Philosophy and the Ethical Transcendence of Language: A Dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida

Filosofi og Språkets Etiske Transcendens: En Dialog mellom Emmanuel Levinas og Jacques Derrida

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"I think everyone should love life above everything in the world." "Love life more than the meaning of it?" "Certainly, love it, regardless of logic as you say, it must be regardless of logic, and it's only then one will understand the meaning of it." – conversation between Alyosha and Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*

"And therefore I tell you that I accept God simply. But you must note this: if God exists and if He really did create the world, then, as we all know, He created it according to the geometry of Euclid and the human mind with the conception of only three dimensions in space. Yet there have been and still are geometricians and philosophers, and even some of the most distinguished, who doubt whether the whole universe, or to speak more widely the whole of being, was only created in Euclid's geometry; they even dare to dream that two parallel lines, which according to Euclid can never meet on earth, may meet somewhere in infinity. I have come to the conclusion that, since I can't understand even that, I can't expect to understand about God. I acknowledge humbly that I have no faculty for settling such questions, I have a Euclidian earthly mind, and how could I solve problems that are not of this world? …I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidian mind of man, that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men—but though all that may come to pass, I don't accept it. I won't accept it. Even if parallel lines do meet and I see it myself, I shall see it and say that they've met, but still I won't accept it." – Ivan to Alyosha, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Abstract

In this work, I discuss the topics of transcendence, language, ethics and philosophy. I orient the discussion around the dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida and the way this dialogue developed. I show first how Levinas conceives of language as a transcendent and ethical relation in his philosophy, then how Derrida challenges this conception, before showing how Levinas responds to these challenges and finally how Derrida responds to Levinas' response. I argue that in the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida, the question of transcendence and language is shown to concern philosophy itself. The fundamental question turns out to be if it is possible to argue coherently within philosophy that language is the metaphysical relation of transcendence understood in the Levinasian sense, or if philosophy necessarily reduces any topic of discussion to the realm of ontology, which is a possibility Derrida seemingly suggests. I argue that this is what leads Levinas to in his later work distinguish between the saying and said of language. The possible consequences of such a distinction occupies the final parts of the work, and will lead to a new way of understanding both what we mean with "a work" and philosophy itself by placing normativity before descriptivity.

Sammendrag

I dette verket diskuterer jeg transcendencs, språk og filosofi. Jeg orienterer diskusjonen rundt dialogen mellom Emmanuel Levinas og Jacques Derrida og måten denne dialogen utviklet seg på. Jeg viser først hvordan Levinas forklarer språket som en transcendent og etisk relasjon i sin filosofi, deretter hvordan Derrida utfordrer denne forståelsen, før jeg viser hvordan Levinas svarer på disse utfordringene og til slutt hvordan Derrida svarer på Levinas' svar. Jeg argumenterer for at spørsmålet om transcendens og språk viser seg å omhandle filosofien selv i dialogen mellom Levinas og Derrida. Det fundamentale spørsmålet viser seg å være om det er mulig å argumentere rasjonelt innenfor filosofi for at språket er den metafysiske transcendente relasjonen Levinas forstår den til å være, eller om filosofi nødvendigvis reduserer ethvert diskusjonstema til den ontologiske dimensjonen, som virker å være en mulighet Derrida foreslår. Jeg argumenterer at dette er hva som leder Levinas til, i hans senere arbeid, å skille mellom språkets utsigelse (*saying*) og det sagte (*said*). De mulige konsekvensene av dette skillet opptar verkets siste deler, og leder til en ny måte å forstå både hva vi mener med "et verk" og filosofien selv ved å plassere normativitet før deskriptivitet.

Key to Abbreviations

Complete referencing to all the abbreviated works can be found in "List of References". The Abbreviations will also be introduced at the proper times in the text. I use the abbreviations to reference the original works by Levinas and Derrida in the text

Levinas' Works

TI   Totality and Infinity

OB   Otherwise than Being

WO   Wholly Otherwise

MS   Meaning and Sense

EP   Enigma and Phenomen

TTO   The Trace of the Other

Derrida's Works

VM   Violence and Metaphysics

AM   At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am

Table of Contents

Introduction

In this work, we will investigate and discuss the topic of language in relation to the topics of transcendence, ethics and philosophy itself.

A work which investigates the topic of language will always have to consider itself and the way it itself makes use of language. We will therefore begin with a reflection on a common rhetorical practice often used when writing philosophical texts, a practice which we will have made use of thrice already. It could perhaps be said of it that it is not only a rhetorical device, but also a *necessity* due to the structure and situation of language. The practice which is referred to above is that of implicating the reader of a text in a "we", a practice "we" have already used and will continue to use in this work.

This practice could strike one as being quite the violent gesture. By claiming, in a work, that "we will argue" or "we will investigate", do I, the author of the work, not assume that you, the reader, is ready to agree to whatever preposterous claims I will make? Is not the conjoining of author and reader implicated in the use of the word "we" unjustified? In the language of Levinas, does it not disrespect the absolute dissymmetry between me and the Other?

The invoking of Levinas' name here opens perhaps another possibility; in using the word "we", I refer perhaps not only to you, the reader, but also to all the other authors implicated in my work, as my work receive and respond to their works. Thus, when the phrase "we will soon see why it is so and so…" is uttered (by me), it refers perhaps also to the fact that the words I write are not only *my* words; I have been taught them by several others, through works and conversations. Although, perhaps, none else than I stand accused in *this* work - as I attempt to weave together in a coherent fashion and to the best of my effort a discussion of language and transcendence – it would nonetheless have been impossible for me to write it, were it not for the fact that the philosophical tradition has *already* been articulated and passed on in history.

Still however, the use of "we" in my work will most often primarily implicate me and you, my reader, and this could, as stated above, be interpreted as an act of violence. Let me therefore attempt to interpret it in an *other* way, for that word and the use of it might be understood *otherwise*. *If* we assume, from the first, the irreducible asymmetry between me and you, then this word and its usage might be taken as an act of *politeness*. For would it not be worse if I only referred to myself throughout the work, as if I assumed and could assume that the work was written *by* me and *for* me, enclosed in the sphere of my egoity? As if I was writing only for myself, in the narcissistic solitude of someone who does not want to admit to the *exposure* of any text, signified by the fact that it *presents* its content?

In contrast to this therefore, is it not possible to say that it is indeed *we* who are about to engage in the themes and topics of this work? That *we* are going to explore the intriguing and extraordinary dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida? In other words, that in the event of writing this text, it would be dishonest to not admit that this event cannot be reduced to myself?

This is of course nothing more than an option, for the dissymmetry still obtains. I therefore refer both to this option laid out above and everything else written in this work when I say this; that it is undoubtedly *my* responsibility and my responsibility *alone*. Still, with this responsibility I have been granted, I will continue to claim that a work is not written only for oneself, but also (and perhaps primarily) *for* and *to* the Other. When I then therefore still maintain that it is *we* whom are about to dive into this work written by me, it is not only in reference to the other authors whom I implicate in this work. It is also to emphasize that the effort and attempt that this work is was not done for *me*, but for those that would, in their turn, read and receive my work. If Levinas is correct in his analysis of language – and if I am correct in my interpretation of him – a work must be understood as always belonging to this ethical horizon of infinitely separated interlocutors whom nonetheless cover this infinite distance by responding to each other. It would count for any work, and it would count for *this* work. Language would be transcendence. It is in view of this possibility that I will say that we are about to engage in this work.

With this reflection, we have in one way already approached the central themes of this work, and a necessary difficulty which will continue to face us is that our themes sometimes must be approached by such disturbances of language. Still, for the sake of clarity and justice, we owe it to the reader to present the themes of this work in a more orderly fashion.

