup>114</sup> on three poetologically central texts by Celan—a letter to Hans Bender (May 18, 1960),<sup>115</sup> Celan's Büchner Prize Speech, "Der Meridian,"<sup>116</sup> and "Gespräch im Gebirg (Conversation in the Mountains)"<sup>117</sup>—Paul Celan: De l'être à l'autre [Paul Celan: From being to the other]" (1972) is an eloquent testimony to Levinas's own understanding of the ethical significance of poetry (and the poetic significance of ethics), as it constitutes itself in the dialogue with Celan's texts.<sup>118</sup> This essay not only problematizes and displaces Levinas's earlier negative view that the "disinterestedness" to which poetry—as one among the arts—invites is not one "of contemplation but of irresponsibility" ("La réalité et son ombre" [1948] p. 787)<sup>119</sup>; more importantly, it testifies to the extent to which ethics and poetry inform each other.

Although Levinas had already suggested a rapprochement between ethics and poetry in "Langage et proximité" (1967), it is in "Paul Celan" that he—presumably reporting Celan's view<sup>120</sup>—explicitly qualifies poetry in such ethical terms as "gratuitous [gratuite]" (p. 55), "signification older than ontology and the thought of being" (*ibid.*), and "saying without said" (p. 52).<sup>121</sup> Poetry is the very condition of signification (p. 56).<sup>122</sup> Like ethics, the poem—defined as "the fact of speaking to the other" (p. 53)—precedes "all thematization" (*ibid.*) and "makes language possible"

(“La poésie et l’impossible” p. 188). Poetry “situates itself precisely on the pre-syntactical and pre-logical level” (“Paul Celan” p. 50). It is the “language of proximity . . . , the first of languages, response preceding the question” (*ibid.*).<sup>123</sup> As an “unheard of modality of *otherwise than being*” (p. 55),<sup>124</sup> poetry, which Levinas—like Celan—distinguishes from art, ruptures the “immanence to which [any systematic] language is condemned” (*Sur Maurice Blanchot* p. 79n) and enacts my transcendence toward the other (“Paul Celan” p. 52-53).<sup>125</sup> In contrast to art, which subsumes poetry as *active poiein* and which, according to Levinas, is the ultimate exposition of Being in that it exhibits itself as *being art*,<sup>126</sup> poetry—understood in terms of Celan’s “Dichtung”—does not “do” or “produce” anything; rather, it is a “[s]ign given to the other” (p. 54) “by way of a poem” (p. 57), in which I “dedicat[e] [myself] to the other [le moi se dédie à l’autre]” (p. 54).<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, the verb “to dedicate [dédier]”—which Levinas borrows from André du Bouchet’s very liberal translation of Celan’s line, “Wer es schreibt [i.e. das Gedicht], bleibt ihm mitgegeben [The one who writes it [i.e., the poem] remains given to it]”<sup>128</sup> as “*Qui le trace se révèle à lui dédié* [The one who traces it reveals himself as dedicated to it]”<sup>129</sup>—fuses ethics and poetics: “dédier” [to dedicate] paronomastically conjoins Celan’s “mitgegeben” and its referential displacement by Levinas with philosophical “unsaying [dédire]”; in dedicating itself (to the other), poetry “unsays” philosophy.<sup>130</sup>

Levinas’s identification of ethics and poetry, which dislocates any received notions of poetry as an artform and textual genre, presupposes a fundamental distinction between poetry as saying (“dire poétique” [“Paul Celan” p. 53]), that is, poetry as ethics itself, and poetry as said (“dit poétique” [*Autrement* p. 263]), that is, poetry as a speech genre,<sup>131</sup> whereby only the latter participates in the term’s received array of meanings. Qua *poetic* said—that is, precisely because it evinces similar discursive traits as its ethical ground, on which, in fact, these traits depend—poetry is best “equipped” to instantiate ethics on the existential and generic levels of dialogic *activity*. As I illustrate below, the tertium comparationis informing Levinas’s rapprochement between ethics and poetry as a speech genre is the discursive explosion of totality: while ethics effectuates the most fundamental “interruption of Being” (*Autrement* p. 75), poetry as a speech genre is the most outstanding non-violent discursive possibility of subverting totalization and violence on the socio-political level. Echoing his Celan essay, Levinas notes:

“[M]an can repress saying, and this ability to keep silent, to withhold oneself, is the ability to be political. [Or] [m]an can give himself in saying to the point of poetry . . . to the other” (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” p. 29). This point needs further clarification.

Levinas’s dichotomization of politics and poetry is based on the Heraclitean notion that the political is an “expression of our ontological nature” (*ibid.*) insofar as it is inherently partisan and interested, that is, grounded in war, the most obvious “face of Being [face de l’être]” (*Totalité* pp. 5-6); war reduces human beings to “bearers of forces which command them” (*ibid.*).<sup>132</sup> While it is the task of ethics to constantly point to the necessity of assuming and pragmatically realizing the ethical underpinnings of the political and thus to perpetually interrupt and critique the political in the name of the other human being (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas” pp. 29-30),<sup>133</sup> poetry “goes one step further” (“Paul Celan” p. 53) in that it indeed—by dispensing with apophansis (see below)—disrupts violence (totality), even the violence ethics necessarily commits: due to its apophantic character ethics, although an indispensable condition and corrective of the political,<sup>134</sup> is necessarily totalizing, hence violent.<sup>135</sup> Levinas’s endeavor to “unsay” his own philosophical discourse, is motivated precisely by this insight, and has been marked by critics in terms of a particular mode of writing or style, which constantly displaces its own eidetico-reductive procedures, without, however, escaping apophansis.<sup>136</sup> Given Levinas’s emphasis on the philosophical continuity of his œuvre, which avowedly employs the method of phenomenological reduction, violence will have always been the point of departure and the telos of ethics.<sup>137</sup> Philosophy cannot possibly interrupt itself without simultaneously “weaving together the interruptions themselves”<sup>138</sup> “Any contestation or interruption of [philosophical discourse] is immediately related and inverted by [philosophical] discourse. It recommences as soon as it is interrupted . . . . [Philosophical] discourse is capable of saying all its ruptures” (*Autrement* p. 262).<sup>139</sup>

For its “unsaying,” philosophical discourse, that is—in this instance—ethics, depends on other modes of discourse.<sup>140</sup> Derrida suggests that such “nonviolent language . . . would be a language of pure invocation, pure adoration, proffering only proper nouns/names in order to appeal to the other,”<sup>141</sup> since “it would be a language without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication” (*ibid.*).<sup>142</sup> However, Derrida does not mention that kind of

“nonviolent language,” which, although it may use the verb “to be,” does it “not seriously,”<sup>143</sup> in the ontologically referential sense, does not assert or predicate ontologically (apophansis), but rather by “parity of form” only.<sup>144</sup> Such language has traditionally been considered characteristic of poetry,<sup>145</sup> which, by “potentially confirming or unsettling philosophical presuppositions without [itself] offering philosophical arguments,” exemplarily enacts the “undoing of philosophy.”<sup>146</sup> Since any apophantic discourse is potentially interruptible by non-apophantic, hence “nonviolent,” discourse, poetry is a potential “moment or structural possibility in every text, whatever its public genre.”<sup>147</sup> Insofar as “poetry” is considered the most general term for non-violent discourse *tout court*, Derrida’s “language of pure invocation . . .” would always already be poetic. As the interruption of ethics, poetry replicates ethics as the interruption of politics, and ethics as the interruption of Being, which in turn informs both ethics and politics; thus poetry—being socio-politically interruptive par excellence—exemplarily accomplishes the critical task of ethics and thereby, ironically, reveals its deeply political significance.<sup>148</sup>

Poetry exceeds the “limits of what may be thought by [merely] suggesting, by letting be understood without ever rendering understandable—by implying meanings which differ from meanings acquired by signs through the simultaneity of a system or through the logical definition of concepts” (*Autrement* p. 263). Poetry thus textually enacts the other’s ethical excess with respect to the “*idea of the Other in me*” (*Totalité* p. 43), that is, ethical untotalizability and infinity, which “always exceeds thought” (p. 10) and, as Levinas emphasizes, traces “the poetic *said* and the infinite interpretation it solicits” (*Autrement* p. 263). By pragmatically suspending ontological referentiality, poetry—like ethics—explodes Hegelian logic, in which the “individual [Einzelnheit]” synthesizes the “universal [Allgemeinheit]” and the “particular [Besonderheit]” and thus corroborates the totalizing enmeshment of the universal and the particular.<sup>149</sup> Poetry, Kristeva notes,

takes the most concrete signifieds, concretizes them to the utmost degree, and, simultaneously, raises them to a level of generality which surpasses that of conceptual discourse. [Poetry] creates a “universe” of signification in which the signifieds are more concrete and more general, more tangible and more abstract than in ordinary [and philosophical] discourse. Poetry seems to be able to *represent* a concrete object . . . , while . . . enacting such a high [“*tellement haut*”] degree of generalization that all

individualization vanishes. The poetic signified . . . is simultaneously concrete and general. In a non-synthetic application, it short-circuits the concrete and the general, and, thereby, rejects individualization . . .<sup>150</sup>

