

**transcendence through
language: emmanuel levinas
and the philosophical
approach to ethics**

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1. BEYOND TOTALITY AND INFINITY

Following the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas published many articles in which he developed a new set of terms that receive their ultimate exposition in his 1974 *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. These terms intended to better describe the meaning of transcendence, ethics, the good, language, and the relation to the other—as Levinas makes clear was his concern throughout his work.¹

One of the very central questions left over from *Totality and Infinity*—or at least a question whose answer given there did not satisfy its author—is how the ethical relation works across language: How can one be in relation to the singular,

transcendent other without the other being reduced to phenomenality or the Same? While insisting that language constitutes the relation with the other and that the face, as pure *expression*, institutes language, Levinas also denied that the other is revealed in the content of language. The other has always already “quit the theme that encompassed him and upsurges inevitably behind the said”;² and, more radically, “language would consist in suppressing the other, in making the other accord with the same” (*TI*, 73). This is not just a problem of language, however, but of thought and experience as a whole. It is not clear how alterity can be revealed in experience without being divested of its alterity.³

After *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discovers that, in order to speak of a transcendent other that escapes immanence, he requires recourse to that which is beyond being or beings, beyond strictly phenomenological experience. Before the self becomes (self-)consciousness, before the advent of intentionality and comprehension, before the self can act autonomously as an ego or a subject, it has already been affected by alterity. “To not be able to enter into a theme [...], invisibility [or alterity... is due to] the excess of a signification that comes from beyond the signification that the being of beings makes shine.”⁴ It is by way of this *beyond-being* that the transcendent, ethical order affects the immanent ontological order without being reduced to the latter. Levinas explains the relation between a beyond-being and phenomenological existence by way of language. Language has two facets: the *Saying*, the ethical or transcendent dimension of language, and the *Said*, the ontological dimension.

The Said refers to the intelligible, signified content of language (that which is designated by a noun or described by a proposition). It also refers to the way in which the meaning of individual beings is dependent on their verbal resonance in being. Levinas understands such meaning to be beholden to the totality of the ontological order. By contrast, the *Saying*, the ethical dimension of language, is not captured in the representational, objective, or conceptual contents of linguistic expression. “Saying” does not refer to the proposition, nor to semantic or thematic content. Is the *Saying* perhaps a kind of speech act or a performative? This is sometimes claimed.⁵ However, already in his 1961 *Totality and Infinity*, transcendence or the ethical relation implied a radical separation of “language [in its ethical meaning] and activity,” as well as a radical separation between “[ethical] expression and work, in spite of the whole practical side of language” and its important ontological implications (*TI*, 205). That is, the spoken word itself, or the linguistic act, does not of itself always serve the ethical or transcendent moment of language. The spoken word “can express in the sense that implements,

clothing, and gestures express. In its way of articulating, by way of style, speech signifies as an activity and as a product [...]. From my speech-activity I absent myself, as I am missing from all my products" (TI, 182). That is, even if the ethical moment of language never passes without some kind of speech act or linguistic activity, it is not reducible to these.

The accounts given in *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* are different; and it is a matter of some debate how or whether the earlier and later accounts are compatible with one another.⁶ However, Levinas already insists in *Totality and Infinity* that the other cannot be contained in any discourse; so we are faced with a more pressing question: How is *any* description of the ethical relation adequate to the transcendent relation itself? How do philosophical descriptions relate at all to ethical responsibility, engagement, or accomplishment? How do ontology, critique, conceptuality, and so on, have any positive bearing on the transcendent relation and ethical responsibility, for Levinas, given the inability of intelligible language to touch on ethical meaning? Why study, read, write, discuss, and debate?⁷ Why does Levinas do so given the way he characterizes the philosophical tradition as ontology, egoism, vanity, and tragedy? The fact that the Saying cannot exactly be an action or a performative act redoubles the difficulty of how language in any practical sense is supposed to evoke or respond to ethical meaning.

In fact, there are two slightly different problems here that are often conflated. The first problem (to which Levinas' analyses are often reduced) is that the meaning of the Saying—the transcendent relation to the other—cannot be conveyed or communicated in ontological or conceptually-intelligible terms. It cannot be described. The second and more difficult problem is that ethical meaning, or the Saying, cannot be manifest in phenomenological experience at all. That is, not only can we not adequately describe the Saying or the transcendent other, we cannot adequately think about or experience these phenomenologically. In fact, when we see the complicity of the Said and phenomenological experience, we will see that the first problem is closely associated with the second problem. Being unable to express the other in language and being unable to experience alterity are reciprocal problems. Neglecting a careful analysis of Levinas' view of language has sometimes masked the ultimate problem that Levinas proposes. It is not simply that philosophy (which he tends conflate with ontology) is only somewhat ill-suited for describing transcendence. Rather, it is not clear how ethical meaning enters into experience at all. Moreover, his philosophical solutions to this problem raise as many questions as they answer.

This article will serve to outline Levinas' later approach to language and transcendence, especially in the way these culminate in a model of meaning explained in terms of the Saying and the Said. This will show why phenomenological experience tends to preclude otherness as well as the difficulty imposed when trying to approach ethics with philosophical tools. It will also show how problematic Levinas' own position is given that, in showing that philosophy is inherently inappropriate for approaching ethical meaning, he has recourse to philosophy. Various theoretical accounts of the Saying, as well as proposals for how one can practically evoke ethical meaning or assume one's responsibility, will be evaluated.

2. KERYGMATIC LANGUAGE AND PHENOMENA AS DISCOURSE: LA PAROLE-PENSANTE

Levinas takes up his arguments following *Totality and Infinity* in "Meaning and Sense" (1964). He begins the article by remarking the discrepancy between so-called objective givens, *la donnée*, on the one hand, and meaning or signification, on the other. For example, the rectangular, solid object that one encounters is not a 'book' because of anything given immediately in 'pure' sensible intuition. It is a book insofar as it carries one's "thought toward other data, still or already absent—toward the author that writes, the readers that read, the shelves that store," and so on.⁸ In this sense, intuited objects would not be given "in a Euclidean space in which they could be exposed, each on its own account, directly visible, signifying by itself" (*BPW*, 37). Intuition or perception are not, to begin with, a question of pure vision and spatiality. Rather the givens of intuition, perception, or consciousness, "require that the given first be placed in an illuminated horizon" (*BPW*, 36). I.e., phenomenological experience is not reducible to a simple empiricism or rationalism, conceived either in terms of geometric space or geometric reasoning. A given object or signification receives its meaning from a whole, from a horizon, or from what Levinas calls "totality."

Levinas explains this complicity of meaning, being, and totality by way of language. In all experience, he says, the multiplicity and disparate givens of sensible intuition are synchronized in a "Story," into theme and identity (*CPP*, 109). Experience is already the experience of things against a horizon by way of which they receive their identity. Intuition or the identification of the givens of experience, then, "does not consist in perceiving *this* or *that*, but in 'understanding,' in 'claiming' ["*prétendre*"] [...] *this as this* and *that as that*" (*ibid*). One does not see a rectangular

object. One sees a thing that is a book (as something authored, as something one can read, etc.), or a thing that might turn out not to be a book; but one never sees a 'pure' geometric shape stripped of any other significance. This *as* a book; that *as* not a book. "The formula 'something *as* something' is Heideggerian [...]. This understanding *as*... is the origin of consciousness qua consciousness. Every problem of the true and the false presupposes this *understanding* of meaning. Without it there would be no consciousness of something. It is a priori" (CPP, 111). Experience is structured to lend itself to claims and propositions that can be true and false. That is, phenomenological intuition, our basic way of experiencing the world, imposes *comprehension* as the most basic and most important means of relating to the world.

More strongly, however, this way of experiencing things phenomenologically does not just lend itself to propositions. Experience itself has a linguistic character. "This as that,' is not lived; it is said."⁹ "Narrative—and consequently verbal, linguistic—intentionality is essential to thought as much as thought is thematization and identification [...]. [I]dentification of the given in experience is a pure claim."¹⁰ Manifestation and intuition are themselves *discursive*. Sensible intuition already conforms to language: to nouns, terms, and predication. 'Things', if one can put it this way, are already experienced as the subjects and objects of propositions, affirmations, judgements, and questions. Levinas now calls this character of being and experience an *ideality* "set up by virtue of the *kerygmatic* word [*verbe kerygmaticque*]" (CPP, 111), where "the a priori-ness of the a priori is a *kerygma*, which is neither a form of imagination nor a form of perception" (ibid). Levinas' use of the term *kerygma* refers to its Greek root, 'to proclaim,' and indicates the complicity of language in phenomenological intuition. Levinas claims that "[t]he very exposition of being, its manifestation, essence qua essence and entities qua entities, are spoken" (OB, 37); and he therefore refers to the ensemble of *kerygmatic* language and its constitutive characteristics as "the thinking word [*parole pensante*]."¹¹ Word, thought, and being, are from the beginning complicit such that "the phenomenon itself is phenomenology." Experience is already beholden to the *logos*. "[T]he appearing of a phenomenon is already a discourse," already conforming to ideal thought and the *kerygmatic* word; and vice versa (OB, 104).