In this work, we will take on the topic of language and its relation to both ethics and philosophy. This will be done by following the development of the dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. In chapter I, we will delineate the way in which Levinas conceives of language within his own philosophy. As we shall see, Levinas will argue that language must be understood as the ethical situation in which I am addressed and address the Other, whom always absolves herself from the themes and topics which try to capture her. In chapter II, we will engage with Derrida's reading of Levinas, which orients itself around the question of language, and more specifically, Levinas' *own* language. Derrida will ask what it would mean that Levinas must make use of the thematizing structures of language in his own philosophy, when this language supposedly does violence unto the Other. In the third and final chapter, we will first return to Levinas to see how he responds to these challenges, before we again return to Derrida and his response to Levinas' response. We will end with an attempt at some concluding remarks.

The works by Levinas which we will focus on in chapter I is *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, in addition to some other articles. We will also make use of the commentary of John Llewelyn on the topic of language in Levinas. In chapter II, we will read *Violence and Metaphysics* by Derrida, which itself is a reading of Levinas' philosophy up and until *Totality and Infinity*. In chapter III, we will return to *Otherwise than Being*, reading it this time as a response to *Violence and Metaphysics*. Finally, we will read *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*, an essay by Derrida which concerns several themes in *Otherwise than Being*. In both chapter II and III we

will make use of commentary provided by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi on the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida.

The question of this work is then whether it is possible to understand language as transcendence due to its irreducible ethical meaning, or whether the very fact that we must *understand* them would mean that transcendence and ethics be necessarily reduced. This is the question which we have approached in this introduction in two different ways, and we see now their correlation. While we in the latter half laid out our themes and topics in a structured way, we attempted in the first half to address the very situation of our own language and of language itself as an ethical communication between interlocutors. Will it have been a simple play of rhetoric, a clever turn of phrase? Or is it possible and justified within philosophy to address the very *saying* of language? What would it mean to do it? How should we understand it? And how should we understand that we understand it? These are the questions which will, perhaps, obsess and haunt us as we undertake the project of this work; to delineate and interrogate the possibility of transcendence in language from a philosophical position.

Chapter I: The General Thesis on Language in Levinas

A) Language and Transcendence

1. Levinas' Philosophy

Before we delineate Levinas' philosophy of language specifically, a general introduction his philosophy is called for. Levinas – born in Lithuania 1906 - was a 20th century philosopher who studied in Germany under Husserl and Heidegger, but lived most of his adult life in France and wrote his philosophy in French. He was Jewish, and also wrote theological pieces about the Hebraic religion. His cultural background range from such varieties as his Jewish ancestry to reading Dostoyevsky – which he so often quotes in his interviews - and other Russian authors in his youth. It is however his philosophy which of course is of most importance to us here. As a student under both Husserl and Heidegger, and later an avid reader of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas' thought is deeply indebted too, but also fundamentally critical of the phenomenological tradition. As we shall see in the course of this work, Levinas criticizes phenomenology for what he understands to be its totalizing and reductive tendencies in regards to the Other and transcendence, while nevertheless still remaining a phenomenologist in his own way. It is however not only the phenomenologists to whom Levinas' responds within the tradition of philosophy, as he finds himself in a dialogue with a diverse variety of philosophers from the Western tradition of philosophy, from ancient Greece to the German idealists to his own contemporary philosophical scene in France. It is of course in the latter that we find that colleague of Levinas whom will be most discussed in this work, namely Derrida. As we shall see, Derrida will in his own reading of Levinas evoke many of the philosophical references we have just made mention of, especially Husserl and Heidegger.

Having given a quick and partial summary of Levinas' background and context, we should now make clearer the radical ingenuity of Levinas' philosophy. Within the philosophical tradition, Levinas' philosophy is a "…revolution not only in phenomenology but also with regard to the entire history of European philosophy…" (Peperzak, 1996, x). Levinas develops a new philosophy, which although it draws on certain ideas present in the history of western philosophy[1], is a critique of what Levinas believes to have been the most dominating currents of western philosophy; namely, the domination of the subject as the nexus of an absolute totality. From within this tradition, Levinas establishes an entirely new position, which seeks to escape the situation of subjectivity by dethroning it. The revolutionary way in which Levinas does this is by orienting his philosophy around a new understanding of ethics and the role of ethics in regards to philosophy overall. According to Levinas, ethics is not deducible from nor reducible to the situation of the subject, but rather comes surprisingly from *beyond* – from the Other – and critiques the subject. In this formula, the *activity* of the subject

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[1] Plato's thought of the Good beyond Being and Descartes idea of Infinity most noticeably

would not be its most fundamental feature, but rather its *passivity*. What would such a philosophy look like?

The great themes of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy is that of transcendence, the metaphysical relation, the idea of Infinity, ethics as first philosophy, etc., which are all names for what Levinas calls "…the ultimate situation." (Levinas *TI*, 81) and "*The absolute experience…*" (Levinas *TI*, 65), namely, standing face to face with the human Other[2]. This situation or experience is, according to Levinas, extra-ordinary in the proper sense of that word[3]. The Other faces me without becoming a content of consciousness for me (Levinas *TI*, 194), "…concerning me without entering into conjunction with me." (Levinas *OB*, 12), therefore breaking with a long tradition of philosophy that understands experience under the dogma of unification and synchronization. In opposition to this tradition which privileges the totality, the Other absolves herself infinitely from the idea I have of her, which exactly characterizes the way in which she approaches me (Levinas *TI*, 50-51), or is infinitely removed into the past, to the immemorial past of which we are left only a trace (Levinas *OB*, 93). The meeting with the Other takes place outside any context, and the other remains independent of any preconceptions I might have about him. But the Other is not the God of negative theology, concerning us only in relation to what He is *not*; the relation to the Other has a positive structure: ethics (Levinas *TI*, 197). This is the extremely difficult (non)topic (n)or theme that Levinas in his philosophy is trying to explore, but which he, in both of his *magnum opi*, refers to the everyday responsibility I have towards others and the asymmetry that characterizes it (Levinas *TI*, 53/*OB*, 10). My everyday obligation to the Other is concretely the metaphysical relation. The so-called "source" of ethics is the Height of the Other.

In "light" of this new perspective, Levinas re-orients the classical topics of philosophy. For him, reason, understanding and objectivity first takes on meaning after the meeting with the Other. It is the critique emanating from the Other which obliges me to answer, and therefore to account reasonably and rationally for my actions and beliefs. *In a sense, normativity enables descriptivity*. In this way, the traditional questions of philosophy – for example how intentional consciousness constitutes an object, what secure knowledge is or the relation between experience and metaphor– do not disappear, but rather take on a new meaning. The very things that makes us human cannot be explained only in reference to what makes the self a self; in fact, the orientation of the self as one part of the transcendence must itself be re-interpreted. In either case, there exist in Levinas' philosophy a notion of self, which is capable of speaking rationally and having an objective perspective of the

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[2] The translation of this term is a well-known topic for students of Levinas, and we will adhere to what Adriaan T. Peperzak describes as the conventional translation in the preface to *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*; "Among Levinas scholars it has become a convention to reserve "the Other" with a capital letter for all places where Levinas means the human other, whether he uses *Autrui, autrui, autre, or Autre*." (Peperzak, xiv). Although, as Peperzak continues to discuss, this translation has some inconveniences, we believe it sufficient for our own purposes to refer to the human other as "the Other".

[3] From Latin *extra ordinem*; an extra or surplus to the given order

world. What, however, is of outmost importance to Levinas, is that we must not believe ourselves capable of encompassing the Other with the capacities that she in a sense has enabled. "The face is present in its refusal to be contained." (Levinas *TI*, 194). This is the way in which the meeting with the Other for Levinas is extra-ordinary; the other approaches me in a way which is wholly otherwise compared to the capacity and order of the active subject. This way of being "otherwise" should not be understood negatively, as an opposition that would still be defined by what it opposes. The alterity of the Other is not a dialectical difference, but a beyond. Therefore, the Other always absolves himself from the categories of reason, understanding and objectivity; he is incomparable to them, cannot me measured in or by them.