Similarly, Derek Attridge argues that “a text in which . . . the relation between singularity and generality [is] staged with haunting power”<sup>151</sup> testifies to the poetic.<sup>152</sup>

In Levinas’s writings, the interruption of ethics by poetry takes place in the shape of frequent quotations from poetic texts, which literally halt the flow of philosophical description and, without arguing anything themselves, contaminate and significantly determine the argument.<sup>153</sup> Levinas’s repeated invocation of Dostoevsky’s lines, “*We are all responsible for everything and everyone before everyone, and I most of all*” [*Nous sommes tous responsable de tout et de tous devant tous, et moi plus que les autres*] (*Éthique* p. 98), is a case in point.<sup>154</sup> Not only does it poetically corroborate and inform Levinas’s stress on infinite responsibility and substitution (pp. 97-98), but, most importantly, it cuts through Levinas’s phenomenological description. Similarly, the repeated invocation and permutation of Vasily Grossmann’s lines, “the generosity of an old woman, who has given a piece of bread to a prisoner . . . the generosity of a singular person toward a singular person,” (p. 278) not only poetically supports Levinas’s emphasis on ethical generosity in terms of “tearing the bread from one’s mouth, satisfying the other’s hunger” (*Autrement* pp. 84, 126), but, more importantly, interrupts phenomenological reduction.<sup>155</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most significant poetic disruption of ethics consists in Levinas’s philosophical absorption and transformation of Celan’s poetry. Thus, the central concept of ethical substitution is, in addition to its phenomenologico-semiotic underpinnings,<sup>156</sup> explicitly linked to Celan’s poem “Lob der Ferne [In Praise of Remoteness],” a pertinent verse from which, “Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin [I am you when I am I],” precedes as a motto the central chapter, “La substitution,” of *Autrement qu’être* (p. 156), in which the concept of substitution is elaborated.<sup>157</sup> If, as Hendrik Birus argues, it is one of the central functions of the motto to continue and reinforce a tradition<sup>158</sup> and to articulate in a nutshell the problematic of the text it precedes,<sup>159</sup> then Levinas’s Celan motto is a perfect specimen. Aside from embedding ethics within a specifically poetic framework, it also focalizes its major theme: Celan’s verse non-apophantically enacts *and* displaces the apophantic, totalizing formula par excellence—the law of identity: “I am I” (A=A)—in

favor of my substitution for the other, while preserving an irreducible separation between me and the other.<sup>160</sup> In light of its Celan motto, *Autrement qu'être* (and, by extension, Levinas's philosophical discourse on ethics *tout court*) can plausibly be interpreted—insofar as it purports to dislocate the primacy of ontology—as a response to and philosophical staging of Celan's poetic intimation.<sup>161</sup>

### Notes:

1. See especially, Stephan Strasser, *Jenseits von Sein und Zeit: eine Einführung in Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophie* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), §74, p. 384 Heidegger's texts are cited—unless otherwise indicated—according to paragraph followed by the page number[s].
2. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. 1943 Rpt. (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 181.
3. Following Levinas (and the Russian formalists), I use "poetry" in reference to "literature" in general (see Levinas, "La réalité et son ombre, *Les Temps Modernes* 38 [November 1948], p. 785). Throughout this essay, all unidentified translations are my own. All page references to Levinas's work are included in the text.
4. Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertelehre: 1908-1914* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 3-4.
5. See Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, Manfred (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), trans. S. Frings and Roger L. Funk, pp. xvii-xix, 109; Jacques Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique: essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), p. 146; Andrew Tallon, "Nonintentional Affectivity, Affective Intentionality, and the Ethical in Levinas's Philosophy," in Adriaan T. Peperzak ed., *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 107; Thomas Weimer, *Die Passion des Sagens: Zur Deutung der Sprache bei Emmanuel Levinas und ihrer Realisierung im philosophischen Diskurs* (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1988), p. 227.
6. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1992 [1961]), pp. 11, 272-273; Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1990 [1974]), pp. 29, 83, 113, 188, 228.
7. I refer especially to such thinkers as Cicero, Seneca, and Quintilian on the one hand, and Wolff, Kant, and Peirce on the other. Levinas notes that

- “the traditional distinction between theory and practice will be obliterated” from the ethical perspective (*Totalité*, p. 15).
8. Aristotle distinguishes between “intellectual” [dianoêtikai] and “ethical” [êthikai] virtues [aretai] (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam’s, 1926), trans. H. Rackham, pp. 1103a, 14-15).
  9. Following Martin Buber (*Das dialogische Prinzip: Ich und Du, Zwiesprache, Die Frage an den Einzelnen, Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen, Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1984, pp. 15-16, 29, 35-37, 43, 56, 61-62, 78), Levinas, in “L’Autre, Utopie, et Justice,” *Entre nous: essais sur le penser-à-l’autre* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), characterizes his ethics as an “ethics of encounter” (p. 239). See also, Levinas, “La trace de l’autre,” *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger. Réimpression conforme à la première édition suivie d’essais nouveaux* (Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1974), p. 202.
  10. See, Aristotle, *The Metaphysics I-IX* (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam’s, 1933), trans. H. Tredennick, pp. 982b9, 1026a16, and 1051b1-2. Ontology is, in Levinas’s terms, “theory as the cognition of beings . . . , which reduces the Other to the Same” (*Totalité*, p. 33).
  11. Levinas’s use of “first philosophy” also invokes Descartes’ *Meditationes* (René Descartes, Gerhart Schmidt ed. and trans., *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia/Meditationen über die Erste Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986 [1641]) and Husserl’s *Erste Philosophie*, (Edmund Husserl, Rudolf Boehm ed., *Erste Philosophie (1923/24) I: Kritische Ideengeschichte*. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956); among others (see “Présentation,” in Jean Greisch and Jacques Rolland eds., *Emmanuel Levinas: L’éthique comme philosophie première* Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle 23 août-2 septembre 1986 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), p. 9. By “West,” Levinas presumably refers to the “philosophical tradition inherited from Parmenides” (see Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* [West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993], p. 13) and constituted—if one is to believe Levinas’s own writings—by such select authors as “Plato, Aristotle, . . . and Plotinus . . . on the one hand, and the philosophers of the last four centuries (from Levinas, Hobbes and Descartes to the present), on the other hand” (*ibid.*).
  12. This should not gloss over the fact that, in 1948, Levinas situates his own philosophy in the realm of ontology (see Levinas, *Le temps et l’autre*, 6th ed. [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996], p. 17). Levinas’s consistent opposition to the primacy of ontology is characteristic of his writings beginning with “L’ontologie est-elle fondamentale?” (in Levinas, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 56.1 [1951], pgs. 88-98). For a discussion of Levinas’s relation to Heidegger’s ontology in particular, see

- Jean Greisch, "Éthique et ontologie: Quelques considérations 'hypocritiques,'" in Greisch and Rolland, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 15-45.
13. Levinas's critique aims at Heidegger's view that "Being-in-the-world [with others]" (see Martin Heidegger, in Petra Jaeger ed., *Prolegomenazur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* [Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1979] §26, pp. 326-335) must be interpreted in light of "Dasein's Being" (*Sein und Zeit* §4, p. 12, §26, p. 121). In particular, Levinas criticizes early Heidegger's omission to interrogate Being as such. In "Liberté de parole," Levinas makes a similar comment: "[P]olitical totalitarianism rests on ontological totalitarianism (in Levinas, *Difficile liberté: essais sur le penser-à-judaïsme*, [Paris: Albin Michel, 1990], p. 289). Inveighing against Heidegger's "Bodenständigkeit" [rootedness (in the native soil)], Levinas writes: "It is not certain that national socialism stems from the mechanistic reification of people rather than from the rustic rootedness and feudal adoration of people subject to their commanding superiors and masters," (*La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini*, "Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale" 62.3 [July-September 1957], pp. 241-253, 246). However, as Derrida points out, even a presumably non-violent philosophy, such as Levinas's, cannot completely dispense with violence: "At this point, we only wish to suggest that any philosophy of non-violence can only, *within history*—but could it be meaningful elsewhere?—opt for the lesser violence within an *economy of violence*" ("Violence et métaphysique," p. 136n1). Regarding Levinas's admiration for and opposition to Heidegger, see, for instance: Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, établissement du texte, notes et postface de Jacques Rolland (Paris: Grasset, 1995), p. 16; Jacques Derrida, "Adieu," in *Critical Inquiry* 23.1 (Autumn 1996), pp. 9-10.
  14. "Essence" does not mean "substance" but, as Levinas explains, translates the German "Sein," that is, Being, and, more specifically, its grammatical meaning as a gerund (*Autrement*, p. 9). "Essence" should thus be understood as a nominal present active participle. It underscores the processual character of Being. Furthermore, since Levinas's critique is specifically directed against Heidegger, the latter's notion of "Sein" (and "Seyn" as "Wesen") must be taken into account; see Martin Heidegger, "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit," in Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann ed., *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1976), p. 201.
  15. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* 16th ed. (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1986), §9, p. 43.
  16. Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, p. 23.
  17. See also *Autrement*, p. 191; Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in Richard A. Cohen ed., *Face to Face with Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 25. Levinas displaces Sartre's and Heidegger's concepts of the existential situation in favor of an anterior "ethical situation" (see Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* pp. §60, p. 299-300; Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, pp. 538-615, esp. 544).