This *kerygmatic*-ideal identification of objects is not a simple psychological tendency to find patterns. Generalizations "do not have to be justified before any instance" (CPP, 112). Levinas is not talking about induction. Rather, experience itself is given as a kind of generalized ideality: "the exhibition that being involves

[...] proceeds from the *understanding*, the faculty of understanding a priori *this as this* or *as that*" (ibid). The first appearance of a thing already appears implicitly as something to be judged as true or false, as truly this or that. Levinas also refers to this structure as the *déjà-dit*, the already-said, the fact that everything fits into a 'system' or 'structure' of *kerygmatic* language (OB, 36).

This experience in terms of the *fable* or *story*, this fabulous character of the "mysterious schematism of an already said, an antecedent *doxa*," by which everything finds its place in the structure of language, is itself the condition of "every relationship between the universal and the individual" (OB, 35). To say that everything is arranged into identities, into ideal accounts, already into relations between the universal and the individual, is only to say again that the particular is already derivative of the totality, of *kerygmatic* language and the already-said. The book is understood in terms of the totality of meanings into which it fits; and it is understood *as a book*, as a thing of the ideal type, 'book'. "[N]othing real, however rigorously individuated it be, could appear outside of ideality and universality" (CPP, 115). "Thought can therefore reach the individual only through the detour of the universal"—through the *a priori* structure of *kerygmatic* language and intuition. "For philosophy as a discourse, the universal precedes the individual; it is, in every sense of the term, a priori" (CPP, 113).

This claim is important for showing that the difference between ontology and ethics, for Levinas, cannot simply be a spontaneous choice to 'speak ethically' instead of 'ontologically'. Phenomenological experience *is* ontological. Language and sensible intuition themselves tend toward ontology and a universality that effaces singularity.¹² And since manifestation is already a question of judgement or proposition, of the *kerygmatic* nature of language and thought, *the manifestation of beings is already implicated in doxic, kerygmatic language that cannot present any singular meaning*. The other cannot appear in experience without being reduced to the sameness or 'universality' of being, and nor can any other entity.

Levinas does not intend to peek behind phenomenality in order to find a 'truer' reality or a truer entity. From a philosophical perspective, "the authority of intuition rests on this *as*, on this meaning behind which one cannot reasonably seek anything further" (CPP, 110). To seek a 'truer' being would only amount to a more comprehensive ontology which would present the same ethical problems. His own project of a "reduction" from the phenomenological to the ethical, "the going back to the hither side of being, to the hither side of the Said [...]" could nowise mean a rectification of one ontology by another, the passage from some

apparent world to a more real world.”¹³ At the same time, this description of being and experience on behalf of Western thought neither decisively proves nor disproves the validity of transcendent meaning and the personal, ethical order that Levinas had argued for since the late 1940s.

3. BEING AND BEINGS: APOPHANSIS, AMPHIBOLOGY, AND THE VERBALITY OF BEING

How to approach transcendence, then? Any recourse to beings will imply universality. Particularity, both in language and in sensible or phenomenological intuition, passes through the universal and suppresses alterity or singularity. Discourse belongs to an already-said. Could *being* itself, then, present another possibility? Is there an ‘experience’ of or relation to being that constitutes transcendence? To ask about this requires some account of the “verbal” aspect of being: not the nominalization of entities and their identification, but the way in which such the intuition of phenomena is made possible through the essence of being.

Levinas proposes an analysis of the verbal or temporal character of being. The “temporalization of time—the openness by which sensation manifests,” it is true, “is not an event, nor an action, nor the effect of a cause. It is the verb *to be*” (OB, 34). That is, the *being* of entities, their duration or temporality, being itself, is not *a* being. It is not the referent of a noun (as are entities within being). The being of beings is verballity. This verb “understood as a noun designating an event” would make the verballity—or the temporality—of being seem like an ‘event,’ like a kind of thing; but strictly speaking, an “event” that could be designated with a word or a noun rather *presupposes* this verballity of being (ibid). However, beyond the way in which a verb might stand for the name of an event or an action, “[l]anguage issued from the verbalness of a verb [does not] only consist in making being understood, but also in making its essence vibrate” (OB, 35). Language is not only a system of signs then, even if it always goes along with one. The doxic or *kerygmatic* character of language has its origin in the verballity of being which allows substantives to resonate verbally, to resonate in time. “Language would rather be an excrescence of the verb” (ibid). So the verballity of being at first glance appears to make possible a different kind of meaning from the *kerygmatic* language and phenomenality seen until now. How, then, are the nominal and verbal aspects of language and being different, and how are they related?

Levinas shows the intimate relation between the nominal and the verbal, or between beings and being, by example of tautological predication. To say A, to suppose that A has an identity, is equivalent to saying that “A is A.” It already implies the essentially verbal nature of being. To refer to “red,” to say that “red is red,” is to put an identity into a proposition, to show that red is and *does* something. Red *is* red, or red *reds*. To put the substantive in a tautological proposition draws out the inherently verbal aspect of entities or phenomena. ‘Red’ is not an ‘inert’ substance (whatever that would mean), but it ‘resonates’ with the verblity and temporality of being. It flows through language and time. The identity or name—the noun—is of itself tied to the copula, and thus immediately tied to the verb and the verblity of being within which the noun resonates. “[I]n the predicative proposition”—and irreducible to a nominative or substantive—the verb is “the very resonance of being understood as being. Temporalization resounds as *essence* in the apophansis” (OB, 40). *Apophansis* refers to apophantic propositions which support substantives and verbs. The verblity of being resonates in the proposition in which a substantive already naturally finds itself. Contrary to his thesis in “Is Ontology Fundamental?” from 1951, there is no *étant*, no simple entity, being, or identity, without *être*, without being itself. There is no name without the verbal resonance of being. Being and beings are complicit. Identities are already tautologies implying essence or the verblity of being. ‘Red’ as a noun already implies *essence*, the verblity (or temporality) of *being*.

At the same time, this analysis of substantives, propositions and the *essence* of being, Levinas thinks, shows again that the particular in phenomenological intuition is always understood according to the universal. “The very individuality of the individual is a way of being. Socrates socratizes, or Socrates is Socrates, is the *way* Socrates is” (OB, 41). Socrates does not appear as a singular person, but as an entity beholden to being or essence, ready to be comprehended as an identity, ready to fit into the already-said and *kerygmatic* language.

This elision works in the other direction, too: Just as beings are always implicated in being, so is being, in its verblity, itself implicated with beings. Levinas demonstrates this with the use of the proposition—where the substantive (noun or identity) and its ‘verbalization’ are already complicit. He ties this apophansis to the *amphibology* of being. The amphibology refers to the difference between being and beings, but also to their intimate relationship; and there is likewise a certain ambiguity or amphibology between verb and name, verb and noun: “[T]he logos is knotted into the amphibology in which being and entities can be understood and identified, in which a noun can resound as a verb and a verb of an apophansis

can be nominalized” (OB, 42). Just as the identity or substantive, cast in the proposition, allowed the verblity of being to be heard (“Red is red,” “Red reds”), the verb also converts back into an identity or a substantive. “There does not exist a verb that is refractory to nominalization” (OB, 42). One can nominalize an action, event, or temporal movement. Even the verblity of being itself returns to the nominalization of the *kerygma*. “[T]o be, the verb par excellence in which *essence* resounds, is exposed, is nominalized, becomes a word designating and consecrating identities [...]. The verb *to be* [...] practically becomes a structure, is thematized and shows itself like an entity. Phenomenality, *essence*, becomes a phenomenon, is fixed, assembled in a story, is synchronized, presented, lends itself to the noun, receives a title” (ibid). That is, being can be treated like *a* being. The verblity of being, because of the very workings of being itself, is fixed as *a* being, just as phenomena are fixed as identities in *kerygmatic* language. “Fundamental ontology itself, which denounces the confusion between Being and entities, speaks of Being as an identified entity. And the mutation is ambivalent, every nameable identity can turn into a verb” (OB, 42–3).

Levinas spends this time on the details of ontology and language in order to show that if a reference to beings and entities—apart from the *being of* entities—does not suffice for transcendence, then the mutual implication of being and beings in the amphibology, or in the apophantic proposition, will not offer different possibilities with respect to transcendence.¹⁴

The verblity of being—the way in which entities fit into *propositions*, and the way that experience is structured in terms of these claims or propositions—does not immediately seem to support a transcendent relation. Within ontological language and phenomenal experience, nothing can simply appear as and for itself. There is no singularity since everything receives its meaning from ontological structures. Now Levinas can properly ask: Is this verblity of being the only signification of language? Does the verblity of being necessarily render all meaning ideal, universal, or totalistic? Is a confrontation with alterity possible in some other kind of language and experience? This possibility would require a meaning beyond being and beings. The relation with alterity will have to obtain “beyond the Logos, being and non-being; beyond essence, true and non-true” (ibid). The *Saying*, the special verblity or language that is *not* a correlate of essence, will thus be neither a more authentic entity nor a truer approach to being, but will be otherwise than being and beings.

4. SENSIBILITY, PROXIMITY, AND THE SUPERLATIVE PAST OF PASSIVITY

In Levinas' new attempts to address this question of a beyond-being, he brings language and sensibility much closer together than he had in earlier accounts. In order to understand the idiosyncrasies of Levinas' conception of language, it is necessary to take a short detour through his conception of sensibility and the way it relates to language. This is used to begin to explain how language is in fact an original 'exposure' or 'exposition' to the other.