This will be the end of our very short summary of Levinas' philosophy, which in no way seeks to do his philosophical project justice, but to give the reader the minimum of necessary context for the topic of our paper. But already from this short summary, is not the fundamental problematic of this paper as described in the introduction already beginning to show itself? For have we not already committed the fault that we are prohibiting? Have we not, with our words and formulations, attempted to determine and describe the Other, which cannot be determined nor described? Have we not been dragging the Other into the context of our understanding, which would be to do unto the Other the exact violence Levinas warned against? Attempts at undoing some of this damage has been made, by for example putting certain words in between quotation-marks ("source", "light") and by naming the Other the (non)topic. Still, these could be called superficial attempts or simply negative descriptions, which would undermine the whole project. It seems then that there is a crucial problem with Levinas' philosophy; if we take it seriously and on its own terms, it cannot be allowed to exist. The philosophy of the Other, which allows us to understand that we cannot understand the Other; can it avoid being an understanding of the Other? What would this betrayal mean?

We shall not begin to answer these questions by addressing them explicitly, but by explicating what we believe to be the correct context belonging to them, namely language. According to a certain direction in modern philosophy of language (a direction to which we will return to at a later point), understanding, rationality and objectivity cannot be understood separately from the language which expresses it. There is no thought or knowledge that is not already anticipated in the language which allows it. As we shall see, Levinas does to a certain degree comply with this direction of philosophy of language. The question would then be whether the Other can be *named*; whether any discourse about the Other would be injustice or not. If language was reducible to understanding, rationality and objectivity, it should certainly be impossible to state the Other. But, as we shall see, Levinas "understands" language to not only be a situation in which you talk *about* the Other, but also - and perhaps primarily- *to* the Other.

But what can we say *about* speaking *to* the Other? What will it mean to *say* something about *speaking* to the Other? Again, these question remains. We shall however, as stated above, not begin our discussion of these question by discussing them explicitly, but rather with what may be called a

"naïve" explication of the topic of language in the philosophy of Levinas. We will explain his understanding of language as it is presented in his two main works, namely *Totality and Infinity* (henceforth *TI*) and *Otherwise Than Being* (henceforth *OB*), without however limiting ourselves to them. The explication will be done on Levinas' own terms and in relation to his own philosophical project, and we therefore also hope that such a explication can help supplement the incomplete summary of his general philosophy given above.

But even though we will stray away from addressing these questions explicitly in this first part, they might still implicitly sneak themselves in, and perhaps not uninvited. This is at least the claim that Jacques Derrida makes in his essay *Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*. This essay plays both a very important philosophical and historical role in the interpretation of Levinas, and Derrida could arguably be said to be Levinas' most important commentator/interpreter. In Derrida's essay, it is exactly these meta-questions of the very *possibility* of Levinas' philosophy which are at stake; and Derrida claims that, if his reading has not been to unfaithful, the questions there addressed are "…put to *us* by Levinas" (Derrida *VM*, 104); and these questions will primarily be "…questions of language and the question of language." (Derrida *VM*, 136).

2. Levinas and Language: Expression and Response

As stated above, with regards to the questions which are central to this paper, we have decided to differentiate between a naïve approach to Levinas' philosophy of language and an explicit one, which will come later. This is because we believe there to be a continuous thesis on the role and structure of language from *TI* to *OB* which can be discussed without addressing the meta-questions explicitly, even though they might silently surface anyhow. What we should however take note of before beginning this analysis is that even though there is a continuity between *TI* and *OB* on the topic of language, there is also a development from the earlier to the later work; and this development might turn out to address the very questions which we for now have decided to put aside. We will also perhaps be able to show that a different *focus* in the two works also concerns these questions. To give a short and inadequate indication of this difference, we can say that *TI* focuses on the ethical revelation of the Other as face, while *OB* focuses on my ethical subjectivity as obligation to answer. This difference will be further explicated and nuanced later on, but we can already see how the focus of the second work to a larger degree concerns our questions. If the question is about the possibility of naming the Other, then the situation of the subject summoned to formulate an answer will of course be most relevant. In either case, this development and difference of focus will not be shown, we will argue, to constitute a decisive difference in the philosophy of Levinas, as a continuous fundamental position – both in regards to language and to his overall philosophy – is maintained between the two works. We will begin now with the consistent position on language.

The consistent role of language in Levinas' philosophy is very fundamental to the entirety of his project, and answers the question of how two completely separated terms – me and the Other – achieve a relation in which the Other is still respected. In language, Levinas sees a situation which constitutes what he understands by the metaphysical relation, namely a relation between two independent parts that remain independent in the relation; «Language accomplishes a relation between terms that break up the unity of a genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within relationship. » (Levinas *TI*, 195). In language, I relate to the Other without touching him, and so the distance between us is simultaneously covered and not covered (Levinas *TI*, 62). With this, we are emphasizing the communicative characteristics of language, as the situation where two people exchange words whose meanings are dependent on the independence of the interlocutors. And indeed, is not communication characterized that one agrees on the meaning of the topics discussed together? The voluntary nod by one of the participants will tell the other whether what she has said was approved as meaningful in the context of the conversation, and since what she said was addressed to the other participant, it should not be controversial to locate the meaning of what was said in this approval (or search for it). The sense of the saying aims at, and is therefore dependent on its reception. If language is essentially communicative, then the plurality of speakers is essential to the meanings in language, and as we shall look at more closely later, Levinas argues for the necessity of this pluralism (Levinas *TI*, 76).

If we however want to say that we emphasize the communicative "function" of language, we will have to specify our understanding of communication, as Levinas claims that communication is, in opposition to what we stated above, not simply or primarily an exchange of words. In *OB* he says this of communication: "Communication is not reducible to the phenomenon of truth and the manifestation of truth conceived as a combination of psychological elements: thought in an ego – will or intention to make this thought pass into another ego – message by a sign designating this thought – perception of the sign by another ego – deciphering of the sign." (Levinas *OB*, 48). According to Levinas, these elements of communication take place always already within the ethical situation of communication, in which I am called to answer for myself. This ethical character of language is for Levinas the most fundamental one, and the one we will now explore.

Levinas states that any language is always already within the "context" of the drama of the meeting with the Other, or, to put it in his later terminology, is always also (and perhaps primarily) a saying; «Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, [saying] is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification.» (Levinas *OB*, 5). Before being a meditation of information through signs – which would be to understand it as exchange – language is signification, "…the very signifyingness of signification." What is meant by this formulation, the signifyingness of signification? Levinas calls it the "…surplus of signification over representation…" (Levinas *TI*, 206). It is the fact that language not only represents its objects to

itself, but signifies them; and in this order, Levinas claims that the signification is primary. The need for presentation comes before representation. The answer to why we would signify something in the first place is the first "meaning" in language, which enables all other meanings in language. This is what was meant by saying that communication first and foremost should not be understood by the act of transmitting a meaning to be disclosed or disclosing a received meaning. It is the distance that that meaning has to (but also, in a certain way, cannot) traverse which is fundamental to language.

But what is this distance? What is it that calls for this surplus to representation which forces us to *convey* meaning across the distance of conversation? As it has already been hinted at, it is the ethical relation which answers these questions; "…*the being of signification consists in putting into question in an ethical relation constitutive freedom itself*. Meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face to face of language." (Levinas *TI*, 206). It is in the situation of facing the Other that we will come to understand language. So far, we have explained language as a relation in which two terms stand in a relation that they still remain completely separated in, where communication consists not primarily of transmitting information, but in the need for or call to present and signify to the Other at all. These two moments of language – the *metaphysical relation between independent interlocutors* and the *signifyingness of signification which prompts their communication* – will now be explicated on the basis of the meeting with the Other. Language will be interpreted as a fundamentally ethical situation. The structure of this situation is inhibited by two fundamental terms; the expression of the Other and my summon to answer the Other. Language is the relation where, although we remain absolutely separated, the Other concerns me in such a way that I must formulate an answer that I address to the Other.