Levinas's disavowal of the primacy of "engagement" is equally directed against Heidegger's contention that Dasein is always already engaged in the world (*De l'existence à l'existant* [Paris: Vrin, (1947, 1963, 1990), 1993], p. 171). The French term "engagement," in its existential use, corresponds to such terms as Heidegger's "Besorgen [lit.: procuring]" or "Umgang [lit.: intercourse]" (*Sein und Zeit*, §12, p. 57, §15, p. 66). That Levinas's critique is addressed to Sartre in particular is evidenced by the fact that the latter explicitly links the responsibility for the other to "engagement" (*L'être et le néant*, p. 612), while Heidegger rarely uses the terms "verantwortlich [responsible]" or "Verantwortung [responsibility]" (see, for instance, *Sein und Zeit*, §58, p. 288). Furthermore, Levinas's repudiation of "engagement" is also a critique of his own early texts, in which he (nominally) accepts the philosopheme that human beings are engaged in existence prior to their ethical relation(s) to (the) other(s) (see "De l'évasion" in *Recherches philosophiques* 5 [1935/36], p. 388; *De l'existence*, pp. 152, 157). Regarding Levinas's relation to Sartre, see Strasser, *Jenseits von Sein und Zeit*, p. 307; Thomas Wiemer, *Die Passion*, pp. 52-59.

18. Sartre, "L'être et le néant," p. 541.
19. Since Sartre's dictum explicitly invokes Heidegger's "Geworfenheit [thrownness]" (*L'être et le néant*, p. 541), Levinas's critique of Sartre equally applies to Heidegger. Elsewhere, Levinas writes: "Existence is not condemned to freedom but invested and judged as freedom" ("La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," p. 251). For further polemical, explicit and implicit, references to Sartre in Levinas's writings, see *Le temps et l'autre*, pp. 44, 68; "La trace de l'autre," p. 198; *Autrement*, pp. 122, 128, 163, 184, 217; "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," pp. 16-17. Levinas's explicit and implicit references to Heidegger are too numerous to be listed.
20. Ethics "originarily enacts itself as discourse" (*Totalité*, p. 29; see also *Totalité*, pp. 30, 38, 45-80, 222, 271; Levinas, "Éthique et esprit," in *Difficile liberté*, pp. 13-23, 21; "Liberté de parole," p. 290).
21. See J. Habermas, "Diskursethik - Notizen zu einem Begründungsprogramm," *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 3rd ed., 1988), pp. 75-76, 104, 113; Karl-Otto Apel ed., *Sprachpragmatik und Philosophie: Beiträge von K. O. Apel, J. Habermas, S. Kanngießer, H. Schnelle, D. Wunderlich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1976). Levinas's opposition to Diskursethik is analogous to his general opposition to post-Kantian formalisms and normativisms (see above). For further treatment of this problematic, see Jean Greisch, "The Face of Reading: Immediacy and Mediation," in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 72.
22. Foucault's most concise definition of "discours" is: "[C]omplex of utterances which depends on the same formative system" (Michel Foucault,

- L'archéologie du savoir* [Paris: Gallimard, 1969], p. 141; see also p. 106). For further circumscriptions of "discours" by Foucault, see: *L'ordre du discours: Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), *L'histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 133.
23. Habermas, "Diskursethik," p. 90.
  24. Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique," p. 124n, my emphasis.
  25. Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, pp. 34-35.
  26. Wiemer points out that Levinas's "explodes and turns into sequences with dashes leaving everything suspended," that his language "writhes in . . . paradoxical comparisons," that his "endeavors multiply in order to repeat the same without being able to say it definitively," and concludes that it is precisely due to these aspects that "his writing points beyond itself" ("Une écriture de la mémoire," in Greisch and Rolland, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 406). In a famous footnote Derrida observes that "the thematic development of *Totality and Infinity* is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the incessant insistence of waves pounding onto the shore: return and repetition, always the same wave against the same shore, whereby, however, each return of the wave brings about infinite renewal and enrichment" ("Violence et métaphysique" p. 124n). This leads Derrida to the conclusion that *Totalité* is "a work of art and not a treatise" (*ibid.*). See also Derrida, "At This Very Moment," pp. 29, 34; Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 100-132; Seán Hand, "Shadowing Ethics: Levinas's View of Art and Aesthetics," in Hand ed., *Facing the Other* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), pp. 63-64, 66.
  27. Greisch, "The Face of Reading" p. 77.
  28. Levinas writes: "[T]he presentation and development of the concepts employed [in *Totalité*] are completely indebted to the phenomenological method" (*Totalité*, p. 14); see also *Totalité*, pp. iii, 8, 32, 44; *Autrement*, pp. 75-77. More than once, Levinas points to the expository style of his philosophical discourse" ("Le nom de dieu d'après quelques textes talmudiques," in Levinas, *L'au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1982], p. 143).
  29. See Edmund Husserl, "'Enzyklopaedia Britannica'-Artikel" in Klaus Held ed., *Die phänomenologische Methode: Ausgewählte Texte I* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1985), p. 204, Husserl, Klaus Held ed., *Phänomenologie der Lebenswelt: Ausgewählte Texte II* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), pp. 14-15. Levinas explicitly qualifies the language of *Totalité* as "eidetic language" (*Totalité*, p. i) and points to his interest in the "structure" of ethics (*Autrement*, p. 162).
  30. See, for instance: "[E]thics is before ontology" (Levinas, "La proximité de l'autre," *Altérité et transcendance* [Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995], p. 109);

"[ethics] . . . precedes . . . Essence" (*Autrement*, p. 180); "[t]he meaning of our entire discourse consists in affirming" (*Totalité*, p. 89). Seán Hand emphasizes the "apophansis of [Levinas's] ethics" ("Shadowing Ethics," p. 86); see also Benjamin Hutchens, "Infinite and Apophansis: Reverberations of Spinoza in Levinas" in Hand, *Facing the Other*, pp. 107-120. I use "apophantic" in its Aristotelian sense as ontologically predicative or assertive and capable of being true or false ("On Interpretation/PERI ERMHNEIAS," *The Organon I: The Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1938], trans. H. P. Cooke and H. Tredennick, pp. 17a1-5, 17a25). According to Aristotle, poetry, for instance, does not fall into the realm of apophantic discourse (*ibid.*), since it does not make ontologically affirmative or negative assertions, or, as Sir Philip Sidney (following Boccaccio) puts it, "the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (Sir Philip Sidney, G. Shepherd ed., *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy* [London: Nelson and Sons, 1965], p. 123). Levinas's philosophical, hence apophantic, discourse, conversely, is "rigorously developed" (*Totalité*, p. 10) and thus evinces, in Derrida's words, "rigor [and] truth" ("Violence et métaphysique," p. 224), whereby "rigor" and "rigorous" allude to Husserl's notion of philosophy as "strenge Wissenschaft [rigorous science]." It is precisely this philosophical apophansis which Levinas attempts to *phenomenologically* reduce in the very process of its enactment (*Autrement*, pp. 67-74).

31. Fabio Ciaramelli comments: "Levinas's whole effort is precisely to show in a philosophical Said the universal signification of . . . a radical preoriginary Saying" (F. Ciaramelli, "Levinas's Ethical Discourse Between Individuation and Universality," on *Re-Reading Levinas*, p. 100; see also 82, pp. 94-95). See also de Michel De Certeau, "Heterologies: Discourse on the Other," *Theory of History of Literature 17* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), trans. Brian Massumi, p. 26; Greisch and Rolland, "Présentation," in *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 8. I do not stipulate an essentialist distinction between scientifico-philosophical and other types of discourse. The proposed delimitation of "speech genres" derives from Frege, Russell, Austin, Searle, and Genette. In line with Aristotle, Frege and Russell distinguish between merely formal/logical and ontologically assertive apophansis concerning existents or states of affairs (Gottlob Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100 [1892], p. 32, Frege, "Der Gedanke," in Ignacio Angelelli ed., *Kleine Schriften* [Hildesheim: Olms, 1967] p. 347; Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *Logic and Knowledge* [New York: Macmillan, 1956], pp. 46, 54). Both posit the meaningfulness of assertive discourse without extratextual reference (Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1919], p. 168) by way of "parity of form" ("On Denoting," p. 46; Frege, "Der Gedanke" p.