Sensation, we saw, *can* play into sensible *intuition* (or the phenomenal), into the intentional act for which "sensibility is already subordinated to the disclosure of being" (CPP, 116). Sensation can signify as discovery and experience within being, a "possibility that is at the origin of ontology's claim to be absolute" (CPP, 117, n. 8). But Levinas maintains that there is an "immediacy of the sensible," that constitutes an "event of proximity and not of knowledge" (and thus not of sensible *intuition*), an event beyond ontology or phenomenology (CPP, 116). What Levinas is looking for is a meaning of sensation 'before' it is enmeshed in the unveiling of being and entities, 'before' the amphibology of being and beings, 'before' *kerygmatic* language. Levinas calls this non-ontological dimension of sensation *proximity*.

This possibility of a non-ideal sensation, then, will go along with the possibility of language otherwise than as doxic, *kerygmatic*, and apophantic. "One must then admit that there is in speech [*discours*] a relationship with a singularity located outside of the theme of speech and which is not thematized by speech, but is approached. Speech and its logical work would then unfold not in knowledge of the interlocutor, but in his proximity" (CPP, 115). And this language, this approach or proximity otherwise than as perception or sensible intuition, is also called "contact": "Whatever be the message transmitted by speech [*le discours*], speaking [*le parler*] is contact" (ibid). *Approach, proximity, contact*, and even *caress* serve as a constellation of terms indicating a relation to the other (who Levinas now often refers to as the neighbor [*le prochain*]). This relation precedes the *kerygmatic* narration or story of consciousness, precedes phenomena and beings given in the light of being. These terms refer to the subject as a "subjectivity that enters *into contact* with a singularity—excluding identification in the ideal, excluding thematization and representation—with an absolute singularity that is as such *unrepresentable*" (CPP, 116. Emphasis added). Through this notion of proximity, Levinas tries to bring language, sensation, and ethics together into a transcendent relation: "The precise point at which this mutation of the intentional into the ethical occurs, and occurs continually, at which the approach *breaks through* consciousness, is the human skin and face. Contact is tenderness

and responsibility” (ibid). Levinas tries to find a relation with alterity through sensibility or proximity, apart from the way in which it would be recounted or comprehended in phenomenal intuition.

Levinas identifies a kind of ‘absence’ in proximity or in one’s ‘contact’ with the neighbor; and he uses a temporal metaphor to explain how the other has already affected the self ‘before’ any present experience. “[P]roximity [is] an anachronous presence to consciousness: consciousness is always late for the rendez-vous with the neighbor” (CPP, 119). Levinas also describes contact or proximity as occurring in an “immemorable past that has not crossed the present” (OB, 58). This is how he describes an experience that is not had in terms of being and beings, verbs and nouns. It is an experience outside of representation and presence. “Thus the neighbor is not a phenomenon, and his presence does not resolve into representation and appearing. [The neighbor’s presence] is ordered out of the *absence in which the infinite approaches*, out of its *null site [Non-Lieu]*; it is ordered in *the trace of its own departure*” (CPP, 121). That is, the always-already-absent other is ‘experienced’ through a certain absence. The other ‘appears’ in experience insofar as he or she is perpetually absent.

The “anachronous presence,” or the “immemorable past” cannot refer to a point further and further back in time—which is always recuperable by retention or memory. A moment further back in time would be assimilated to the same structures of ontological meaning or the Said discussed earlier. (In that case the other would not be “the first-come—he would be an old acquaintance.”)¹⁵ This ‘deep past’ rather refers to a past that, with respect to ontological temporality or verbiage, was *never present*, is not a noun or identity. Levinas refers to a ‘temporality’ that by all phenomenological notions is not a temporality at all and not a moment of being, but which conditions the subsequent flow of time. This anarchic past is less a ‘real’ past than that which *orients* synchronic or ontological time toward the transcendent. Because sensibility—not first of things, but as a pure exposure to alterity—derives from proximity to the singular other beyond being, proximity is not “‘experience of proximity’ [...] not knowledge that the subject has of an object. Nor is it the representation of the spatial environment, nor even the ‘objective’ fact of this spatial environment observable by a third party or deduced by me” (OB, 76). Proximity is the passive exposure to the other. The other is ‘experienced’ before the self can actively seize this experience as one of the self’s own possibilities. It is here that the ethical demand—for which the self is always too late to respond—is foisted upon the self. The “without-beginning of anarchy,” of the deep past of proximity, has its counterpart in the unending

patience required for the “without-end of obligation” (OB, 142).

So Levinas claims that we do have a special sort of ‘experience’ of the other. It is an ‘experience’ that somehow precedes phenomenological experience. It takes place beyond being and beings, but it somehow leaves a trace in our phenomenological experience such that we have at least some inkling of an absence or of alterity.

How does this sensibility or proximity relate to language and ethics? Recall that for Levinas, even in the ontological domain, sensible intuition was already bound up with phenomenology. The same is true in the case of ethics or transcendence, where the original, immediate exposure to the other takes on both the modalities of sensibility and language discussed here. Saying and proximity—the linguistic and the sensible—are different expressions of the same transcendent relation. “On the hither side of the ambiguity of being and entities”—that is, *before* the Said, or *kerygmatic*, or ontological language—“the Saying uncovers the one that speaks, not as an object disclosed by theory, but in [...] being exposed [*s’exposant*] to outrage and injury. But the Saying is a denuding of the denuding, a giving a sign of its very signifyingness [*donnant signe de sa signifiante même*], an expression of exposure [*expression de l’exposition*]” (OB, 49). The origin of language, what Levinas now calls the Saying, or the subject as Saying, is “affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity, an irrecuperable time [...] an exposedness always to be further exposed, an exposure to expressing, and thus to Saying, and thus to Giving” (OB, 50. See also *ibid.*, 69). That is, the Saying and proximity—the linguistic and the sensible—are different expressions of the same transcendent relation, the same immediate exposure to alterity and the ethical demand, which cannot be limited to a term or understood in ontological terms. Ultimately, the difference between language and sensibility becomes blurred. Proximity, sensibility, exposure, nudity, and the Saying are already one’s being-in-communication-with-the-other, what Levinas calls in passing the “Saying-contact [*dire-contact*].”⁶ Apart from any complicity in being, the Saying is language, but also a sensible exposure to the other. Neither language in its purely ethical dimension, nor the sensibility that Levinas refers to here, can derive its meaning from, or be reducible to, a phenomenological experience or ontological meaning. As opposed to the Said of *kerygmatic* language—always complicit in sensible intuition—Levinas describes this sensible-linguistic exposure to the other as the *dire*, the Saying.

5. THE SAYING AS PRE-LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION: THE SELF AS A SIGN

Levinas has shown the complicity of being and beings, the way being and beings elide into one another, by way of the *logos* or the copula (and apophantic discourse) that allows the verblatity of being and the substantive to blur. He has also shown how phenomenal manifestation is given in the already-said, or given within the *a priori* structures of *kerygmatic* language that only encounter identities under the aegis of essence. This ontological reality implies several consequences.

To begin with, having demonstrated the complicity of *kerygmatic* language and conscious thought (in the *parole pensante*, the thinking word), it is clear that one cannot attain transcendence through an abandonment of language. "It is then not enough to suppress spoken discourse and abandon oneself to duration in order to reach pure singularity. The thought behind speech retains the structure of discourse if it is to remain a consciousness" (*CPP*, 114). The silent thought accompanying any act is itself of the ontological order, already complicit in language as *logos* or discourse, or as *kerygmatic* language. One is in a body, in the world, exposed, manifest, but thereby already constrained to language and thought in their ontological significations.

Levinas' question is whether *kerygmatic* language or the *Said* thereby exhausts meaning, or whether there is a non-ontological, non-phenomenological meaning of experience, i.e., a transcendent meaning that escapes the tragedy and vanity of this ontological regime.¹⁷ Levinas approaches this problem again in terms of language or communication. Even putting aside the question of ethics and transcendence for a moment: With respect to being and the ontological question, why are subjects interiorized and then made to communicate? Why and how are self and other separated such that language becomes possible and necessary?

A few considerations will help demonstrate Levinas' response to this question. From an ontological perspective, the self's intelligence and linguistic ability appears to play some role in the unveiling or deployment of being itself; but at the same time, ontological meaning seems to suppress the singular self and other needed for language to be possible. The ontological regime of meaning works to efface the separate or singular interlocutors that would have an interior or singular meaning apart from the totality of being. "The thinking subject [...] is interpreted [...] as a detour that being's *essence* borrows in order to be arranged and thus to truly appear" (*OB*, 134). That is, the ego or self-consciousness—who seems to be required for being itself—appears as an anomaly within being, since the intelligibility of being and beings tends to subsume unique, separate interlocutors. Being serves to "absorb the subject to which the essence is entrusted," which is

to say that being absorbs (or dissolves) the distinct, *separate* terms—the self and the other—that are requisite for communication or verblity (ibid). It is from this self-coincidence of being—its tendency to arrange all meaning into a totality or into ideal structures—that ontology “claims, paradoxically”—or, as Levinas really believes, *falsely*—“to derive communication” (OB, 118–9).