Having arrived at this crucial structure and its two fundamental elements, we will continue by discussing them separately; first the **expression** of the Other, and then my **response**. Both this terms concern the very core of Levinas' philosophy. We should however make mention of the fact that we now have come upon for the second time the divergence between *TI* and *OB*. As was stated before, there is a different choice of focus in these two works, which Richard Cohen formulates as such in the foreword to *OB*; "*Totality and Infinity* is focused on ethical alterity, *Otherwise than Being* on ethical subjectivity." (Cohen 1998, xii). While *TI* is more focused on the ethical alterity of the Other, explicated in such terms as "the idea of the Infinite", "transcendence" and "metaphysics", *OB* puts a greater emphasis on the subjects situation after having been met with the Other, with such terms as "despite oneself", "disinterestedness", "exposure" and "…psyche in the form of a hand that gives even the bread taken from its own mouth." (Levinas *OB*, 67). A difference in focus does not however imply that the topics don't sometimes overlap between the two works, for indeed they do. It will in fact be difficult for us ourselves to always keep the two topics apart, considering how much they have to do with one another. Still, we will attempt to discuss first the expression of the Other, then my response to the Other, for the Other. Here a certain divergence will show itself, which will be reflected in which work which will be most used in the two parts.

3. The Expression of the Other

The **expression** of the Other has a principal importance to the philosophy of Levinas. It is the *way* of the Other's ethical resistance; it is his revelation and epiphany, his height and infinity. "This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: "you shall not commit murder"." (Levinas *TI*, 199). The way in which the Other touches us or concerns us and reveal her "meaning", is in her expression. We must bracket "meaning" here, for the expression of the Other is not something which I disclose or interpret. As we shall discuss more closely later, I do not gain an understanding or grasp of the Other in his expression; he rather teaches me, unsettles me, makes me passive. What then of the question of exactly what the Other expresses? Levinas tells us that what is expressed in the Other's expression is the Other's ethical alterity; his independence and unforseeableness, a resistance not of this world (Levinas *TI*, 199). To be sure, the Other also appears in the world, among other things; but she breaks through and dissolves herself from her plastic form. In this world, familiar to my grasp, the Other is "…something absolutely *other*." (Levinas *TI*, 199). The "meaning" of the Other then, would be that of an incomprehensible unforseeablesness which transcends my world. The Other concerns me independently of myself, in fact, as we shall see later, *despite* myself.

That the face of the Other is an *expression* is not coincidental, and, according to Levinas, is of fundamental importance for the possibility and structure of language. In fact, in relation to language, the face is extraordinary, because it is the expression which expresses itself completely by itself, in itself; "…a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form." (Levinas *TI*, 66). The expression of the face then works quite differently from how we normally understand language to be working. In opposition to other expressions, the face does not make reference to other words or cultural contexts in order to express itself; in fact, as we saw before, the face expresses itself exactly as independently breaking through all context in its expression. In contrast to contextual expression who gain their meaning in relation to other meanings, the expression of the face depends only on itself, and expresses only its expressiveness. The expression of the face is speech itself (Levinas *TI*, 201). The expressiveness of the face is signaled in the ethical alterity of the Other understood as height. The one whom I must respect as independent is the one who has her own voice. The mention of the Other's "voice" here must however not be misunderstood, for the Other does not have to open her mouth to speak. Without moving her lips, the Other expresses to me her unshakable independence of all else. This expression has a meaning that cannot be disclosed nor contained, as it expresses itself solely by itself by continuously absolving and dissimulating itself from the forms that attempts to contain it, which is "The idea of infinity, the infinitely more contained in the less…concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face." (Levinas *TI*, 196). The extraordinary expression of the Other is however beyond language not by being outside it, but, as the idea of infinity, *overflows it from within*.

This overflowing from within is not a coincidental occurrence in language, but rather constitutes its structure: "The idea of infinity is produced in the *opposition* of conversation, in sociality." (Levinas *TI*, 197). This is what it means to say that language is a metaphysical relation between two independent terms; language is primordially the situation in which the face speaks *to* me, and in which I speak *to* the face, before it is the tool with which we speak *about* things. It is in this way that Levinas privileges the *communicative* feature or characteristic of language, understood in this special way.

Because the expression of the Other guarantees itself, it is, according to Levinas, beyond the standards of truth and falsehood, which are already presupposed by the authentic expression, this "…word of honor." (Levinas *TI*, 202). To say that the face is beyond truth and falsehood might seem like an extreme statement, but is sustained by the fact that the Other does not give herself over, but "…retains the freedom to lie." (Levinas *TI*, 202). The face of the Other is not ambiguous as a truth always is, "…always possibly dreamt up." (Levinas *TI*, 202). In contrast, the expression of the Other securely rests in its own, independent manifestation, above and beyond any standards of mine. It does not surrender to the option between true or false, but is "…foreign to all compromise and all contamination, this straightforwardness of the face to face…" (Levinas *TI*, 202). This incorruptible meaning of the face is the fact that my responsibility to the Other is indubitable; I cannot escape from my moral responsibility, even by neglecting it. We see then the radical position which Levinas is taking. His philosophy maintains an ethical realism which gives and supports itself entirely by itself. This is the reason why Levinas characterizes ethics as first-philosophy; the ethical does not receive its authority by a transcendental necessity which can be explained in reference to my position as a subject. Rather, the ethical is the authority which critiques the subject over and beyond any capacity of the subject; the ethical is transcendence. But will such a philosophy be able to account for and justify its most decisive step, namely, the undoubtable responsibility for the Other? Or is justification necessarily transcendental and/or holistic? Can one include in one's philosophical system a moment which defies inclusion? Can one take as one's philosophical topic the unsayable and incomprehensible? Such questions do appear as obvious paradoxes; but could this be the effect of a paradoxical reality? Again, these questions come back to haunt us, but we will delay them further yet. We will however foreshadow the argument for a possible answer, which would be the situation to which Levinas refers to this possibility of the impossible. The strongest argument for Levinas' philosophy is nothing more than the incredible everyday event of my responsibility to others, which does not reveal its meaning but nevertheless is experienced as unquestionable. Face to face with the other, to even state the question of moral realism seems offensive, insulting and gravely ignorant. The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is built around this experience and its possible significance.

To return to the question of expression and language, we have seen that the expression of the Other posits itself beyond the standards of the true and the false. The moral obligation put on me by the Other does not leave any room for doubt, although perhaps, as we shall see later, for some kind of choice. By constituting this first expression, which always remains sincere even in deceit, the

expression of the Other, according to Levinas, is the guarantee which makes the ambiguity between truth and falsehood possible. "To seek truth I have already established a relationship with a face which can guarantee itself, whose epiphany itself is somehow a word of honor." (Levinas *TI*, 202). The metaphysical relation of language in which we can express statements of truth already presuppose the authenticity of the relation, which is guaranteed by the Other whom expresses himself as an independent term in the relation. Were it not for this, argues Levinas, "…speech would not surpass the plane of activity, of which it is evidently not a species…" (Levinas *TI*, 202). For Levinas, language must not be taken as an act, but must be understood properly as an ethical situation in which I relate to an independent interlocutor who breaks through my world[4]. Language must be understood as transcendence, and the transcendence is guaranteed by the positive structure of the ethical, which comes from above and beyond to critique my world.

To summarize the explication of the expression of the Other, we must say that this expression which guarantees itself plays an immensely decisive role in the metaphysical relation Levinas calls language. The Other concerns me in language, but in such a way that she remains completely independent of me and my world while still retaining this relation with me. This is because the expression of the Other continuously dissolves itself from any form or context that tries to hold it, and in contrast breaks through my world. This does not however happen negatively, but positively; by summoning me to an ethical obligation which is put on me by no reasons of my own, the Other reaches me in a positive movement which is authorized only by this authorization itself, which is the expression. This expression is then the source of authenticity before truth and falsehood, as the expression which guarantees its own meaning independently of any context. The face speaks, which signals a distance and an "outside" of myself – an exteriority - which opens the subject to a transcending relation which has no beginning nor end in myself, namely language. To "hold a conversation" must be understood to partake in a metaphysical relation where the other party that concerns me remains, at all times, also completely separated; separated in his ethical independence over and before me. Such is the radical understanding of language in the philosophy of Levinas.