- 347), such as diverse fictional and poetic genres. Austin underwrites the validity of Frege's and Russell's distinction by admitting sentences that "have . . . the look—or at least the grammatical make-up—of 'statements'" without being "*utterances* which could be 'true' or 'false'," which is "traditionally the characteristic mark of a statement" (J. L. Austin, in J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa eds., *How to Do Things With Words*, 2d Edition [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975], p. 12). John R. Searle's "pretended reference" (J. R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" *New Literary History*, 6.2 (Winter 1975), p. 330) and Gérard Genette's "pseudoreference" (*Fiction and Diction* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991], trans. G. Genette, Chatherine Porter, p. 25) reconfirm this distinction. Since Levinas peritextually announces his text as "philosophical investigations," he establishes a pragmatic non-fiction contract (*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], trans. G. Genette, Jane E. Lewin, pp. 94-103; Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," pp. 322-324; Renate Hof, *Das Spiel des 'unreliable narrator': Aspekte ungläubwürdigen ERZFHLENS im Werk von Vladimir Nabokov*. [Munich: Fink, 1984], p. 59) with the reader, who is thus invited to approach the text apophantically, that is, as ontologically assertive. My functional or "conventional" approach to the fiction /non-fiction dichotomy is not undermined by Derrida's critique of Searle's stipulation of the logical dependency of fictional discourse on non-fictional discourse (J. Derrida, *Limited Inc.* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], pp. 102-104, 133-134). Derrida by no means denies the dichotomy in his attempt to "recall that they [fiction and non-fiction] are not 'natural entities'" (*ibid.* p. 134).
32. See Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique," pp. 159, 164. The last two senses of "ethics" are frequently conflated in critical studies on Levinas (see, for instance: Harita Valavanidis-Wybrands, "Énigme et parole," *Emmanuel Levinas* p. 382; Guy Petitdemange, "Emmanuel Levinas et la politique," in *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 344-345).
  33. See Levinas, "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," p. 247; Greisch and Rolland, "Présentation," p. 9, Petitdemange, *Emmanuel Levinas et la politique*, pp. 328-329.
  34. See Diogenes I, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam's, 1925), trans. R. D. Hicks, p. 327.
  35. "Tradition," according to Levinas, derives the concept of ethics from "knowledge" and "reason" as "faculties of the universal" (Levinas, "Le dialogue: conscience de soi et proximité de l'autre," *De dieu qui vient à l'idée*, 2nd revised and augmented edition [Paris: Vrin, 1986], p. 108). Both knowledge and reason attempt to "grasp the individual not in his or her singularity but in his or her generality" ("La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," pp. 244-245).
  36. Robbins, *Prodigal Son*, p. 101.

underwrites and thereby continues a certain ethical tradition": "In Greek philosophy one can find the ethical breaking through the ontological, for the 'good existing beyond being (*agathon*)' . . . One can also cite in this connection Descartes' 'infinite', which surpasses the finite limits of human mind. And similarly, supra-ontological in the Pseudo-Dionysian doctrine of the *via* of the divine over being, or in the Augustinian *via* between the truth that challenges (*veritas*) and the ethical truth that shines (*veritas lucens*), and so on (Levinas, "p. 25). See also *Totalité*, p. 79 . . . 189-190.

"[W]e have no option but to employ the Greek philosophy, even in our attempts to go beyond the language of metaphysics" ("Dialogue," p. 28). See also Derrida, "Violence et Origine," p. 75.

Levinas has elaborated in *Autrement*, pp. 261-263.

Levinas uses multiple references to poetry as "examples" of how they serve more than a seemingly hermeneutic function; they interrupt Levinas's own philosophical

thought in a sense, as correlative to consciousness ("Introduction," p. 198). Heidegger notes: "We do not grasp Being conceptually, Being is always already present" (§39, p. 183); "Being [is] in consciousness, that is, in the present" (§43, p. 207). Levinas criticizes Heidegger's "phenomenological apprehension of Being" (*Sein und Zeit*, §4, p. 207) "into intelligibility . . . . *Being and Time* . . . . In the original thesis: Being is inseparable from the present" (*La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini*, p. 245; the infinitival form "sein" [to be], upper-case "Sein" [Being]).

Levinas's notion of Dasein, that is, existence, as "care," which is the concern for its Being; see *Prolegomena*, §31, pp. 406-407, p. 121, §39-§42, pp. 180-200. Existence, as a relational structure involving the human being and the world: "Dasein . . . always relates somehow" (*Sein und Zeit*, p. 207).

"Introduction," pp. 20-21.

"Introduction," p. 246; see above and *Totalité*, p. 38.

46. Levinas's double subversion corresponds to Heidegger's double concept of ontology as "the explicit interrogation of the Being of being" and Dasein's condition of "comprehension of Being" (*Sein und Zeit*, §4, p. 12).
47. "[E]thics in the human" ("Levinas, "Diachronie et représentation," in *Entre Nous*, p. 182).
48. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §28, p. 130.
49. When referring to "ethics" *tout court*, I henceforth mean ethics in the third sense.
50. Regarding the question of witnessing in Levinas's ethics, see, for instance, Wiemer, "Une écriture de la mémoire," p. 400; Valavanidis-Wybrands, "Enigma et parole," p. 383.
51. See Levinas, "La trace de l'autre," pp. 191-192, "Diachronie et représentation," p. 172; *Totalité*, pp. 46, 249-250; *Autrement*, pp. 75, 134, 140, 188; "Martin Buber et la théorie de la connaissance," *Noms propres*. (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1987), pp. 36-43.
52. "Ontologisch-sein," Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §4, p. 12.
53. I use "response-ability" and its adjectival and adverbial derivations in reference to ethical dialogue only. My particular hyphenated spelling captures the foundational status of ethics, which enables me to become actively, existentially responsible or answerable. The term "responsibility" and its adjectival and adverbial derivations refer to the existential or socio-political realm in general. At times Levinas uses "responsabilité [responsibility]" in reference to both the realm of the ethical and the realm of the existential or the socio-political. Thus, it is the interpreter's task to decide which "responsabilité" is intended in a particular passage.
54. See also Greisch, "Éthique et ontologie" p. 19.
55. I am referring to Heidegger's analyses of the "call of conscience" (*Sein und Zeit*, §56-§60, pp. 272-301).
56. Regarding the dichotomy of "Hebraism and Hellenism" in Levinas's writings, see Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique"; Robbins, *Prodigal Son*, pp. 100-132; Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 185-217.
57. See "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini": "To put it in the most *formal* of terms, the Same does not recover its priority over the other . . . . Let us try to explicate these *formulae*. If the Same does not repose on . . . itself, philosophy is not inseparably tied to the course which incorporates any Other within the Same" (p. 244; see also *Totalité*, p. 33, *De l'existence*, p. 13). The French terms "l'autre," "les autres," and "autrui," which Levinas employs throughout his writings—using both upper-case *and* lower-case spelling (inconsistently, as far as I can tell)—evinces subtle but crucial differences. While "autrui," a *singulare tantum*, only refers to human beings, "l'autre" and "les autres" can refer to anything. If "l'autre" contextually refers to a human being, it is more specific—referring to only one human being—than "autrui," which can designate one or many human

beings. However, “l’autre” (sing.) can also be more general than “autrui,” as when it designates the general “other” (for instance, “god”). “Autrui” is always more specific than “les autres” (pl.). (Littré specifies: “les autres est plus général que autrui . . . ; autrui, c’est spécialement cet autre-ci [‘les autres’ is more general than ‘autrui’ . . . ; ‘autrui’ means *this* specific other]” [I, p. 749]). In formulaic discourse, “l’autre” is general while “autrui” would not be used, since it always refers to (a specific) human being(s). Thus, in “l’un/le même et l’autre,” “l’autre” is the general other, and not “another (human being)” and, hence, not as specific as “autrui.” However, in “moi et l’autre,” “l’autre” is a contextually defined singular person and, hence, more specific than “autrui.” In view of Levinas’s correlation of “l’un/le même” with “l’autre” and of “moi” with “autrui,” the latter seems to be used in a more specific mode than the potentially more specific “l’autre.” Similarly, in the formula “le même et l’autre,” “l’autre” is used on a general level. However, sometimes Levinas uses “l’autre” to designate a singular person (see John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* [London and New York: Routledge, 1995], p. 185). The alternating use of “autre” and “autrui,” which corresponds to the alternating use of “même” and “moi” must be viewed as part of Levinas’s endeavor to “unsay [dédire]” his own apophantic discourse, which “trahit [betrays]” the unthematizable, that is, ethics, by thematizing it (see *Autrement*, pp. 113, 239-242). See also Levinas, “De la lecture juive des Ecritures,” in *Altérité et transcendance*, p. 138n11, where Levinas implies the structural formality of the correlation of “Même” and “Autre.” Only the formalization of ethics justifies Levinas’s emphasis on the “structure of ethics” (*Autrement*, p. 162). Alphonso Lingis’s translations of Levinas’s works are frequently misleading regarding this issue, since he employs “another” and “other” indiscriminately in reference to both “autre” and “autrui,” as, for instance, in the following instances: “La subjectivité . . . se substituant à *autrui*. En tant que l’un-pour *l’autre* . . . . Substitution à *l’autre*—l’un à la place de *l’autre*—expiation. La responsabilité pour *Autrui* . . .” (*Autrement*, pp. 29-31; my emphasis). Lingis’s translation reads: “[S]ubjectivity . . . substituting itself for *another* [autrui]. Qua one-for-another [l’autre] . . . [S]ubstitution for *another* [l’autre], one in the place of *another* [l’autre], expiation. Responsibility for *the other* [Autrui] . . .” (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being* [Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 1991], trans. Alphonso Lingis, pp.13-15). Later in the text, he again translates “autrui” with “another” (*Autrement*, p. 44; *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 24).