For Levinas, however, it will not be possible to explain everything from “the same side, the side of being” (ibid). Communication—the *Saying as opposed to the Said*, the interpersonal or transcendent dimension of language—must be explained from “the relationship with the other,” on which is founded “communication and transcendence, and not always another way of seeking certainty, or the coincidence with oneself” (OB, 118). Whatever “its function that consists in remaining in correlation with the Said, in thematizing the Said, and in opening being onto itself,” the meaning of this verblity or the Saying is not exhausted in such a role (OB, 46). There must be instead “an extreme passivity of the Saying behind the Saying that becomes a simple *correlative* of the Said—the passivity of exposure” (OB, 189, n. 25). There must be a Saying that signifies ethically, as a relation to the other. A Saying that has a meaning apart from the exposure of beings, themes, and the theoretical and practical dimensions of ontology; and thus communication ultimately requires an account of language that has recourse to transcendence or the *Saying*, and not to the Said of being. Note that, when Levinas refers here to a “Saying behind the Saying,” *Saying* thus signifies ambiguously. Sometimes Levinas uses *Saying* to refer to the verbal-ontological *correlate* of the *Said* (the verblity of being as opposed to beings); while more often he uses the word in its ultimate signification, in its ethical meaning that is radically transcendent with respect to being and beings, a meaning that presupposes separation and transcendence rather than the totality of being or essence. The equivocation of this word *Saying* highlights the difficulty that, here as in all of his past work, one will have to confront: namely, the difficulty of establishing the relationship between ethics and ontology, and how one can escape ontological meaning.

Language is not only the verblity of being understood in purely ontological terms, then. “Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication” understood in the sense of *kerygmatic* or apophantic language (OB, 48). There is a verblity, a Saying, that does not reduce to the Said, does not exhaust itself in the furnishing of identities that play out in the peregrinations of a neutral, omnipresent being. The “detours” through the self and the other are not redundant to meaning. Prior to the Said there is a Saying, the original inspiration or impetus for communication. Nothing in the conceptions of phenomenology or

ontology alone explains the radical divide between interiority and exteriority—and all the more so the divide between Same and other—that makes language possible. As in *Totality and Infinity*, this requires a genuine exposure, which presupposes a fundamental separation or transcendence.

To summarize: Levinas claims that the very fact of language presupposes a radical separation. Ontological meaning, which derives the meaning of entities from being and from a totality, serves to efface self and other and the radical separation between them. Thus Levinas claims that there must be a Saying, a transcendent relation, that ultimately explains language; and as opposed to an ontological meaning, this relation will have an ethical meaning. However, he has still not shown in great detail how this works.

Although language serves the ends of *kerygmatic* exposition and manifestation, this ontological regime is at the same time “forgetful of [... the] exposure to the other” that makes meaning possible (OB, 78). “It is not ontology that raises up the speaking subject [...] it is, on the contrary, the signifyingness of Saying, going beyond essence gathered together in the Said, that can justify the exposedness of being or ontology” (OB, 37–8). Apophansis or proposition is still proposal *to the other*, exposition and exposure to the other. It is for this reason that Levinas claims: “The predicative statement [...] stands on the frontier of a de-thematization of the Said, and can be understood as a modality of approach and contact [...]. [T]he *apophansis* signifies as a modality of the approach to the other. It refers to a Saying on the hither side of the amphibology of being and entities” (OB, 47). This is one way in which Levinas explains how the ‘deep past’ of the Saying leaves a trace in, or affects, the present. Every Said is ‘carried’ by a Saying, which is at work in all language. “[E]ven the philosopher,” says Levinas, “remains a subjectivity obsessed by the neighbor.”¹⁸ The ontologist does not carry out research outside of the original exposure to the other. The other remains the condition for this research. (This also shows in the most straightforward way why no project for Levinas could be strictly descriptive or theoretical. All of our endeavors are accompanied by an ethical demand, whether we choose to recognize this or not.)

Levinas tries again to describe the Saying. In this ethical exposure, one is made *a sign of one’s own responsibility*. “The subject of the Saying does not give signs”—it does not fit into the kind of signification that Levinas already rejected in *Totality and Infinity*, but rather—“it becomes a sign” (OB, 49); where this pure exposure to the other, before words or dialogue, is “pure obedience” or what Levinas refers to as the “*me voici*,” the *here I am*. This is not an autonomous presentation of

self, but a passive exposure (OB, 145). Ethical language is not something one uses like an instrument; it is a kind of modality of ‘existence’—though beyond phenomenological or ontological existence—of the ethical self. In that sense, as Levinas says, “Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication,” which is to say a condition of all the ontological dimensions of language (OB, 48). The Saying is itself the original assignation to responsibility. One is affected by the other and ‘incurs’ responsibility *en deçà de l’être*, on this side of being. For Levinas, this responsibility makes being and the ego possible since it explains the original transcendence—the real separation—that puts the concealment and unveiling of being into motion: The Saying is the original possibility of the *verbality* of being. Thus everything that concerns being and beings is already in some way oriented by the Saying. The Saying constitutes the origin of meaning and signification, the transcendence that Levinas had long sought.

Importantly, then, the notion of Saying or language that would explain the basic fact of communication does not correspond to the scenario in which thought-contents are translated into verbal speech (or writing) and then transmitted to another who is then also able to think them as well. Thought, speech, writing, and other signs (substantives, verbs, etc.), Levinas is clear, belong to the order of being. The responsible self, in its Saying, *is* this exposure to the other. The self does not only communicate through speech and language; the self is him- or herself ‘communicativeness’. Saying is a “*prise dans la fraternité*,” the being-caught in fraternity before any conscious choice or explicit use of what we would normally consider language. The self “signifies in signifying itself [*signifie en se signifiant*]” (OB, 83). The self, the “I involved in saying in the first person, absolutely unconvertible into a noun [...]. [The I is] a sign given of this giving of signs, exposure of oneself to the other” (OB, 56). In this way the self does not first give or use linguistic signs but, as Levinas says, makes itself a sign, or is made a sign. That is, it is assigned or it is significant in being delivered over to the other as responsible. In fact, this model of being-oneself-a-sign-for-the-other, or being already exposed to the other (before the possibility of signs as ‘external’ indicators), is again not so different from the schema drawn up in *Totality and Infinity*: “[I]t is not the mediation of the sign that makes signification,” he said there, “but signification (whose primordial event is the face-to-face) that makes the function of the sign possible” (TI, 206). There is a ‘pre-linguistic,’ pre-ontological, pre-phenomenological exposure to the other that properly deserves the name *language* as the basic relation between self and other.¹⁹ What is more radical than before is the way in which Levinas explicitly associates all the concrete forms of language (*kerygma*, propositions, signs) with sensible intuition such that all concrete modes

of language are complicit in being and phenomenological experience. At the same time they represent possible modes of transcendence, since the very verballity of being itself bears the trace of a Saying that does not reduce to *kerygmatic* language in either its verbal (essential) or nominative dimensions. The Saying cuts across all particular forms of language in the broadest sense, including its physiological or phenomenological aspects. The Saying is a question of the linguistic and the bodily, as is the Said in its own way; and as has become clear, the Saying is neither a theoretical intelligible nor a practical *act* in any way that could be reduced to an ontological moment (as autonomous action, for Levinas, always does). We will also see the problems that this represents when we intend to make use of Levinas' work to inform a philosophical ethics.

6. THE SAID AND PHILOSOPHY

The difficulty, already caught sight of in *Totality and Infinity* and earlier but finally elaborated in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* is that all language at our disposal—the kind of language we can *actively* dispose of, all language insofar as it adheres to being and is able to form propositions and judgements—is beholden to the Said, denies alterity, and has the pretension of being the origin of its own meaning. Levinas in fact says that this is the natural order of things: “It is not by chance, through foolishness or through usurpation that the order of truth and essence, which the present exposition itself claims to hold to, is at the first rank in Western philosophy” (OB, 156–7). But he nevertheless asks: “Why knowing? Why is there a problem? Why philosophy?” (OB, 157). Why the preponderance of philosophy in Western thought, in Levinas' exposé, and in the order of being itself?

Manifestation requires the Said. It requires being. “The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands” (OB, 6). We saw Levinas' sincere claim that there is no peeking behind phenomena and the world to try to find a truer world. The world of being—the objective world, the intelligible world—is the common world that we all share, the world that unites us; and it is the only world. Nothing exists outside of existence. Thus, importantly, “[t]he way of thinking proposed here does not consist in failing to recognize being, nor in treating it disdainfully, with a ridiculous pretension, as the defaulting of an order.”²⁰ Manifestation is necessary, and it is only because of ontology and ontological language that one can intelligibly discuss or think about the Saying and ethical signification. True, in expressing the Saying in the Said, in universal or *kerygmatic*

language, one betrays the ethical nature of it and gives it over to the ontological regime. One effaces the very transcendence, singularity, and separation needed for meaning. But, Levinas maintains, these are never effaced without a trace of the Saying left in the Said. The fact that the Saying or ethical signification is betrayed in manifestation is just part of how being and ontological-phenomenological meaning function. Thus this betrayal is not just a choice that one could avoid. The “betrayal at the price of which everything shows itself,” makes possible the very, “indiscretion with regard to the unsayable,” or its manifestation; where making manifest, even by a betrayal, “is probably the very task of philosophy.”²¹ Through philosophical language, one can apparently “go back” to the Saying, “starting from the trace retained by the Said in which everything shows itself” (OB, 53). That is, philosophy—through the Said that covers over the Saying—can constantly try to bring itself back to that which always escapes philosophy and escapes being; and one can assume that this is what Levinas attempts in his work. “In an alternating movement [...] philosophy justifies and criticizes the laws of Being” (ibid). It is the work of philosophy, through the Said or *kerygmatic* language, to critique reductive ontological meaning insofar as it covers over ethical responsibility, even as philosophy tacitly justifies the structures of being by making use ontological meaning (as does all language in a general way).²²