But as we have already seen, this position faces some difficult questions. For what justifies us talking about a self-guaranteeing expression which holds its authority beyond the option of false and true? And what does it mean that we are *talking about it?* What allows us to claim that the Other absolves herself from all context and all understanding? And what does it mean to *ab-solve* oneself from all context? Does not the *ab* (away from) in "absolve" presuppose or include (by excluding or opposing itself to) the *ad* (toward)? And if the concept of *ab* presupposes its opposite, is it not a negative movement which depends on the contextual structure to which it belongs? To "absolve" oneself – to loosen oneself away from something – implies that one is fastened *to* something; if so, the

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[4] Levinas does specify that language also *can* be an activity; but this is not its most fundamental feature (Levinas *TI*, 202)

Other could not absolve himself continuously *from* my world if he did not also, continuously, belong *to* my world. At the very moment when Levinas wishes to signify something beyond our understanding and comprehension, his own language turn against him to drag his topic back into the contextual, holistic structure of our understanding. Does this perhaps testify to an inescapable dilemma of our situated understanding? Is it impossible to escape our understanding, because the concept of "escape" must be meaningfully understood? Again these questions seems to assail us. Perhaps it then is time to integrate into our inquiry the **response** of the subject having been met by the Other.

4. The Response of the Subject

As we said before, the topics of **expression** and **response** signal a certain divergence between *TI* and *OB*. We did however also mention that this divergence is not total, and could better be interpreted as a different choice of focus between the two works. Nevertheless, already in *TI* the question of the ethical subject is already an important topic, and the structure of the work bases itself on a transformation of "the Same" – Levinas' chosen name for the subject in *TI* – from solitude to sociality, a transformation that goes from before to after the meeting with the Other[5]. In this transformation, the self begins as an enjoying egoism, at home with itself (Levinas *TI*, 175). As an ego, the Same is happy with its needs, happy because it *has* needs, so that it can fill them. The Desire for the Other however, is the desire which is borne beyond any need to fill; it is an extra, a surplus. We have already discussed the Other and her expression as the idea of infinity, transcendence, etc. Now comes the transformation of the self face-to-face with the Other. According to Levinas, the unforeseeable entrance of the Other introduces a critique to the self. As has been said before, the Other resists or opposes the Same, but not with a power *greater* than that of the self, which would suppose a similarity between the powers of the Same and the Other. The Other opposes the Same with a resistance which is completely *other*; ethical resistance, "…the resistance of what has no resistance…" (Levinas *TI*, 199). The critique of the Other does not dominate me, but inhibits me in a completely new way; by exposing my powers as violence. This critique does not limit my freedom, but rather constitutes it; it gifts me the possibility to rise to my responsibility (Levinas *TI*, 203). The arbitrary spontaneity of my ego gains a wholly new orientation by the way of a critique of this very arbitrariness – and thus also founds reason (Levinas *TI*, 204). The rational mind does not derive this rationality from itself, but is taught by the Other. The revelation of a new perspective, of a possibility to think otherwise and the critique of ones arbitrary spontaneity constitutes the possibility of freedom and of rational thought. The Other puts the Same into question (Levinas *TI*, 207).

As has been said before, the Other also opens me up to the metaphysical relation called language. Having focused on the expression of the Other, we emphasized the essential ethical structure

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[5] As Micheal Morgan makes note of in *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, this narrative should of course not be taken literally, but as a genetical story which illuminates different aspects of our already social lives (Morgan 2011, 37).

of language in which we talk *to* the Other. Now we will discuss language and objectivity, and the meaning of designating different objects. We said in the above passage that the Other opens us up to a new perspective, but that should not mean that we gain the perspective of the Other. Rather, the revelation of the Other teaches us that things *can* stand in the perspective of the Other, *and therefore teaches us that things can stand in a perspective in general*. The subject goes from an attitude that must be called naïve – because it does not consider itself, does not *need* to consider itself – to an attitude that is forced, by the Other, to consider itself. In this way, the possibility of objectivity is established (Levinas *TI*, 209). The objectivity of objects is not due to a contemplative stare which pauses our enjoyment of them, but rather the ethical critique of my possession of them; "…the entry of the thing into the sphere of the other." (Levinas *TI*, 209). In this way, objectivity and thematization is possible because language is possible, and not the other way around: "In speaking I do not transmit to the Other what is objective for me: the objective becomes objective only through communication." (Levinas *TI*, 210). Language is the relation in which the critical distance needed for objectivity is established, namely my disengagement from the world caused by the ethical critique. According to this view, reason and objectivity would not seek to unite all individuals in agreement and thereby neutralize their individuality, but would in contrast presuppose society and the plurality of speakers (Levinas *TI*, 208). The peace between us would be necessary, as the non-violent critique of the Same from the Other, but this peace would not mean the cancelling out of our separation; it would rather be conditioned by that separation. The resistance of the Other which does not dominate me but rather teaches me and makes me free would be the source of rationality; a rationality that finds itself in the relation of language, where independent terms nevertheless stand in a relation they nevertheless remain separated in. This, to reason, incomprehensible situation would be its source, but not as irrationality; as the Good beyond reason and being. Again, what is this direction we have sketched out here, which seeks to show where reason comes to short *by the way of reason?* What does it mean to *understand* what *is* beyond exactly *reason* and *being*?

We see then that Levinas already in *TI* re-interprets our "understanding of understanding"; the way we understand rationality, objectivity, and language. The critique of the Other forces me to account for myself and to present the world to the Other. In this way, language and rationality are primarily *responsive*, acting out of a passivity which the Other installs in me without touching me. Language and objectivity comes about as a response to the Other which, through his expression, has exposed my naïve enjoyment of the world as arbitrary and ignorant. "In designating a thing I designate it to the Other." (Levinas *TI*, 209). The meaning of objectivity lies primarily in a giving of it to the Other. It is however not only objectivity which becomes meaningful in the metaphysical relation. In his essay *Meaning and Sense* (henceforth *MS*), Levinas argues that artistic expression receives its signification in relation to the Other "…he to whom expression expresses, for whom celebration celebrates…The Other (*Autrui*) who faces me is not included in the totality of being expressed. He arises behind every assembling of being as he to whom I express what I express." (Levinas *MS*, 52).

Although neither objectivity nor artistic expression are primary topics in *OB*, the thesis that my world takes on a new meaning as what is shared with an independent Other remains. We shall now move on to that work to see how this thesis is presented there. As we however already have noted, there is a development in *OB* over *TI*, which has to do with ethical subjectivity. In addition to explain how the Other opens the subject to a new world of freedom, rationality and language, *OB* focuses much more heavily and intensely on what has so far been called the critique of the Same face-to-face with the Other. Levinas calls it a persecution of the self by the Other; a non-voluntary exposure and denuding; "This being torn up from oneself in the core of one's unity, this absolute noncoinciding, this diachrony of the instant, signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by-the-other." (Levinas *OB*, 49). We will now discuss language in the context of this second *magnum opus*.

In *OB*, Levinas introduces a new distinction which is fundamental to his understanding of language; namely the distinction between *saying* and *the said*. There is, according to Levinas, a very important difference between the "dead" content of language - the said - and the speaking of that language - the saying - which evokes this dormant content. This difference must be understood properly in order to also properly understand their correlation, and the difference can to some extent be compared to the difference between the objective and the ethical explicated above. According to Levinas, saying and the said do indeed correlate, but the signification of saying is not exhausted in the said: "Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said." (Levinas *OB*, 46). Objectivity and thematization is indeed included in language, but the signification of saying as signifying to the Other must be understood on the basis of the ethical relation between me and the Other which cannot be reduced to a theme. In *OB*, Levinas explicates this relation as my proximity to the Other, which we will discuss more later. First however, we will take a closer look at the thematizing aspect of language, namely the said, which Levinas also has a certain understanding of.