58. See Levinas, “La signification et le sens,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 69.2 (April-June 1964), pp. 125-156. 129; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III: Die Philosophie des Geistes. Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen* (Frankfurt a.M.:

Suhrkamp, 1986) §426; Hegel, Hermann Glockner ed., *Wissenschaft der Logik II*: 3<sup>rd</sup>, ed. 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1958), pp. 35-36.

59. Whether Heraklitus's "èn panta [one is all]" (fragment #50), Parmenides's identification of thought and Being, Descartes's, Kant's, and Husserl's transcendental subjects, Hegel's process of *Aufhebung* as the teleology of negations involving individuality [Einzelheit], particularity [Besonderheit], and universality [Allgemeinheit], or Heidegger's "precedence of existence" over onticity, to name only a few philosophical models constituting the "intellectual . . . life of the West"—the domination of the "same" informs each of them: Heraklitus dissolves singularity and unicity within universality; Parmenides subsumes the other within the thought of the other (thus prototypically anticipating Husserl's concept of intentionality); Descartes, Kant, and Husserl subject the external world to the contemplating or thetic subject; Hegel incorporates "everything" into the process of mediation and sublation leading to conceptual universality; Heidegger subjects the human being to the domination of Being as existence, or, in his later writings, to language. Regarding Heraklitus, see: Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker I* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951), trans. Diels, p. 161; M. Heidegger, "Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)," *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 6th ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1990), p. 199. Regarding Parmenides's ". . . tò gàr autò noein estin te kai einai" (fragment #3), see: Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker I*, p. 23; M. Heidegger, "Moira, (Parmenides VIII, pp. 34-41)." *Vorträge*, pp. 223-248; *Sein und Zeit*, §36, p. 171, "Was heißt Denken?"; Levinas, "La trace de l'autre," p. 189; *Totalité*, p. 42; Peperzak, *To the Other*, p. 13. See also Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, pp. 72-75; *Enzyklopädie*, §426, §430; *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, pp. 35-36, 52, 122-126; Descartes, Geneviève Rodi-Lewis ed., *Discours de la méthode suivi d'extraits de la Dioptrique, des Météores, de la vie de Descartes par Baillet, du Monde, de l'Homme et de Lettres*. (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1992), pp. 38-40; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten*, I (Leipzig: Reclam, 1989), p. 65, §3, p. 75, §6, p. 81; Husserl, *Die phänomenologische Methode*, p. 39; Heidegger, *Prolegomena* (1925), *Sein und Zeit* (1927) §4, p. 13, §9, p. 43; "Nachwort zu 'Was ist Metaphysik?'" *Wegmarken*, pp. 303-312. (1943), "Brief über den 'Humanismus'" (1946); the essays in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1990 [1950-1959]).
60. "Greek" acquires eponymic significance in Levinas's writings. Aside from its linguistic meaning, it designates "the essential characteristic of philosophy," a "certain, specifically Greek, way of thinking and speaking" involving such terms and concepts as "*morphe* (form), *ousia* (substance), *nous* (reason), *logos* (thought) or *telos* (goal), etc.—that constitute a



- specifically Greek lexicon of intelligibility" (Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas, pp. 18, 28).
61. See also Levinas, "Une religion d'adultes," *Difficile liberté*, p. 25.
  62. See also Wiemer, "Une écriture de la mémoire," p. 399.
  63. See *Autrement*, pp. 156-206.
  64. Thematically, "substitution" is highly problematic, since it leads, according to Levinas, who implicitly refers to the Third Reich, to the passage "from outrage to the responsibility for the persecutor, and thus from suffering to expiating for the other" (*Autrement*, p. 176). Here Levinas is very close to Sartre's Hegelian depiction of the collusion between torturer and tortured (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, p. 218). "Substitution" exemplarily encats ethical non-reciprocity or asymmetry. Adorno's critique of Sartre equally applies to Levinas in this context (see Theodor Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann ed., *Noten zur Literatur*, 6th ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 409-430).
  65. Among other things, "vertreten" literally means "to substitute." Thus, "die Vertretung" denotes "the substitute" in a professional setting. Already in "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," (1957), Levinas translates Heidegger's "Vertretbarkeit" as "substitution," p. 245. See also "L'Autre, Utopie et Justice," pp. 238-239. Literally, "Vertretbarkeit" means "substitutability."
  66. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §47, p. 239.
  67. Insofar as death is the ultimate possibility of Dasein's existence, Heidegger exemplifies the impossibility of existential substitution by the "Jemeinigkeit [Myownness]" (*Sein und Zeit*, §47, p. 240) of death. In "L'Autre, Utopie et Justice" Levinas vehemently critiques Heidegger's obsession with death (p. 238).
  68. Levinas notes: "I always make a clear distinction, in what I write, between philosophical and confessional texts. I do not deny that they ultimately have a common source of inspiration. I simply state that it is necessary to draw a line of demarcation between them as distinct methods of exegesis, as separate languages. I would never, for example, introduce a Talmudic or biblical verse into one of my philosophical texts, to try to prove or justify a phenomenological argument" ("Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," p. 18).
  69. Although Levinas uses "ethique" by far more frequently than "morale," he does not seem to make a semantic distinction between the two terms in *Totalité et infini* (see, for instance, pp. 85, 103, 249). See also *Totalité*, p. 106. Stéphane Mosès underscores the paradigmatic character of the bible in general and of Genesis in particular for Levinasian ethics (Stéphane Mosès, "L'idée de l'infini en nous," Greisch and Rolland, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 94-101).
  70. Levinas is indebted to Franz Rosenzweig, whose *Der Stern der Erlösung* is "too frequently present in *Totalité* to be cited" (*Totalité*, p. 14), for the ethical instrumentalization of the concept of the creature. See, for instance,

Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 4th. ed. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), p. 255; see also Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 149.

71. See *Totalité*, pp. 234-235, 310-313, 325-327; "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," p. 29. Although Levinas speaks of "paternité" in particular, I refer to "parenthood" in general, eschewing the question of gender and the feminine in Levinas's writings. Levinas implicitly reverses Buber's claim that "the relation to the human being is the exemplary parable of the relation to god" (p. 104).
72. The term is neither listed in the *Grand Larousse* and the, *Trésor* nor by Littré.
73. See, for instance, *Sein und Zeit*, §38, §39: "Thrownness [Geworfenheit] is the mode of Being of a being which is its own possibilities" (pp. 175-181; here, p. 181); see also §42, where "Geworfenheit" is defined as being "at the mercy of the world" (p. 199). The noun "Geworfenheit" is the substantivized form of the passive perfect participle ("geworfen") of the verb "werfen" ("to throw"), which, within the isotopy of procreation, is only applied to animals in German. Thus dogs "throw" ("werfen") puppies, while human beings "give birth" ("gebären"). By being "geworfen" Dasein is idiomatically stripped of its humanity.
74. Genesis 2: 7 reads: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life . . ." (King James's version). The philosophical task, Levinas emphasizes, consists in reducing the "Said to respiration opening itself to the other and signifying to the other human being(s) its signifiante itself" (*Autrement*, p. 278).
75. See Otto, *Das Heilige*, pp. 5-10. In his groundbreaking study *Das Heilige* (1917), Otto introduced the neologism "das Numinose [the numinous]" to characterize "the holy minus its ethical moment" (p. 6). The experience of the numinous manifests itself as the human being's "feeling of absolute superiority (of the other)" (p. 22). Buber criticizes Otto for underestimating the human being's significance in the face of the numinous (*Das dialogische Prinzip*, p. 82; see also pp. 98, 104).
76. While Levinas explicitly borrows the term "absolument autre" from Vladimir Jankélévitch, he points to the fact that Jankélévitch himself borrowed it from Otto (see "La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini," p. 241; Levinas, *Sur Maurice Blanchot* [Montpellier, 1975], pp. 13-14).
77. See also *Totalité*, p. 15; "Une religion d'adultes," p. 33. Since the numinous, in Otto's sense, is the "holy minus its ethical moment" (*Das Heilige*, p. 6), the "wholly Other," as one aspect of the numinous is *a fortiori* non-ethical. Depending on the context, Levinas uses the term "absolument autre" in reference to "god" (see, for instance, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," p. 23) and in reference to the other human being (see, for instance, "Une religion d'adultes," p. 33; *Totalité*, p. 15). In view of his insistence on the "accessibility" of "god" through the ethical relation to the other human being, the "absolute" alterity of "god" is predicated on

the “absolute” alterity of the other human being (*Totalité*, pp. 76-77). As I illustrate below, “god” has a very specific meaning in Levinas’s texts. The ethical conception of the “wholly other” must also be understood as an oblique polemic against Hegel’s concept of the “absolute” and Heidegger’s use of the term in reference to Being (“Nachwort zu: ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’,” p. 306). Interestingly, both concepts, “creaturelité” and “wholly other,” occupy an equally central place in Paul Celan’s poetics and poetry and thus warrant a thematic rapprochement between ethics and poetry.