Levinas has several metaphors to describe how some kind of philosophical work can bring the Said back to the signification of the Saying. He describes the Said—necessary for being and the manifestation of the Saying, but which betrays it in conveying it—as “the element that bears the embarkation [and as] also the element that submerges it and threatens to sink it” (OB, 181). Or to use another metaphor, the *logos* or *kerygmatic* language of the Said has the pretension of rendering all meaning within one, ubiquitous and universal discourse. “The *logos said* has the last word, dominating all meaning [...]. Nothing can interrupt it. Every contestation and interruption of this power of discourse is at once related and inverted [*invertie*] by discourse. It thus recommences as soon as one interrupts it [...]. [And even in] relating the interruption of the discourse [...] I retie the thread.”²³ That is, if one believes that the Saying leaves a trace in the Said, interrupts the *logos* of *kerygmatic* language, it is still the case that this interruption itself can only be expressed or represented in the Said—and thus the interruption is denied. The Said again prevails as the only contender for meaning. On the other hand, the Said *is interrupted*. The expansive, unreserved coherence of the *logos*, is interrupted “by silences, failure or delirium,” (or by a skeptical refusal of the *logos*), and one can always ask: “does not the discourse that suppresses the interruptions of discourse by relating them maintain the discontinuity under the knots with which the

thread is tied again?” (OB, 170). Is there not always a trace of this pre-ontological transcendence? Does the fact of *needing to retie* the thread of the logos show that the Saying has interrupted it? Levinas associates this gesture, the following of the trace from the Said to the Saying, with the *epochè* or phenomenological reduction whereby one steps back from the natural dogmatic attitude to see the ‘hidden horizons’ from which a signification arrives. “The movement back to the Saying is the phenomenological Reduction in which the indescribable is described” (OB, 53). The philosophical language that reduces the Said back to the Saying, the language that, in Levinas’ own discourse is apparently able to bring the Said back to the signification of the Saying through some kind of linguistic operation, is this “reduction that is then an incessant unsaid of the Said, [a reduction] to the Saying always betrayed by the Said” (OB, 181). More ‘practically’, one must assume, this happens by retracting one’s speech, by ‘unsaying’ the inevitable betrayal one commits in attempting to retrace the Saying, or by pulling back one’s ontological activity to reorient oneself to the other and to one’s ethical obligations. It is this that Levinas thinks ultimately explains the philosophical task. This is presumably the real possibility of the veiling and unveiling of being: “Truth of what does not enter into a theme, it is produced out of time or in two times without entering into either of them, as an endless critique [...] which in a spiralling movement makes possible the boldness of philosophy, destroying the conjunction into which its Saying and its Said continually enter” (OB, 44).

Levinas in fact uses this “inevitably successive character of all research,” of philosophical work—the critique and critique of critique—to explain why his terms change over the course of his work even though his concern from the beginning has only been transcendence and the Good. Terms become ossified in the Said and one attempts to critique them to get at the Saying that precedes all signs.²⁴ In some way, this shows the superfluity of the debates surrounding the differences between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the conceptual contents of which could never be more than an inadequate betrayal of the Saying. But it makes more difficult an explanation of what positively philosophy is intended to accomplish and how it relates to ethics and transcendence.

In any case, Levinas is sincere, it seems, in his claim that the spirit of philosophical critique—the search for a true (exterior) reality and the renunciation of dogmatism and idolatry—in fact lives by ethical meaning and in a way is part of it.²⁵ Paradoxically, the ethical moment can only be *manifested* in the ontological realm, and yet ontology serves to efface the ethical even as it makes it intelligible.

The paradox of this situation is precisely the difficulty of an *otherwise than being*. Alterity as alterity can never be experienced, and yet it is somehow attested to in experience; and some kind of philosophical engagement, Levinas says, allows us to evoke this ethical meaning.

It should be recalled that this is not simply a question of whether we can adequately describe or represent the Saying. The Saying is not only not a theoretical content, and nor can it be a simple practice among others. It cannot be speech as opposed to writing, nor writing as opposed to speech, nor utterance as opposed to content.²⁶ The *kerygma*, the *parole-pensante*, is co-extensive with phenomenal intuition, experience, and consciousness. Thus any action *qua* action, any event that can be nominalized (insofar as it can be nominalized)—is not of itself the Saying. If the Saying necessarily passes through some kind of speech or linguistic act, it is nonetheless not simply identifiable with either of these as phenomenal events, since these, of themselves, always reduce to the Said.²⁷

But if the *Said* arrives at inevitable failure, if ontological meaning betrays ethical meaning, we can ask why we ought to bother with Levinasian ethical philosophy or any other philosophy of ethics. Many people—choosing to face their responsibility, or not—happily make do without philosophy understood as an academic discipline. Levinas even gives a little glimmer of a suggestion that the Saying, purified of the Said, is not a philosophical gesture, but a *polite* gesture. “Sincerity would then be Saying without a Said, apparently a ‘speaking for the sake of it’, a sign I make to another of this giving of signs, ‘as simple as hello.’” This polite gesture would be only a “recognition of the debt” that one has accrued in the Saying (*OB*, 143). But why bother with the superfluous meanderings of philosophy and questions of metaphysics if politeness suffices, if the Saying is a rigorously non-intellectual thought? At least part of the reason that plain politeness does not suffice in the absence of philosophy is that one cannot really escape philosophy. Philosophy—phenomenology and ontology—serves to clarify, but also engage and, in a certain sense, ‘amplify’, being.²⁸

Levinas’ point is well taken: a polite gesture has little semantic or *kerygmatic* content. It is not really a proposition or affirmation, nor even a question, but a salutation. However, already the words used to express such a gesture are part of a totality of meaning, form part of an economy of being and part of the phenomenological world that has to be navigated critically. Moreover, language and sensible intuition are complicit. Whether and how a gesture is polite is already a question of philosophy from the moment it crosses the threshold of experience

and thought.

But if this is the case, “philosophy” is at best a double-edged sword; or otherwise it has two radically different modes which reflect the alternation between the Saying and the Said. “The history of Western philosophy has not been the refutation of skepticism as much as the refutation of transcendence,” the refutation of the transcendent relation between self and other that makes ethical meaning or the Saying possible.²⁹ But at the same time, philosophy, “at its highest, exceptional, hours stated the beyond of being and the *one*”—the self in its assignation to the other—“distinct from *being*” (OB, 178). The question is how to distinguish these, how to know when or how philosophical work and thought is being directed toward ethics and the evocation of the Saying, and when it is particularly tending away from these.³⁰

7. PROPHECY AND COMMAND

Given that the Saying or the affectation of the self by the other ‘occurs’ in a past that was never present, how does it ever affect one in the present and allow one to respond? Or how does one evoke or produce ethical meaning in the language of the Said and in being? If the call to responsibility is issued in such a past that was never present, how can such a call ever reach the self in the present in the clear form of a phenomenal event? Where is the event whereby the self passively comes into relation with the other, and which then evokes the Saying? And if this never happens, how is ethics or the Saying not just a “transcendental illusion”? Levinas’ answer is that, in a way, the self hears the call of the other in the self’s own *response*. “The unheard-of saying is enigmatically in the an-archic response” (OB, 149). The self has “obeyed before hearing the order” (OB, 113). In this sense, the appeal of the other “becomes present only in my own voice, already obedient in the harsh present of offerings and gifts” (OB, 140). This ‘hearing the other through one’s own voice’ Levinas calls *prophecy*. Prophecy is “the fact that [...] the appeal is heard in the response [...]. [T]he ‘epiphany’ comes in the Saying of him that received it” (OB, 149).

Thus, it is in responding to one’s obligation that one *recognizes that one is obligated*. Phrased another way, Levinas says: The “infinite [...] orders me by my own voice. The command is stated by the mouth of him it commands” (OB, 147). In fact, Levinas had already formulated prophecy in a similar way in *Totality and Infinity*. To have the idea of infinity in the self, Levinas says, is to “recognize the mastery of the other, to receive his command, or, more exactly, to receive from him the

command to command.”³¹ The other commands the self to command because this is how the ethical order must appear in the ontological order, or how the (ethical) order of heteronomy inspires the (ontological) order of autonomy. To put this another way: The Saying, the real ethical response—wherein one concedes the autonomous meaning of the *other*—could only be evoked by the other. But within the ontological order of the Said—wherein the ego is always active in the production of meaning—an ethical response always appears as though it is an action founded on the ego’s autonomous initiative (and *within the ontological order*, an ethical act *is* founded on the self’s initiative). Only the self can command itself, and the Said or sensible intuition only ever reconfirms the autonomy of the ego. But at the same time, the ontological order seems inexplicable without some recourse to transcendence. The Said requires the Saying to explain the original impetus for the verbiage of being; and thus Levinas concedes a certain, transcendent, ethical meaning to linguistic acts. Insofar as one is able to respond ethically, or insofar as one even attempts to do so, one has heard the call. One can always choose to ignore it, and one can, in a way, autonomously ‘choose’ to hear it; but these alternatives both presuppose that there was something to be heard. Thus prophecy or command, Levinas maintains, originates with alterity; but it is heard in the response of he or she who is commanded. The Saying is ‘heard’ in the Said.