The said is the "…*already said*…" (Levinas *OB*, 37) of language; the linguistic structure of words and their meanings. The said of language is the manifestation of its saying; it is the manifested linguistic structure that allows us to name "this as that". Language qua said should however not be understood as a "…system of signs doubling up beings and relations…" (Levinas *OB*, 35), where words are added on top of an already established receptivity. Representation does not literally re-present what was already present in thought; the "this as that" – the identity of entities - already presuppose the thematization of the said; "The "identical unities" are not given or thematized first, and then receive a meaning; they are given through this meaning. The "this as that" is not lived; it is said." (Levinas *OB*, 35). To the dimension of the said then, belongs themes, topics, determinations, knowledge; the this as that, which is always in reference to the totality through which it is given. The said is meaningful based on ontological structures: "In a system signification is due to the definition of terms by one another in the synchrony of a totality, where the whole is the finality of the elements…In the said, to have a meaning is for an element to be in such a way as to turn into references to other

elements, and for the others to be evoked by it." (Levinas *OB*, 69). The determined, objectifying and manifested elements in language belongs to the already said. The thematizable character of language - which allows something to show itself *as* something – is manifested in the referential structure of language, in which words signify other words by standing in relations such as "difference" or "similarity".

Nevertheless, language obviously does not only rest dormant on our lips; it consist not only of its said, but also its saying. This is the aforementioned saying of language, who's existence few would object to; we do of course speak. But is it the saying or the said which is most fundamental to language? We could decide to understand language in its said primarily, and in turn interpret saying "…as having its function purely correlative with the said, a function that consists of thematizing the saying and opening being to itself, arousing and appearing, and then, in themes that arouse nouns and verbs, operating the "putting toghether," the synchronization or structure – the putting into a world and putting into a history for a historiography…" (Levinas *OB*, 46). Our role in language would be to operate within a structure that also speaks through us; we would continue to partake in the history of language which opened ourselves to it in the first place. We would simultaneously express and be expressed by the said. This is however not the chosen direction by Levinas. "Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities. This is one of the central theses of the present text." (Levinas *OB*, 46). This other signification is the fact that saying signifies to a neighbor, which was mentioned and formulated above as my proximity to the Other. How should we understand this proximity?

My proximity to the Other is characterized by my ethical responsibility to the Other, as it also was in *TI*. The ethical relation is still the main topic. In *OB* however, this relation is explicated with a bigger emphasis on ethical subjectivity, as has already been stated aplenty. The significance of the Other for the subject was, as previously explained, already thematic in *TI*, as the surprising entrance of the uncontainable Other into the world of the Same. The description laid out in *OB* is not a departure from the narrative in *TI*, but focuses to a much larger degree exactly how ethical responsibility is constituted in the subject, *and what it means for our understanding of subjectivity in general*. We saw already in *TI* that the Other opened the subject to freedom, language and rationality, but in *OB* Levinas explains that the responsibility for the other characterizes the subject *in its very subjectivity*. To be a subject means for Levinas not to identify oneself as oneself, but means rather to be *despite oneself*. My subjectivity does not begin in me, but owes itself to the involuntary election by the Other, which summons me to answer. *Subjectivity is fundamentally responsive, passive*.

Subjectivity will as said above be interpreted as a despite-oneself. We will see that this "feature" of subjectivity comes to the subject quite surprisingly, without the subject having been able to predict this event. This unpredictability is to a large degree the same as the unforseableness of the revelation of the Other to the Same in *TI*. Also much like in *TI* however, *OB* also includes a description of the ego *without* having been exposed to responsibility, namely the complacent ego of

enjoyment. The description is almost completely the same, albeit some differences[6]. The main point remains the same however; the enjoying ego rests complacent in its happy enjoyment, as it needs no reflection to satisfy itself with satisfaction and be happy in it (Levinas *OB*, 73). This enjoyment will however end up working as a condition for the *restlessness* of the subject, as the subject traumatized by an all-encompassing responsibility which obligates me to the ultimate sacrifice "…in the form of giving the very bread I eat." (Levinas *OB*, 72). The significance of this sacrifice, this "giving the bread out of my mouth", is conditioned by the prior solitary enjoyment of the bread, "…not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give oneself in giving it." (Levinas *OB*, 72). In order for my sacrifice to the Other to be sincere, I must have tasted the sweet flavor of the bread I nevertheless give away.

To have enjoyed ones bread is then a condition for the responsibility for the Other, but it is, according to Levinas, a condition "…exempt from dialectical tensions…" (Levinas *OB*, 74). The responsibility for the Other in proximity could in no way have been anticipated or deduced by the complacent ego. This is due to the fact that responsibilities are not assumed by myself, but rather comes surprisingly from beyond. My obligations to the Other slips into me without my notice; they do not have their beginning in me (Levinas *OB*, 13). The subjects movement towards the Other is to already be implicated in fraternity; exactly *implicated,* because fraternity is not an act of kindness initiated by me, but rather "…a being caught up in fraternity." (Levinas *OB*, 83). In responsibility, I am the chosen one, elected to my responsibilities; but I was elected non-voluntarily. Levinas described this summon to responsibility as "…traumatic; it is an election in persecution." (Levinas *OB*, 56). It constitutes the restlessness of the subject, which is surprisingly exposed in responsibilities it did not assume, but for which it must nevertheless answer for.

While it might could seem like it, the non-voluntary election to responsibility does not dominate or do violence upon the subject, but in contrast opens it up to freedom. The possibility of "doing what is right" does not come voluntarily, for "Goodness is always older than choice." (Levinas *OB*, 57). I do not assume the choice to do Good; to be able to do Good is to have been involuntarily elected by responsibility. The fact that one did not assume one's responsibilities however, does not mean that one is "…enslaved to the Good." (Levinas *OB*, 11). The subject retains the freedom to negligence. In this way, the involuntary election of the subject is in no way the "…abdication of the same…" (Levinas *OB*, 68), which would in fact be to relieve the subject of responsibility. In contrast, the subject elected to responsibility cannot avoid having to choose. I am not free in being responsible for my freedom; in fact, the meaning of my freedom lies in this unavoidable call to answer for the other, the summon to goodness.

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[6] In a footnote to the paragraph on enjoyment in *OB*, Levinas notes that sensibility in *TI* was interpreted as sensibility as consumption and enjoyment (Levinas *OB*, 191). Sensibility in *OB* is however interpreted as the sensibility of the subject in its exposure to the Other.

That the subject retains the possibility to neglect its responsibilities does not mean that the subject can avoid being responsible. My responsibility to the Other, which lies on "…the hither side of freedom and non-freedom…" (Levinas *OB*, 57) is signaled in the impossibility of slipping away from it. This impossibility of slipping away from one's obligations is what, according to Levinas, constitutes our subjectivity (Levinas *OB*, 56). The uniqueness of the "I" is nothing more but being the one assigned to responsibility. This understanding of the subject has a puzzling result; it means that the core of myself is a de-coring of myself for the sake of the Other; I am *despite-myself, for-the-other*. It is exactly as such that Levinas decides to interpret subjectivity. According to him, I am elected to my subjectivity despite-myself, and am therefore "…*one* without identity, but unique in the unexceptionable requisition of responsibility." (Levinas *OB*, 53). My "identity" is to be required for the sake of the other. As such, my subjectivity is not an assembled unity, resting assured in its own substantiality; it is rather "…the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability." (Levinas *OB*, 48). This is what was meant by the restlessness, trauma and exposure of the self in proximity. The subject does not coincide with itself, but is rather relentlessly dragged out of itself in its responsibility for the Other. It is a persecution of the self penetrated by the Other.