78. See also Levinas, “Dieu et la philosophie,” p. 125; Mosès, “L’idée de l’infini en nous,” p. 82. Levinas implicitly refers to Rosenzweig’s stipulation of a pre-apophantic discourse (Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, pp. 255-256; see also Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 153-154).
79. Regarding the universality of language as a system, see, for instance, Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, p. 56.
80. See also Jill Robbins, “Visage, Figure: Speech and Murder in Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*,” in Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch eds., *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 275-298. By using “visage,” Levinas continues his critique of Heidegger’s “animalization” of Dasein as “geworfen”: “The visage . . . differs from the animal face . . . in its brutish stupidity” (La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini,” p. 248). For an in-depth discussion of “expression” in this context, see: Hutchens, “Infinition and Apophansis,” pp. 115-118; Wiemer, “Une écriture de la mémoire,” p. 390; and Michael Eskin, “A Language Before Words - Levinas’s Ethics as a Semiotic Problem,” forthcoming in *Semiotica*.
81. Levinas uses “Saying” throughout *Autrement* and subsequent works. While Saying designates my response in particular, it equally refers to ethics tout court (see, especially, *Autrement*, pp. 17, 48, 75).
82. See also *Totalité*, p. 225; *Autrement*, pp. 147, 150, 159, 161, 167, 173, 186, 223, 226. An adequate critical elucidation of Levinas’s complex notion of ethical “passivity” cannot be undertaken within the limited scope of the present chapter. Suffice it to point out that it involves Christian images of suffering and self-sacrifice (see *Autrement*, 232) as exemplified by Jesus Christ, and, to a certain extent, by some characters in Dostoevsky’s texts, which are central to the development of Levinas’s ethics (especially, Liza in *Notes from Underground* and Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*; Levinas explicitly intertwines “passivité,” “patience,” and “passion” [see, for instance, “La trace de l’autre,” p. 191; *Autrement*, pp. 89, 91-93, 173] against the implicit backdrop of their common Latin root, “pati” [to suffer, to endure], thus underscoring the pertinence of the Christian problematic). Equally, if not more, important is Levinas’s constant awareness of the holocaust: he depicts Jewish suffering

during the Third Reich as “une souffrance à la limite de toute souffrance et qui les souffre toutes [a suffering at the limit of all suffering, which suffers all sufferings]” (“La poésie et l'impossible,” p. 185). Questions of passivity and activity and their paradoxical enmeshment are also central to Dostoevsky's ethics (*Winter Notes*), Buber's dialogism (*Das dialogische Prinzip*, pp. 15, 78), and Sartre's poetics (*Que-est-ce que la littérature?*), all of which inform Levinas's ethics (see Levinas, “Martin Buber et la théorie de la connaissance,” *Noms propres*, [Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976], Levinas, “La réalité et son ombre”; Valavanidis-Wybrands, “Enigme et parole,” pp. 390-391).

83. See my “A Language Before Words.”
84. See “La proximité de l'autre,” p. 109. Robbins's claim that ethics “could never become . . . dialogue” (*Prodigal Son*, p. 109) only makes sense, if “dialogue,” as she suggests, denotes a reciprocal, mutual, “symmetrical” exchange (*ibid.*). Obviously, however, ethics is interlocution, that is, dialogue—albeit another kind of dialogue, corresponding to the “communication” which is the “condition of all communication.” Other scholars, such as Derrida and Ponzio stress the dialogic character of ethics (see, for instance: Augusto Ponzio, “Bachtin e Lévinas: Scrittura, Opera e Alterita,” in Paolo Jachia and Ponzio eds., *Bachtin e Lévinas: Averincev, Benjamin, Freud, Greimas, Lévinas, Marx, Peirce, Valéry, Welby, Yourcenar con inediti di M. Bachtin* [Bari: Laterza, 1993], p. 119; Derrida, “Violence et métaphysique,” p. 145).
85. See also Genesis 22: 1, 7, 11. Levinas cites the biblical formula “Here I am” or “Here am I” [“me voici”], throughout his œuvre as the supreme instance of ethical assignation (see, for instance: *Autrement*, pp. 262, 283; see also Robbins, “Tracing Responsibility in Levinas's Ethical Thought” in Peperzak, *Ethics*; Derrida, “At This Very Moment”).
86. Dante Alighieri, *Literature in the Vernacular (De Vulgari Eloquentia)* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), trans. Sally Purcell, p. 18.
87. See also *Autrement*, p. 82; Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip*, p. 203.
88. Robbins, “Tracing Responsibility,” p. 179.
89. Although no explicit copula is used in the original Hebrew text, “hineni,” meaning literally, “Here I,” implies ontological predication.
90. See also Exodus 33: 20-23. Levinas emphasizes: “The proscription of images is indeed the supreme commandment of monotheism” (“La réalité et son ombre,” p. 786).
91. Levinas's emphasis on the ethical significance of the paradigmatic biblical constitution of the “I” is thematically intertwined with a critique of Heidegger's hermeneutics of “Alltäglichkeit [everydayness]” on the one hand, and of his conception of speech and language on the other. Levinas reverses the ontico-ontological interplay between authentic (“eigentlich”) and inauthentic (“uneigentlich”) Dasein (*Sein und Zeit*, §9, §27, §38, §52). According to Heidegger, everyday life is an inauthentic form of existence

informed by “Gerede [talk]” (*Sein und Zeit*, §35, p. 167). “Gerede” in turn is ontologically grounded in “Rede [speech],” which is an originary mode of existence and thus the “*existenzial-ontologische Fundament der Sprache* [existential-ontological foundation of language]” (*Sein und Zeit*, §34, pp. 160-161). Similarly to Heidegger’s later concept of language as a kind of internal monologue, “Rede” is fundamentally monologic and existentially precedes my dialogic interaction with the other. “Speech” transpires as Dasein’s internal auto-interpellation, calling Dasein back from its “inauthentic” quotidian existence onto itself, thus enabling Dasein to authentically assume existence. In order to hear this “Gewissensruf [call of conscience]” (§56, p. 272), Dasein must be “vigilant,” to use a Levinasian term; it must listen carefully, since it is difficult to hear this unique call amidst the noise of everyday “Gerede” (*Sein und Zeit*, §56-58).

92. See also *Autrement*, pp. 83, 113, 188n.
93. See *Totalité*, pp. 249-250; *Autrement*, pp. 134, 140, 188. Levinas also calls this asymmetry “*dysmétrie morale*” (*Totalité*, p. 331).
94. See Levinas, “De la lecture juive des Ecritures,” pp. 133-139.
95. See Mosès, “L’idée de l’infini en nous,” p. 80.
96. See Shira Wolosky, “Mystical Language and Mystical Silence in Paul Celan’s ‘Dein Hinübersein.’” *Argumentum e silentio: International Paul Celan Symposium/Internationales Paul Celan-Symposium* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 72-86.
97. Levinas avowedly displaces Descartes’s onto-theological concept of god as “*substantia infinita*” (*Meditationes*, p. 120). See Levinas, “La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini,” pp. 247-249; Mosès, “L’idée de l’infini en nous,” p. 87. Levinas’s conceptualization of god as “infinity” is equally indebted to the kabbalistic concept of the attributeless *deus absconditus* as “En Sof [Infinity]” (see Gershom G. Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*, 3rd. ed. [Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988], p. 227; Mosès, “L’idée de l’infini en nous,” p. 97).
98. See also “De l’un à l’autre,” p. 163.
99. See, for instance, “La signification et le sens,” p. 146.
100. “Absolute,” as Levinas points out, in the literal sense of the Latin “*absolvere*” [to separate, to sever] (“Le nom de dieu,” pp. 147-148). Thus Levinas depicts the “passing” of the infinite as “*s’absoudre* [to absolve oneself]” (“La trace de l’autre,” p. 200).
101. See, for instance, “La philosophie et l’idée de l’infini”; *Totalité*, p. 42; “La trace de l’autre,” p. 200; *Autrement*, pp. 26-27.
102. “[L]’infini, c’est . . . Autrui [the Other . . . is the infinite]” (*Totalité*, p. 227).
103. See *Totalité*, pp. 30, 78-79, 107.
104. Levinas’s use of “relation” in this context underscores the presumably formal character of religion.
105. “Se passer” means “to be going on,” “to happen,” “to transpire.”