Thus by *prophecy*, Levinas does not mean the prediction of the future (*OB*, 150); but the word is indeed chosen for its biblical resonances: “‘Before they call, I will answer’: the formula is to be understood literally,” where this refers to “this obedience prior to all representation, this allegiance before any oath, this responsibility prior to commitment.”³² But prophecy then is just the other-in-the-same, the trace of the Saying in the Said, *responsibility before the ontological order*. It is “the-other-in-the-same, inspiration and prophecy.”³³

Levinas is conscious of how precarious this appeal to prophecy or inspiration is from a phenomenological point of view. The claim is that the infinite or the transcendent cannot appear in the ontological order because to do so would render it immanent; and it is because of this that the prophet is sometimes thought by others to be mad: “The infinite would be believed in the proof that the finite would like to give of its transcendence; [but] entering into conjunction with the subject that would make it appear, it would lose its glory. Transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own demonstration. Its voice has to be silent as soon as one listens for its message. It is necessary that its pretension be exposed to derision and refutation, to the point of suspecting in the ‘here I am’ that attests to it a cry or a

slip of a sick subjectivity” (OB, 152). In this fragility of the transcendent—the fact that it calls one to listen but withdraws into silence as soon as one searches for the source of the call—is the ambiguity, the enigma, or the “blinking of meaning” of the transcendent (OB, 152). At the same time, the appeal to prophecy obviates the possibility of rendering existence a neutral economy of being. As opposed to Levinas’ characterization of the ontological order as indifferent to the singular human, the moral order cannot dispense with the self, to such an extent that there is no transcendent order—no call to responsibility—except by way of he or she who takes up this responsibility (BV, 133). There is no Saying without the responsible self.

Prophecy becomes an important term for Levinas but it does not mark a departure from his other attempts in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* to describe the transcendent relation or ethics. Prophecy, then, seems not to be a guide for *how* to follow the trace left in the Said back to the Saying, but again only a description of the fact that this happens.³⁴ It is still not clear how or whether we experience the Saying in the present and can respond to it.

8. THE SAYING AS THE QUESTION

Étienne Feron offers one of the more finely-worked interpretations of what the Saying refers to in terms of any practical use of language. To begin with, he claims that language must be understood as bivalent and in terms of the Saying-Said structure such that each of these terms cannot legitimately be isolated in order to prioritize one to the exclusion of the other (Feron, *ITQL*, 121). As Feron says: “[T]he Saying must not be interpreted as a pure relation to God outside of being [...] which would no longer have anything to do with language”—a point on which Levinas is generally clear. The Saying should be interpreted rather, “as the orientation that being receives by way of language.”³⁵ Or, again, the Saying and separation make possible the Said and ontological meaning.

One will recall that Levinas actually used the term ‘Saying’ in two ways. There was the Saying as the verbality of being that correlates with the Said; and this left open the ambiguous possibility of a Saying beyond the Said that forms no correlate with the Said. Feron ultimately tries to show is that “it is permitted to understand [...] ethics as the *obverse* or the other face of the phenomenological. All signification would be essentially bi-faced, on the one hand manifestation adequate to the intentional ego, on the other hand proximity of that which is imposed on the passivity of the Self” (Feron, *ITQL*, 276). Levinas himself had claimed that, “the

predicative statement [...] is held at the frontier of a de-thematization of the Said, and can be understood as a modality of approach and contact” (OB, 47, quoted above). A proposition is a Saying that carries a Said, or a Said that resonates in a Saying; and a Said is always put forth in a Saying. Feron’s analysis seems to make sense of the fact that every Said bears a trace of the Saying that it betrays, but that the Saying also calls for the Said and manifestation, just as ethics itself requires being, even if the meaning of ethics is to orient being rather than to appear within it. But given the “basic ambiguity of the Saying, at once essence of being and the signifying of transcendence,” as Feron says (ITQL, 205), how do we navigate the Saying and the Said? “[H]ow can this trace be determined *as* the trace of a Saying irreducible to the Said” (Feron, ITQL, 223)? Or, better, what allows one to hear the Saying in the Said, and when is this prevented?—as it often is. This is the question for the sake of which this analysis has been carried out in the present article.

Feron claims that the key to this problem is in the structure or act of the *question* (ITQL, 205). The *enigma* that Levinas speaks of, wherein the intrigue of ethics flickers, Feron claims, can be understood as a mode of a pure question, “before all questioning, a question that calls me to responsibility [...]. A question that calls for me and not a question wherein I pose the question [*je me demande*].”³⁶ An ethical questioning in which the ethical Saying resonates, as opposed to solipsistic, ontological questioning, can mark the difference between a discourse that bears a trace of the Saying and one that suppresses the Saying. In this sense, a kind of philosophy or philosophical life would be the path of transcendence: “Does the essential of language not reside in philosophy itself, insofar as philosophy is the point at which language is rendered as a question?” (Feron, ITQL, 268). And could phenomenology—“as the site at which philosophy is no longer simply thematization of a Said, but the very vigilance of language, the vigilance of the Said attentive to the Saying”—not itself be this philosophical-ethical work?³⁷ Thus Feron claims that philosophy is the essence of ethics.

But Feron’s analysis has little focus on Levinas’ decades-long critique of phenomenology as the culmination of a Western history of egoism and the suppression of transcendence. If Levinas’ mature description of ethics is just a description of philosophy, why does philosophical discourse and engagement so often fail to be ethical? Why do even Socrates and Heidegger—among the most influential, and in many ways humanistic, figures in Western thought—undergo such severe criticism by Levinas?³⁸ What makes these forms of philosophy or dialogue inadequate? The essential for philosophy that Feron affirms on behalf of Levinas holds to “the living dialogue between philosophers” (ITQL, 310), but

yet this philosophical-ethical justice “must be heard on another plane than that of the simply linear alternation of questions and responses in an intersubjective dialogue” (*ITQL*, 249). So what is this special form of questioning? Levinas specifies the key element in a later interview: “The question,” in the ethical sense of recognizing oneself as being *put into question*, “is already a relation, there where there is no place for a response [...]. Our theoretical questions [by contrast] are already the extenuated form of that which is the question, of that which is searching [*recherche*] [...]. Western philosophy is a philosophy of the response: It is the response that counts” (*GCM*, 85). What marks out the question in its philosophical and pernicious mode, then, is that it is only meaningful as the comparative lack and indigence with respect to the response that is hoped to reinstate the plenitude of ontological significance.³⁹ Elsewhere, Levinas explains: “Truth is not the *adequation* of the thought and the thing, but the *inadequation*—the transcendence, as it were—of the response and the question; transcendence ‘assumed’ by a new question. The assumption of truth is then an exegesis. The place of truth [...] is in the question.”⁴⁰ The truth of meaning is in the practice of sustaining questions about meaning. Following this line of thought, the weight of ethics comes to rest on how philosophy, intellectual rigor, questioning, exegesis, and education as a whole, can engage one as responsible. And it is precisely here that we can inquire into Feron’s suggestion of the *question* as the privileged site of ethics or transcendence.⁴¹ But just as there were two Sayings—one that is the passive response to alterity, and one that is the verbiage of being in its ontological meaning—so are there two kinds of question or questioning that must be distinguished.

When is philosophy and questioning ethically-engaged learning, and when is it ontology and suppression? Apophantic language and grammatical form are of no help. Concerning the question *what?*, for example, Levinas says: “The answer required is from the start in terms of being, whether one understands by it *entity* or *being of entities*, entity or *essence* of being. The question *what?* is thus correlative of what it wishes to discover, and already has recourse to it.”⁴² The question *what?* would inquire into the other in the way of an object or determinate entity. It adheres to the already-said and to ontological structures; and to pose this question is not of itself to effect the relation with the transcendent other. To ask *who?* is similarly to ask about the other as something that can be expressed in terms of *logos* or the Said. It reduces to the question *what?*⁴³

What other *form* of question is there than that which is proposed in apophantic terms, indebted to the *logos* and thus reducible to the Said? The problem is not a

who? or a *what?* or a *why?* It is not a question of grammar or syntax, and perhaps not of semantics. “The question,” in its role in ethics or transcendence, “would be neither a modification, nor a modality, nor a modalization of the *apophansis*” (Levinas, *GCM*, 120). It is a problem here of the difference between “*La mise en question*,” the being-put-into-question-by-the-other, and the “*consciousness* of this being put into question,” which is the ontological-philosophical approach to the question (Levinas, *BPW*, 54. Emphasis added). These are in no way equivalent and rather tend to exclude one another following the same diachronic movement of the Saying and the Said. The moment of Saying or exposure to the other, the moment of incumbent responsibility is “prior to dialogue, to the exchange of questions and answers” in this ontological sense of questioning (Levinas, *OB*, 111). “The infinite” must “animate this aspiration, signify itself as a question, instead of being inscribed [*se figer*] into being,” says Feron (*ITQL*, 207); but how this is possible or what this looks like is not obvious. This is again to ask how a Saying does not reduce immediately and absolutely to the Said, what kind of positive language is ethically meaningful.⁴⁴

9. OTHERWISE THAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONCLUSIONS

In a way, the terms have only been refined well enough to properly approach the pertinent problems of ethics. Except in very formal terms, it has not been shown what one does to respond to ethical responsibility. What is it to ‘unsay’ or ‘re-say’? What kind of philosophical work contributes to ethics in a way that phenomenology or ontology traditionally do not? What are its theoretical and practical modes? Is it in the writing of a book? or a philosophical symposium? And if so, under what circumstances? Are unsaying and re-saying only produced in the interventions of philosophers participating in a common history, as Levinas suggests? (*OB*, 171). And in that case, are Saying and unsaying a question of one’s actions in a community? How then to dissociate ethics from the ontological tradition that ignores ethical responsibility given that actions are beholden to ontological structures and meaning? We have seen that not all philosophizing is equivalent. What is the element, then, that renders philosophy “in its highest hours,” an announcement of “the beyond being” rather than a “refutation of skepticism” and transcendence? What does transcendence or ethics demand? As Levinas had said in *Totality and Infinity*, “Not every discourse is a relation with exteriority” (*TI*, 70), and we can say the same for the Saying. Not every instance of the Said can *equally* bear a trace of the Saying, and part of ethical responsibility is to ask how one better gives voice to the Saying, or better faces one’s responsibility.