The persecution of the self by the Other is an obsession for the subject, an obsession which "…paralyzes with the weight of its very silence the power to assume this weight." (Levinas *OB*, 84). The impossibility of assuming the weight of responsibility simultaneously as this weight obsesses you and persecutes you, can be compared to the idea of infinity in *TI*, which is always more than what is thought in it. Also in *OB*, the Other obligates me from an incommensurable distance; namely from a "…immemorial past, which was never present…" (Levinas *OB*, 88). The diachronical time of the Other has already obligated me, and is always missed by my present. I am therefore in proximity called despite-myself from an irrecuperable past, meaning that proximity can never be a unity, but is always broken up by the difference of the terms (Levinas *OB*, 83). But that proximity as such is in two times, in a *diachrony*, means that proximity "…thus is transcendence." (Levinas *OB*, 85). The subject transcends itself in it being despite-itself. Here we again return to the topic of the saying of language, *for the signification of saying will now turn out to be the transcendence of proximity.* By undoing its essence as such by substituting itself for-the-other in signification, the speaking subject is absorbed in the glory of transcendence (Levinas *OB*, 13).

As we stated above, we wished to interpret saying not on the basis of the said, but in the signification of signifying it to my neighbor. Having now concluded our explication of proximity, we can now explain this signification: "The proper signification of subjectivity is proximity, but proximity is the very signifyingness of signification, the very establishing of the-one-for-the-other, the establishing of the sense which every thematized signification reflects in being." (Levinas *OB*, 85). Signification is *for-the-other*; expressions are for the sake of the other, despite myself. Having however interpreted the subject not as a coinciding substantiality, but as a restlessness and breaking up

of the subjects core, we would be wrong to interpret saying as the subject giving its interior thoughts to the other, which would be to misunderstand the despite-myself of subjectivity. As Levinas says, "The subject of saying does not give signs, it becomes a sign, turns into an allegiance." (Levinas *OB*, 49). In saying, I express my exposure; but I am also simultaneously exposed in my expression. This again comes back to the paradoxical identity of the self. As was said before, "I" am not myself on the basis of myself, but rather despite-myself, in my unique assignation of being the one required. When we now seek to understand subjectivity in its saying, the same characteristic is held forth. The speaking subject cannot properly be named by a pronoun – be named as "I" – because "…the I is said by him that speaks." (Levinas *OB*, 56). Speaking has however been interpreted as responding to the responsibility to the Other, and must therefore not be understood as the subject stating itself for itself, but exactly despite-itself, in sacrifice and giving. The subject of saying gives; but "I" do not give signs, because what is named the "I" is the very giving of oneself. One is oneself in this giving, in this sacrifice, in substitution. This is the signification of the saying of language. It is a turning oneself inside-out towards the other, expression in exposure. The distressed subject which is dragged out of itself is the one that signifies; "Despite-me, for-another, is signification par excellence." (Levinas *OB*, 11).

Having interpreted saying as such, we see now that language not only is en*acted* out of a passivity, but to some degree remains a passivity in each of its moments. And indeed, Levinas understands saying not only to be a passivity, but the *supreme* passivity (Levinas *OB*, 47), "…the most passive passivity…" (Levinas *OB*, 50). How should we understand this? In saying, I uncover myself and put myself at risk; the risk of my words being treated as pure non-sense, patient exposure to the reception of my exposure. The giving myself over in such a way is called by Levinas the *suffering* of saying (Levinas *OB*, 50). It is running the risk of not being taken seriously, or perhaps being taken *too* seriously, or perhaps being held accountable for what one says, or perhaps ridiculed for it. In either case, the saying is forever *for-the-other*, to which the risks and rewards are upheld. I signify for the sake of my neighbor, and therefore expose myself in spite of myself, expecting nothing in return.

With this analysis, Levinas hopes to have shown what he set out for, namely, that "Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities." (Levinas *OB*, 46). Indeed, we have seen that saying signifies quite differently; it signifies despite-itself, and therefore undoes its essence rather than just putting essences together for the Other. In saying to the Other, I do not simply navigate in the referential structures of meaning, but come to signify in an exposure of expression which becomes transcendence. This plot of transcendence does however, according to Levinas, lead to the said, which "…arises in the saying." (Levinas *OB*, 46). The putting-together of synchronization and identity – the appearing of "this as that" – has its place in language, and is not antithetical to the saying of language. *And even more extraordinary, we will be able to thematize even the saying in the said.* But that we shall be able to manifest saying in a said -which in a certain way will be a betrayal - does not mean that saying is exhausted in this manifestation. "[Saying] imprints its trace on the

thematization itself…" (Levinas *OB*, 46-47). This we will discuss more at a later point, as it concerns the still-to-come discussion with Derrida. For now we will be satisfied in saying that saying signifies otherwise than the said, in the way which was explicated above.

To summarize our discussion of the **response** of the subject, we now see that Levinas both in *TI* and *OB* wishes to orient the objectifying, thematizing feature of language in a new way. While he does not wish to make away with them, he is insistent on his position that neither the Other nor the subjective saying can be reduced as to be contained as themes or objects posited by language qua said. We saw in our discussion of expression that the Other infinitely absolves himself from any context that attempt to hold him. Now we also see that that the critique of the self initiated in the self by the Other unsettles the self in such a way that it cannot coincide with itself, and therefore cannot be synchronized into a unity. It is then not only the expression of the Other that cannot be contained in language; also the saying subjectivity transcends the identifications and categories of language in its signifying for-the-other, despite-itself. The dimension of themes, topics and objectivity does indeed have their place in language. But the fact that these themes and topics are signified to the Other cannot be reduced to a theme or a topic. Much like the expression of the Other then, the saying of language transcends language from *within* language, with a primordial signification over and beyond the manifested said.

5. Preliminary conclusions

We have now explicated the general thesis on language in Levinas as it is presented in his two *magnum opus*, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. We have attempted to show both that there is a continuity on the understanding of language in addition to a different choice of focus. Our discussion has been oriented around the **expression** of the Other and the **response** of the subject, which for Levinas constitute the primordial structure of language. Such an understanding of language will have two very important consequences; it will subdue the thematizing and objectifying feature of language to a more fundamental ethical one, and it will understand language not primarily as an *activity*, but first and foremost as a *passivity*. Both these themes might be said to concern the *transcendence* of language. We will round out our discussion of the philosophy of language in Levinas by revisiting these two themes.

Levinas tells us that the Other reveals herself in her expression, which is the face that speaks. The face initiates language understood as conversation between two independent interlocutors. Levinas then interprets language to be what he calls the metaphysical relation, namely the relation between two absolutely separated terms. The Other *opposes* me in conversation, although not with a greater power than mine, but with ethical resistance which puts me into question. This of course speaks to a very ordinary but often also very frustrating experience, namely that of discussion, quarrel and misunderstandings. It can be quite infuriating to converse with someone who just does not want to understand your point, or agree to your argument, or see your perspective; or even worse, who just

does not seem to understand what you are talking about. The independence of the Other in conversation can quite simply be one of the most exasperating experiences in ones life. One could understand this experience as a hindrance to be overcome, so that me and my interlocutor would aim at being united in an agreement dictated by the absolute truth, equally undeniable to both parties. According to such an understanding of language, "…the role of language would be to dissolve the ipseity of individual consciousness fundamentally antagonistic to reason…" (Levinas *TI*, 208). Language would be an obstacle to the unity of reason, filled with coincidental misunderstandings belonging to particular individuals which obstructed them from leaving their individuality behind and joining the universal. This is however not the path chosen by Levinas. *Rather than understanding it as an accidental and unfortunate feature of language, Levinas takes the opposition of the Other in language to constitute its fundamental structure*. Language does not begin because there is a prior truth which I am trying to figure out how to formulate, but because another human demand that I *speak up* and explain myself. The expression of the Other teaches me an independence that I must answer to, and to which all linguistic meanings are designated. Language is communication first and foremost, and the content inscribed in it and the act of disclosing and interpreting that content must be understood as secondary to this fundamental feature. Communication again must however be understood properly, namely as the situation in which I relate to the wholly independent Other, whose ethical expression consists in critically opposing me in our communication.