106. In "La trace de l'autre," Levinas distinguishes between a "transcendence . . . to the second degree" (p. 189) and, implicitly, a presupposed transcendence "to the first degree," which would be the dynamics of the relation between human beings (*Totalité*, p. 66)—ethical discourse. In the preface to *Totalité*, Levinas explicitly defines "l'infini" in general and formal terms as the "transcendence with respect to totality" (p. 7) and further specifies that "inifini" is the "concept of this transcendence" (*Totalité*, p. 10) "rigorously developed" (*ibid.*). Regarding the diverse uses of "transcendence," see also: "La transcendence des mots"; *Totalité*, pp. 28-29, 66, 74-77, 85, 89, 91-92, 190; *Autrement*, pp. 114, 188, 220, 263-264, 279; "Le dialogue," p. 223; "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," p. 26.
107. Levinas calls this the "passé absolu [absolute past]," the "trace," or "illéité [illeity]" ("La trace de l'autre," pp. 199-202). Wiemer notes: "[T]he (inter)human signifies as the trace of the relation with the infinite, with God" ("Une écriture de la mémoire," p. 397).
108. Derrida's claim that the interhuman "presupposes the face-to-face of man . . . with . . . God" ("Violence et métaphysique," p. 158) only makes sense as a metalepsis.
109. See Robbins, *Prodigal Son*, p. 120. Metalepsis, the figure of the reversal of the early and the late, underlies Levinas's claim that ethics precedes ontology. Robbins notes: "Since Levinas's discourse is post-Heideggerian, the articulation of his claim to an anterior ethics is necessarily posterior. This posteriority of the anterior does not trouble Levinas. He refers to it in another context as ' . . . an inversion logically absurd . . .'" (*ibid.*).
110. See St. Augustine, *The Confessions* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), trans. F. J. Sheed, pp. 281-284; Husserl, "Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins," Ulrich Melle ed., *Ausgewählte Texte II* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986) pp. 80, 95-102, 117; Heidegger, "Vom Wesen des Grundes," *Wegmarken*, pp. 190-191; *Sein und Zeit*, pp. §65/329, §72/376.
111. Hutchens notes: "[T]ime is produced in the relationship with the neighbor rather than in one's own silent self-consciousness" ("Infiniton and Apophansis," p. 109).
112. Ethical diachrony underlies and conditions the fact that "[socio-political] responsibility toward the other is also a responsibility toward the *future*, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know" (Derek Attridge, "Introduction: Derrida and the Question of Literature" in Jacques Derrida, Attridge ed., *Acts of Literature* [New York and London: Routledge, 1992], p. 5; see also Attridge "Trusting the Other: Ethics and Politics in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*" in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 93.1 [Winter 1994] p. 70).
113. See, for instance: "La réalité et son ombre"; "La transcendence des mots," p. 1094; *Totalité*, pp. 149, 222; *Autrement*, pp. 70-71, 122, 235, 263, 280;

- “La poésie et l'impossible”; “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” p. 29; “Langage et proximité,” p. 228; “De l'unicité,” p. 202; *Sur Maurice Blanchot*.
114. Greisch. “Éthique et ontologie,” p. 43
115. Paul Celan, Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert and Rolf Bücher eds., *Gesammelte Werke*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), Vol. III: pp. 177-178.
116. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-202.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-173.
118. The subtitle, “De l'être à l'autre,” which, in its original publication, was the essay's full title, sufficiently indicates the tendentiousness of Levinas's interpretation. Although differing in terms, it formally and thematically converges with the title and, hence, theme, of Levinas's early philosophical text, *De l'existence à l'existant*. Thus, Levinas's Celan essay can plausibly be considered part of Levinas's overall philosophical project.
119. A similar view is still presented in *Totalité* (p. 222).
120. Several of Levinas's characterizations of poetry in “Paul Celan” are preceded by such introductory phrases as: “We find Celan telling us” (Levinas, “Paul Celan: De l'être à l'autre,” *Noms propres*, p. 50), “It turns out that for Celan” (*ibid.*), “In Celan's words” (*ibid.*, p.52), “For Celan” (*ibid.*, p. 55), “Doesn't he suggest” (*ibid.*)
121. See, for instance, *Autrement* pp. 32, 278; “La trace de l'autre,” pp. 191-192; *Autrement*, p. 75; “Diachronie et représentation,” p. 172. “Saying without Said [Le Dire sans Dit]” is the title of a subsection in *Autrement* (pp. 78-81).
122. See also *Autrement*, p. 17.
123. See “Langage et proximité”; *Autrement*, p. 47; “De l'unicité,” p. 200.
124. The entire sentence reads: “Doesn't he suggest poetry as an unheard of modality of *otherwise than being*” (“Paul Celan,” pp. 55-56). In view of Levinas's general characterization of poetry in ethical terms, the oblique suggestion that Celan himself suggests “poetry as an unheard of modality of *otherwise than being*” points to Levinas's own implicit agreement with Celan's presumed viewpoint. Furthermore, the lexematic contamination of Celan's imputed stance with such ethical vocabulary as “*autrement qu'être*” and “*inouï*” (Levinas qualifies ethics as a “*Langage . . . de l'inouï*” [*Totalité*, p. iii]) blurs potential discursive boundaries.
125. Regarding the distinction between art and poetry, Levinas writes: “But, after all, the word ‘poetry’ does not name a species of which the word ‘art’ would be the genre” (*Sur Maurice Blanchot*, p. 79n). Hand notes: “[P]oetry is exempt from Levinas's negative view of art . . .” (“Shadowing Ethics,” pp. 86-87n2).
126. “[A]rt, ostension par excellence—the Said reduced to a pure theme . . . the Said reduced to the Beautiful, the vehicle of . . . ontology” (*Autrement*, p. 70). While it is true that Levinas refers to ethics in terms of “production” in *Totalité* (pp. 10-11, 242), which Llewelyn takes to mean “poiein” (p.

- 181), in *Autrement*, Levinas unmistakably departs from such an overtly activist conception of ethics.
127. Like French, English lacks a second term for “poetry,” which translates both the German “Dichtung” and “Poesie.” Celan makes a clear distinction between “Kunst [art]” as including poetry *qua poiein* and “Dichtung,” which witnesses to the “presence of the human” (Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, III: pp. 177, 189-190). See Otto Pöggeler, “—Ach, die Kunst!,” Dietlind Meinecke ed., *Über Paul Celan*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973) pp. 77-94.
  128. Celan, “*Strette*,” p. 198; my emphasis.
  129. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
  130. Throughout his essay, Levinas relies on André du Bouchet’s translation of “Der Meridian.” After quoting this line in du Bouchet’s translation (“Paul Celan,” p. 52) Levinas displaces the object of dedication by identifying it with the poem’s addressee rather than—as Celan has it—with the poem: “le moi se dédie à l’autre.” Regarding “dédire,” see *Autrement*, pp. 113, 239-242; “Wiemer, “Une écriture de la mémoire,” p. 405.
  131. By “Said,” it will be remembered, Levinas means language as a system, a code, the process of speaking (communication), and texts/works within language (see *Autrement*, pp. 17, 223). Wiemer depicts the Said as the “solely visible and audible language of thematization, consciousness, and comparability [allein sichtbare und hörbare Sprache der Thematisierung, des Bewußtseins, der Vergleichbarkeit]” (*Die Passion*, p. 401); M. C. Taylor calls it “the structured totality of language” (*Altarity*, p. 96). Levinas distinguishes between the Said in general and the “pure Said,” which explicitly designates written discourse: “In the written saying makes itself pure said” (*Autrement*, p. 264).
  132. Aside from its literal meaning, “war” in this context implies the reduction of the other to the same in any form. Guided by interest, calculation, and partisan objectives, politics is necessarily totalizing and thus belligerent in the ethical sense (“Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” pp. 29-30). Levinas’s broad notion of war and its repudiation, is *ex negativo* informed both by Heraclitus’s dictum that “Polemos pantôn men patêr esti, pantôn de basileus [War is the father of all things, of all things king]” (Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* I, p. 162 [fragment 53]; see also (*Ibid.*), p. 169 [fragment 80]; *Totalité*, p. 5) and Hobbes’s “war of every man against every man,” which in turn can only be terminated by an act of power, that is, of war (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [New York and London: Macmillan and Collier, 1989], pp. 106-108). See *Totalité*, p. 5; *Autrement*, p. 15; Hutchens, “Infinition and Apophansis,” p. 109.
  133. In this sense, Levinasian ethics indeed “accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge [accomplit l’essence critique du savoir]” (*Totalité*, p. 33).
  134. Attridge notes that “it is the political that is to be corrected by the ethical, and not vice versa” (“Trusting the Other,” p. 70; see also pp. 75-76).