One of the big lessons of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* is that in no way could *ethics* or the unsaying, the reduction of the Said to the Saying, simply correspond to an academic discipline, logical exercise, or rhetorical maneuver in any narrow sense. What Levinas shows in this work is that phenomenology is already complicit in ontology and sensible intuition itself, as well as in every philosophy. Philosophy *is* existence, he had said decades earlier.⁴⁵ All the more so, then, if philosophy is to be oriented by ethics, the reduction of the Saying to the Said cannot be a particular action or discipline—though certainly it could animate one or several. The Saying must be part of a much more global dimension of all of one's actions and relations. In one's activity as a researcher, writer, or educator, is one taking phenomenological experience as a whole and evoking the ethical responsibility that animates experience? Is one orienting theoretical and practical activity as a whole toward ethical responsibility? Is one giving voice to the Saying or shutting it down in a Said? The answer is probably: both at the same time, by way of a diachronic, spiraling movement. But then *in what way* is one giving voice to the Saying and *in what way* is one valorizing the Said? No purely philosophical demonstration for this has been given here.⁴⁶

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NOTES

1. See the preface to Emmanuel Levinas' 1981 re-publication of *De l'existence à l'existant*: Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existant*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1993, 13.
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969 (TI), 195.
3. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*. Translated and edited by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998, 61.
4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987 (CPP), 115–6.
5. See Schroeder, Brian and Benso, Silvia. "To Return in a New Way: Introduction." In *Levinas and the Ancients*. Edited by Brian Schroeder and Silvia Benso, 1-8. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 2. See Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 18; and Simon Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 177–78. See Bettina Bergo, "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophy." *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005): 141-177, 167; and Bettina Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Little Beauty that Adorns the Earth*. Dordrecht: Springer/Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, 191, 197, 210; though in the latter, Bergo understands any 'enactment' of the good in terms of a great distance from action. Cederberg makes the point that action *qua* action does away with the passivity important to Levinas' ethics (Carl Cederberg, *Re-Saying the Human: Levinas Beyond Humanism and Anti-Humanism*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2010, 184). Jeffrey Kosky makes a similar claim in *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, 53. How these different views are justified will be explained in this paper. In general, glosses of Levinas' views on language are often given too quickly, where a proper account would put into question the broader analyses that these glosses are used to support. See for example Claire Katz, *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, 143: "[Levinas] contrasts the saying to the said, the latter indicating that which is thematized and static. The saying is fluid, exemplary of the approach in the ethical relation." Such a claim is of itself not wrong (though Levinas never describes the Saying and the Said in these terms, and in fact the Said might be described as 'fluid', since it relations also to essence and temporality). However, this gloss covers over how philosophically and phenomenologically precarious Levinas' position is when he tries to describe, in a rigorously philosophical way, what he claims can never really be described in philosophy or experienced unambiguously in phenomenological experience.
6. By some accounts, the descriptions of the transcendent relation given in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* are "mutually incompatible." William Large, *Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot: Ethics and the Ambiguity of Writing*. Manchester: Clinamen Ltd, 2005, 58.

Michael Fagenblat also attempts to make the case for a ‘radical turn’ in *A Covenant of Creatures*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, xxv. Others deny such a turn. See Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2001, 170; Fabio Ciaramelli, *Transcendance et éthique: Essai sur Lévinas*. Bruxelles: Éditions Ousia, 1989, 49; Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993, 209; and Jeffrey Bloechl’s seemingly self-contradictory view in *Liturgy of the Neighbor: Emmanuel Levinas and the Religion of Responsibility*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2000, 13, 219. Bergo gives a good summation of several accounts, as well as her own, in *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics*, 134–147.

7. Derrida’s proposal is perhaps not absurd: “If one thinks, as Levinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires, infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words *infinite* and *other*.” Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 114. See *ibid.*, 116.

8. Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Edited and translated by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996 (*BPW*), 35.

9. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006 (*OB*), 35.

10. Levinas, *CPP*, 110. In this sense, “[t]he intuition that one has opposed to the concept is already the sensible conceptualized.” Levinas, *OB*, 63.

11. *CPP*, 113. Lingis translates this as “thinking utterance.” See Levinas, *OB*, 37.

12. See Adriaan Peperzak’s helpful analysis: Adriaan Peperzak, “From Intentionality to Responsibility.” In *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. Edited by Arleen Dallery and Charles Scott, 3–22. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. For a more recent account of the already-said and ideality of *kerygmatic* language see also László Tengelyi “En découvrant les phénomènes avec des livres,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: La question du livre*. Edited by Miguel Abensour and Anne Kupiec, 105–116. France: IMEC, 2008. Paul Ricœur explains some of the salient points of this section very briefly in *Autrement: lecture d’autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence d’Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 16–17.

13. Levinas, *OB*, 45. There are both ontological and ethical reasons to not search for a world “behind the scenes” in order to fulfill a desire for transcendence. See Benso, Silvia. “Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?” In *Nietzsche and Levinas: “After the Death of a Certain God.”* Edited by Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo, 214–231. New York: Columbia University, 2009.

14. Wyschogrod writes: “In thinking the amphibology of Being the oscillation of verb and noun remains *within* [the Said of] language; [thus, for Levinas] what is beyond [the Said of] language is no longer thought of as a negation of something given, but as beyond relation to the copula, and thus irrecoverable through the thinking of difference within Being.” (187) That is, thinking about the ontological difference does not further an approach to transcendence. As will be shown, what Wyschogrod calls a “beyond language,” Levinas in fact calls a Saying beyond being.

Edith Wyschogrod, "Doing before Hearing: On the Primacy of Touch." In *Textes Pour Emmanuel Lévinas*. Edited by François Laruelle, 179-203. Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1980.

15. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 (GCM), 166.

16. Levinas, *OB*, 160. Lingis translates this as "the saying as contact." There is some debate concerning the priority of language versus that of sensibility. Feron insists that the linguistic precedes the sensible. Étienne Feron, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage: l'itinéraire philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas*. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1992 (ITQL), 128. Translations of this work are my own. See *ibid.* 126, 72-3. Bergo describes a "hermeneutics of substitution" that moves by way of sensibility *and* affectivity, and she describes Levinas' conception of embodied flesh as text, where the ethical moment is an event before a division between "signs and concepts versus raw, passive sensibility" (Bettina Bergo, "Levinas' Weak Messianism In Time and Flesh." *Journal for Cultural Research* 13. 3-4 (2009): 225-248: 247 and 238). Cf. Bergo, "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence," 170. Elsewhere she says: "Which of the two comes first remains undecidable: the 'Saying' of which the trace is grasped in words that are said, or the sensibility and affectivity that 'phenomenalize' themselves." (Bettina Bergo, "Le messianique philosophique chez Levinas: comme une chair se faisant parole." *MondesFrancophone.com: revue mondiale des francophonies*. Accessed September, 2015. <http://mondesfrancophones.com/espaces/philosophies/le-messianique-philosophique-chez-levinas-comme-une-chair-se-faisant-parole/> accessed September, 2015). The Saying is neither simply language, nor simply sensibility, in any traditional understanding of those terms, and it cannot be fixed within a particular domain among others. It is better to consider sensation and language as *modalities* of the transcendent relation.

17. For one of his most poignant descriptions of what it is to experience life in seeming absence of transcendence, see Emmanuel Levinas, "Tout est-il vanité?" Bettina Bergo, "Tout est-il vanité?" in *Les cahiers de La nuit surveillée, no. 3: Emmanuel Levinas*, edited by Jacques Rolland, 319-321. Lagrasse: Editions Verdier, 1984.

18. Levinas, *OB*, 84. Levinas points out again how surprising it is, on a purely ontological model, that a philosopher should be "exposed to the other [...]. Who then came to wound the subject so that he should expose his thoughts or expose himself in his Saying?" (*ibid.*).

19. In *Totality and Infinity* the 'first word' or origin of language began with the other, in expression. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the Saying is the self being made a sign for the other; but it is the self's passive exposure to the other. Thus in some way the Saying 'begins' with the self, but not on the self's *initiative*; and thus on rare occasion Levinas refers to "the Saying, that is, the face." Levinas, *BPW*, 73-4.

20. Levinas, *OB*, 16. This is presumably a retraction of his passing claim from decades earlier that being is evil. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987, 50-1.

21. Levinas, *OB*, 7. It is through the *Said* that one can describe the radical passivity of responsibility, “which the present work [*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*] aims to thematize.” Levinas, *OB*, 189, n. 25.
22. Recall, though, that the problem of the Saying and ethical language is not just a problem of how to *describe* this in ontological terms. The question is how the Saying or ethical language is evoked in life, how responsibility is really faced.
23. Levinas, *OB*, 169. Translation modified. Lingis seems to read *investir* for *invertir*.
24. See *De l’existence à l’existant*, Levinas’ 1981 retrospective preface to the 1947 book. This is perhaps the answer to the question: how or why does Levinas write two very different books on the same question? Is *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* the unsaying and re-saying of *Totality and Infinity*? Richard A. Cohen suggests this in, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 147.
25. Levinas later retrieves the term *éveil*, wakefulness, to characterize this function of reason beyond the philosophy of the Same: “Reduction would be an awakening of the spirit beyond certainties or uncertainties, modalities of the knowledge of being [...]. [A] rationality of thought is profiled [in this ethical conception of wakefulness...] contrasting with the norms that command the identity of the Same.” Levinas, *GCM*, 21. Thus he denies again that this is the work of philosophy understood simply as ontology or phenomenology. Levinas, *GCM*, 29.
26. Levinas retains his use of the term “writing” to describe the pretensions to synchrony of the Said: “In writing the saying does indeed become a pure said, a simultaneousness of the saying and of its conditions.” Levinas, *OB*, 170–1. See *OB*, 166. At the very end of the book, by contrast, Levinas says that, “the substitution of the hostage discovers the trace, the unpronounceable writing [*écriture imprononçable*] of what [is] always already past.” Levinas, *OB*, 185.
27. This is an essential point of Levinas’ thought that is often overlooked. Critchley says, “[t]he distinction between the Saying and the Said corresponds to the demarcation in Lacan between the order of enunciation (the subject’s act of speaking) and the *énoncé* (the formulation or translation of this speech act into a statement or proposition).” Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, 77–78. See a similar claim in his “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 18. The ethical for Levinas would cut across the constative and the performative, hence Levinas’ explicit rejection of the *‘parole-activité’* as the ethical aspect of language, even in much earlier work. Levinas, *TI*, 182. Elsewhere, Critchley treats the Saying, or ‘ethical language,’ as a special domain of terms and syntax. The phrase, “a passivity more passive than all passivity,” he says, quoting Levinas, “is a good example of Levinas’ ethical language.” Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, 71. But taken by itself, this is nothing but an apophantic phrase. The Saying is inevitably bound up with the Said; and Levinas writes decades’ worth of books and articles about transcendence—knowing that it cannot really be described—presumably with an aim to evoking real ethical meaning in this world. But are rhetorical maneuvers really the basis of the re-orientation of being and meaning that Levinas had imagined, that would rescue the anonymous

victims from war and anonymous being? Is speaking in hyperbole included in one's obligation to the widow, orphan, stranger?

28. Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, 33.

29. Levinas, *OB*, 169. Repeated elsewhere: "the history of Western philosophy has been a destruction of transcendence." Levinas, *GCM*, 56.

30. An anonymous reviewer suggested—as many scholars seem to assume—that we can respond to this problematic simply by pointing out that meaning "fluctuates" between the Saying and the Said. However, a primary goal of this paper is to ask how and when these alternations happen. Without a precise response to this problem, it is not clear how we are to navigate responsibility. Is philosophy really required to evoke the Saying? If so, what kind of philosophy? If no answer can be given to this question—and Levinas does not quite give an answer—then it becomes difficult to know how we can be affected by the Saying. If all of our actions are equally beholden to the Saying and the Said, or if we cannot know how our actions will fare with respect to the Saying and the Said, then how can we respond meaningfully to the other? And if we cannot respond meaningfully to the other, then in what sense do we actually experience alterity?

31. Levinas, *TI*, 178. See *TI*, 213. See also his 1954 "The Ego and the Totality." Levinas, *CPP*, 43. Ciaramelli says that "it is perhaps to be regretted that Levinas dropped the idea of a constitutive correlation between the prophetic word and the response to the call of the other attesting to the presence of the third" in his later writings, that is, the correlation between prophecy and the order of being. Ciaramelli, *Transcendance et éthique*, 152. However, the reason that Levinas does this is to avoid the also regrettable alternative whereby prophecy serves to forge a *correlation* between the Saying and the Said that would blot out the Saying. Cf. Bergo, *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics*, 191.

32. Levinas, *OB*, 150, with reference to Isaiah, 65: 24. Levinas describes the possibility of the pronunciation of the divine word in human language in analogous terms. Emmanuel Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 111–112. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Translated by Gary D. Mole. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994 (*BV*), 110 on the human being as the "prophetic animal." Levinas' understanding of 'prophecy' is not classical. Cf. Léon Askénazi, "Y a-t-il une philosophie juive?" In his *La parole et l'écrit*, edited by Marcel Goldmann, 29–40. Paris: Albin Michel, 1999, 37.

33. Levinas, *OB*, 150.

34. Dudiak says: "it is true that the technical details of *how* the said would arise from out of pure saying are decidedly sketchy in Levinas' text, even if we are given the reason *why* this movement from the saying to the said is necessary." Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics*, 234.

35. *ITQL*, 157. Many of Feron's phrases play on Levinas' description of the Saying as exposure to the other as the meaning of sensibility, described as the very beating of the heart or as respiration, breath. See Levinas, *OB*, 181. See André Neher's account of the importance of the

- notion of spirit or breath—*ruah* in Hebrew—in Jewish theology, and the many overlaps between this and Levinas’ use of the metaphor of respiration. See André Neher, *Prophètes et prophéties*. Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2004, 107, 110–1.
36. Feron, *ITQL*, 206. See Levinas, *OB*, 24. Franck, too, cites Levinas on this theme: “the question,” i.e., the search for truth, “is not explained by astonishment only, but by the presence of him or her to whom it [the question] is addressed.” (Didier Franck, *L’un-pour-l’autre: Levinas et la signification*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008, 18); citing Levinas, *TI*, 96. Franck’s important recent work containing many critiques of Levinas’ views on language—many of which have better responses than Franck concedes—cannot be entered into here in detail.
37. *Ibid.* Feron repeats this hypothesis again later (*ITQL*, 313). Derrida asks: “Is not intentionality respect itself [for the exteriority, the infinite, the other]?” Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 121.
38. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Translated by Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 25. This lecture discusses how much more unforgivable is a moral infraction committed by the learned. See also Levinas, *TI*, 43–44, 171, 180, on the seductive and violent quality of maieutics, a repudiation of Socrates for his ontological commitments, despite the fact that he seems to be invested in nothing more than concrete, face-to-face engagement.
39. Levinas, *GCM*, 110. This qualified privileging of the question is mentioned by Levinas several times in the essays included in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. See *GCM*, 191–120, 165, 171.
40. Emmanuel Levinas, “Les enseignements,” in *Parole et Silence et autres conférences inédites au Collège philosophique: Œuvres 2*, eds. Rudolphe Calin and Catherine Chalier, 173–198. Paris: Grasset/IMEC, 2009 186–187. Levinas elsewhere refers to the “questioning virtue [that] has been perpetuated in the Talmud, the basis of all Jewish education.” (Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Seán Hand. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 287). Repeated in a much later article in Levinas, *BV*, 150.
41. Diane Perpich holds a similar thesis in *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 144–5. She claims that skepticism, denying that we have reached the truth, is precisely the enactment of ethics (*ibid.*, 123). Ethics finds its domain in questioning, when we ask why and how we are responsible (*ibid.*, 44–5). Insofar as Perpich proposes that questioning is the philosophical mode that serves ethics, her analysis meets with the same difficulties as does Feron’s. See also Ian McPherson, “Other than the Other: Levinas and the Educational Questioning of Infinity.” In *Levinas and Education: At the Intersection of Faith and Reason*. Edited by Denise Egéa-Kuehne, 85–99. New York: Routledge, 2008.
42. Levinas, *OB*, 23–4. Levinas says that *teaching* is this being put-into-question by the Other. Levinas, *TI*, 171. But again, to pose the question “what?” reduces essences to the totality of being, refuses alterity. Levinas, *TI*, 177.
43. Levinas, *OB*, 27. See *OB*, 8: “the extraction from essence contests the unconditional privilege

of the question *where?*; it signifies a null-site [*non-lieu*].” Heidegger makes different but similar claims. See “Letter on Humanism,” in *Pathmarks*. Translated by Frank A. Capuzzi. Edited by William McNeill, 239-276. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 249. See also Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz. New York: HarperOne, 1991, 71, 74.

44. This is why Ciaramelli says that Levinas’ Judaic-inspired philosophy investigates a thought that is guided by the original event that inspires and makes possible questioning. “There is, for him, a beyond of the question that precedes the freedom of the questioning attitude.” (Fabio Ciaramelli, “Le rôle du judaïsme dans l’œuvre de Levinas.” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 52 (1983): 580-600, 595). He adds, “In the horizon of religious existence, the first event is precisely the giving of the law and it is unthinking to question it” (*ibid.*, 596).

45. Emmanuel Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001, 138.

46. A partial solution to this problem in non-strictly philosophical terms is proposed in Jordan Glass, “Education as Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas on Jewish Schooling.” *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 51. 4 (December 2018): 481-505.