- Levinas's emphasis on the interdependence between ethics and politics goes back to Aristotle, who considers ethics—despite its methodological priority—as part of the “mastercraft . . . of politics” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 1094a29; *Politics*, pp. 1323a14-16). Levinas reverses Aristotle's hierarchy.
135. Derrida criticizes Levinas precisely for using apophantic discourse to subvert violence: “[T]here is no [apophantic] phrase . . . which does not pass through the violence of the concept . . . . The very enunciation of nonviolent [ethics] is its first disavowal” (“Violence et métaphysique,” p. 219).
  136. Regarding Levinas's style, see n21. Levinas reiterates the philosophical, that is, apophantic character of his discourse (see “Le nom de dieu,” pp. 143, 145-146; *Sur Maurice Blanchot*, pp. 46-47).
  137. See, for instance, Levinas's preface to the German edition of *Totalité* [1987] (*Totalité*, pp. i-iv) and his preface to the second edition of *De l'existence à l'existant* (in: *De l'existence*). Levinas notes: “[P]hilosophy is called upon to reduce the Said to Saying” (*Autrement*, pp. 243, 278) by unsaying the former; but, by being “consigned to the apophantic *Said* philosophical reduction can only take place in an ever renewed [philosophical, that is, apophantic] Said” (*Autrement*, p. 200; see also *Autrement*, pp. 243, 278). By being “based on the principle of abstraction” (Derek Attridge, “Introduction: Derrida and the Question of Literature,” in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 14) and generalizability, philosophical discourse necessarily reduces the other to the same and is thus totalizing.
  138. Derrida, “At this Very Moment,” p. 18.
  139. See also “Violence et métaphysique,” p. 163.
  140. The fact that the “the reference to the interlocutor continuously pierces through the philosophical text” (*Autrement*, p. 264) does not invalidate the philosophical impossibility of subverting apophansis apophantically, since it equally applies to the constitution of any text as dialogic. Thus, Derrida's claim that through its dialogic constitution Levinas's philosophical discourse succeeds in interrupting itself “*at the very moment* when . . . the philosophical *récit* . . . pretends to reappropriate for itself the tear within the continuum of its texture” (“At this Very Moment,” p. 21; see also p. 27) is equally valid for non-philosophical modes of discourse.
  141. Derrida, “Violence et métaphysique,” p. 218.
  142. Derrida explains: “Predication is the first violence . . . . Both the verb ‘to be’ and the act of predication inform every verb and every common noun” (“Violence et métaphysique,” p. 218). Praying, for instance, is a mode of non-predicating speech, a “language of pure invocation,” since it consists in “dis-inter-est-ing oneself, setting oneself free from the unconditional attachment to Being” (Levinas, “De la prière sans demande,” p. 192, cited in Bernahard Casper, “La prière comme être voué à l'au-delà de l'essence” Greisch and Rolland, *Emmanuel Levinas*, pp. 259-271, 270).

143. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 22.
144. Russell, "On Denoting," p. 46.
145. I specifically refer to the Aristotelian strain of poetics, which in one way or another adheres to Aristotle's anti-Platonic conception of poetry as ontologically non-referential, hence non-apophantic ("On Interpretation," pp. 17a1-8). One need only think of Boccaccio's dictum that even if poets "do say in their works that there *are* gods . . . they neither believe nor assert it as a fact, but only as a myth or fiction" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's Genealogiae Deorum Gentilium in an English Version with Introductory Essay and Commentary* by Charles G. Osgood [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930], p. 65; my emphasis), and Sidney's famous paraphrase of this dictum, "the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" (*An Apology for Poetry*, p. 123). More recently, such authors as Frege ("Der Gedanke," pp. 346-347), Austin (*How to Do Things With Words*, pp. 22, 104), Searle, Kristeva, Genette (*Fiction and Diction*, p. 25), and Hof (*Das Spiel des 'unreliable narrator,'* pp. 1-76) have emphasized the pragmatic conceptualization of poetry as non-referential in the ontologically assertive sense. This does not mean that poetry relinquishes the referential function of language (which, according to Jakobson, it could not possibly do). Rather, it refers to the "world of the text" (Hof, *Das Spiel des 'unreliable narrator,'* p. 41) itself. See Derek Attridge, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics in Retrospect," Nigel Fann, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant, and Colin MacCabe eds., *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments Between Language and Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 17. I should stress that I am not attempting to objectively define "poetry"; I am solely interested in elaborating a productive framework for Levinas's specific understanding of poetry.
146. Attridge, "Introduction," pp. 2, 17; see also Attridge, "Closing Statement," p. 25.
147. Attridge, "Singularities, Responsibilities: Derrida, Deconstruction, and Literary Criticism," in Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch eds., *Critical Encounters*, p. 114.
148. Attridge rightly suggests that "[i]n a sense, the [poetic] *is* the ethical" ("Trusting the Other," p. 77). See also Levinas, *Sur Maurice Blanchot*, pp. 46-47.
149. See Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* II, pp. 14, 60; M. C. Taylor, p. 205. Incidentally, Hegel is—Derrida suggests—"the most accused in the trial conducted by *Totality and Infinity*" ("Violence et métaphysique," p. 125; see also Hutchens, "Infinition and Apophansis," p. 107).
150. Julia Kristeva, "Poésie et négativité." *Shmeiwitikh: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), p. 191.
151. Attridge, "Introduction," p. 16.
152. The "power" is "haunting" precisely because the "individual," which particularizes the "general" or "universal" and thus brings it "down to

- earth” is absent. Both Attridge and Kristeva implicitly point to the structural sublimity of poetry by discussing it in traditionally sublime terms (“haunting power” and “high altitude” [“tellement haut”], respectively); see esp. Burke’s sections on “power” and “vastness” (Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], pp. 59-65, 67-68) and Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), §28. The poetic interplay between the “singular” and the “universal” replicates the Kantian structure of the sublime as a dynamics involving imagination (singular) and reason (universal) (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §27). Ethics, too, may be described as sublime (see Mosès, “L’idée de l’infini en nous”).
153. This interruptive interplay radically differs from Heidegger’s harmonious “[d]ialogue between thinking and poetry” (Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1981), p. 7), in which “poetry” and “thinking” complement each other in the quest for Being (see also “Nachwort zu ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’”). Levinas’s most frequent quotations from poetry include passages from the *Thora*—Levinas explicitly qualifies biblical language as poetry (“La poésie et l’impossible,” p. 182)—and Dostoevsky’s works. In addition, Levinas quotes such poets as Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Vasily Grosman, Aleksandr Pushkin, Paul Valéry, and Paul Celan (see: “La réalité et son ombre,” p. 10; *Éthique* pp. 95, 97-98; “La signification et le sens,” pp. 127-128, 142-143; “La trace de l’autre,” p. 193; “La proximité de l’autre,” pp. 116-117; *Autrement*, pp. 156, 176, 228). Peperzak notes: “[B]esides the Bible . . . it was above all the great Russian poets and novelists Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, etc., read in the original language, that informed [Levinas’s] mind” (*To the Other*, p. 2; see also Hand, “Shadowing Ethics,” p. 63).
  154. See also *Éthique*, pp. 95-96; *Autrement*, p. 228; *To the Other*, p. 171.
  155. See *Autrement*, pp. 84, 109, 120, 124, 126; “La proximité de l’autre,” pp. 116-118; Isaiah 58: 7.
  156. See Eskin, “A Language Before Words.”
  157. Levinas notes: “Ce chapitre fut le germe du présent ouvrage [This chapter was the germ of the present work]” (*Autrement*, p. 156). Interestingly, Levinas did not use Celan’s verse as an epigraph to the original essay, “La substitution” (1968), which subsequently became the central chapter of *Autrement*.
  158. Hendrik Birus, “Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!: Einiges über Lessings Mottoverwendung und das Motto zum Nathan,” *Euphorion* 75 (1981), p. 386.
  159. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
  160. See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, §424-§427; Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, “System des transzendentalen Idealismus, *Ausgewählte Schriften I: 1794-1800*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 428;

Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, 9th ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1990), p. 9; Levinas "La trace de l'autre," p. 187; *Autrement*, pp. 67-72; Hutchens, "Infinition and Apophansis," p. 107.

161. In fact, Celan's poetry and poeology have already traced and thus disconcerted the philosophical discourse of *Autrement qu'être* long before the reference to "Lob der Ferne." When discussing the ontological character of art, Levinas uses the example of the cello, the being of which transpires and comes to the fore in its resounding: "The *Being* of the cello . . . temporalizes itself in the work of art" (*Autrement*, p. 71) before it, that is, in this instance, music, "reverts into notes—identities which arrange themselves according to scales . . . , from the acute to the grave" (*ibid.*). In view of Levinas's citation of the last three verses of Celan's poem "Cello-Einsatz [Cello Entry]" (*Gesammelte Werke*, II: p. 76)—included in French translation ("Irruption du violoncelle") in the volume *Strette*, which Levinas uses throughout "Paul Celan"—as a motto to "Paul Celan," the use of the cello example in *Autrement* in conjunction with the terms "acute" and "grave," which play a central ethico-poetic role in Celan's Büchner Prize Speech (*Gesammelte Werke*, III, p. 190), reveals itself as poetico-poetologically motivated. Similarly, the ethical concept of the "desire for the absolutely Other," who "does not fulfill it but hollows it out" (*Totalité*, pp. 22-23), is avowedly derived from Paul Valéry's verse "desire without default" from the poem "Cantiques des Colonnes" (Paul Valéry, *Poésies*. [Paris: Gallimard, 1942], p. 120) and is thus indeed structurally disrupted by the poetic (Levinas, "La signification et le sens," p. 143). Levinas's master concept of the visage is yet another case in point: in addition to its philosophical and semiotic underpinnings, it is a fortiori poetically motivated by way of Dostoevsky's emphasis on the ethical significance of the human visage in Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Moscow: Khdozhestvennaya literatura, 1972), book 6, and thus functions as a constant disruption of its own philosophical rigor. Regarding Levinas's implicit stipulation of continuity between the ethical and the linguistic, see Eskin, "A Language Before Words."