This leads us to another truth about language taught to us by Levinas. The expression of the Other, which in a certain sense teaches us to speak, can itself not be contained in language. The Other absolves herself from all context, by only referencing herself in her expression; the expression that expresses itself. This is the independence of the Other, who's expression is not dependent on anything but itself. The way in which I "receive" the idea of the Other is therefore not comparable to the way in which I disclose regular objects and informations, but is explained as the idea of infinity, whose idea is always more than what is contained in the idea. The Other is always more than the idea I have of him, and expresses himself exactly as such. Therefore, the one I designate words to cannot himself be designated by a word, except by what Levinas calls "an abuse of language." The question then arises of what we so forth have been doing, when writing about the Other. Is it legitimate to say that the Other of which we are speaking is not contained by the words we make use of, but is always the Other I am speaking *to* and not *about*? Or would this again have to be understood as yet another designation which attempts to escape the objectifying feature of language still by using language? We shall soon have the opportunity to address these questions. For now, what is important to take note of is the irreducibility of the Other. In the situation called language, the Other is always first the independent interlocutor that opposes me and to which I present language, before being a theme presented in language. Language is therefore characterized not only by what is contained in it, but also by what exceeds it *from within*.

Language interpreted on the basis of the expression of the Other cannot be understood to be only an activity, but must be understood to constitute primarily the situation[7] of transcendence. Levinas argues for this already in *TI*, although he admits that language of course also *can* be an activity; i.e. used practically. Language understood as the metaphysical relation however, interprets language to be a situation which I stand *in* that *exceeds* myself, and which cannot be explained solely or primarily with reference to my activity; rather, my "speech-acts" are meaningful only on the basis of the summon they respond to. We must however nuance also this understanding of "speech-acts" when we take the signification of saying as hitherto explained into consideration. As we have seen, Levinas interprets saying to be fundamentally passive. Although he occasionally paradoxically calls it "The *act* of saying…" (Levinas *OB*, 48, my italics), Levinas interprets saying as to be always already a *response*, a response to an untraceable call which I have already missed when I become aware of it. As an effect having been installed in me without me having been able to predict nor trace its cause, the summon-to-answer cannot be said to be an effect of *my* consciousness – although it undoubtedly "is happening" for my consciousness[8] – and must therefore be understood to affect me *passively*. And this affected effect is exactly me being turned-to the Other in the form of signification or substitution. To be obligated by responsibility is to be turned-toward the Other in an involuntary exposure. This is of course, as was also said before, not the only moment in language. I do also chose my words and control what I say with intent and purpose. The passiveness which Levinas however is describing follows these words at each step, in what was described earlier as the inherent *risk* of saying. Having uttered my words, the saying which I have expressed in a certain sense exposes me, as I now am at the risk of everything that can compromise and humiliate me or otherwise traced back to me. When I speak out, my words are out there to be criticized and judged, which of course also counts when I remain silent, which is an answer in itself. In my responsibility – in my *ability to respond* – I am exposed to the Other. But what is it that exposes me? It is the already established authority of those to whom I designate my words. It is the ethical obligation which has snuck itself in surprisingly. That I am responsible towards the Other is already established; I am already committed to conversation without having chosen that commitment myself. In this way, the content and activity of language always already respond to a summon to which they are obligated, which is the measure of their seriousness. The gravitas of language is its ethical signification, and this gravity weighs our words in our very saying of them. Language always responds to it, perhaps even at this very moment.

Both when we understand it as the metaphysical relation and as passive saying, language is understood to be transcendence. To say, speak, listen, answer and question is to partake in

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[7] We must however be critical of the notion of situation, as Levinas discusses this exact notion in *OB*. To clarify then, we understand here with the word situation *not* something which one dwells in, is complacent in and in which one is master of one's own origin and freedom, which are the accusations made against the term "situation" by Levinas in *OB* (Levinas *OB*, 137)

[8] Which means for Levinas that consciousness does not exhaust nor contain everything that appears for it, "Not everything that is in consciousness would be posited by consciousness…" (Levinas *OB*, 101)

transcendence. We have now been able to discuss both terms of the transcendent relation. Language is transcendence because it is the relation in which I am approached by the Other and where her expression is revealed, which speaks to me without giving itself to me, and concerns me while remaining absolutely separated and independent as an interlocutor. The one side of transcendence is the transcendence of the interlocutor. Language is also transcendence because I expose myself passively in it, as I respond to a summoning which belongs to a wholly other time by being turned inside-out to-the-other in the form of signification. The second side of transcendence is the transcendence of my substitution. These are the two moments of transcendence hitherto explained, although both sides of the relation are of course involved in the description of either of them. The expression of the Other is of course revealed to the subject, and the subjects passiveness in saying is of course due to the expression of the Other. The distinction we have made so far between the **expression** and **response** is, as we have said, a difference of *focus*. Both are however meaningful in the situation of the meeting face-to-face (or text-to-text?) between the subject and the Other.

Interpreting language as transcendence should of course not exclude those features of language that are not transcendent. The unity of identification understood as the structural understanding of this-as-that and the activity of language do have their place, and are not dismissed by Levinas. Rather, they are given a new meaning. Objectivity and linguistic meaning are re-interpreted as communicative phenomena which receive their meaning and validity from belonging to a shared world. That is of course not the entire story, and phenomena such as "objective facts" do of course gain their validity from a whole range of sources. Their original meaning as "objective" however, owes it status at least partially to this notion of a shared world in which interlocutors speak to each other. The perspective of objectivity presupposes the critique of the complacent self by the Other, which forces its reflection by the way of ethics. This is the way in which description presupposes normativity, as the critique which suspends the activity of the subject and teaches it to consider its moves. The solitary hermit might face obstacles which forces him to adapt, but this is not the same as gaining a new perspective. Everything still remains for-him, in a way which we now argue must be understood as naïve and essentially lacking a perspective. The force which teaches us to take the world and the things in it into consideration is the being which remains independent in its relation to us. It is the Other, whom unsettles me and drags me out of myself; awakens me in my complacency and forces me to *think*. As we shall see soon, thought itself cannot be separated from speech, because the thought owes its meaning to the communicative relation of language. The ethical requirement to "think for yourselves" then measures itself up to the responsibility for the Other. This responsibility constitutes its legitimacy and justification. We weigh our words for the sake of the Other.

B) Levinas and his Contemporaries

Before we move on to our next chapter, it will be useful for us to contextualize the hitherto given discussion in the context of the philosophies of language contemporary to Levinas himself. Such a contextualization will make it clearer exactly why Levinas understands language as he does, and why he believes it to be important to understand it in this way. During this contextualization, we will be discussing and referring to many views which conflicts with the most important notions of Levinas' philosophy of language. We will however not delve into an intricate discussion of the differences in conflict, as our goal is first and foremost to situate the context of Levinas' understanding of language.

In his exposition of his general thesis on language, Levinas works within and responds to both the tradition and the contemporary scene of his time of philosophy of language. He has his own interpretation and understanding of the development of philosophy of language, whose insights he deems necessary, but not exhaustive. This interpretation of his contemporary scene of philosophy of language could be said to constitute what Levinas understands by the concept of "the already said", which we have already looked at. In this understanding of language as said, Levinas finds two key developments that he himself does not intend to go back on; namely the critique of the subject and an understanding of identity and meaning as an already "this as that". Agreeing that these two developments are necessary, he does however not believe that they explain language sufficiently, as they lack an explanation of what has been called the transcendence of language. They do however still constitute important developments which we must take heed of. We shall now take a look at Levinas interpretation of his contemporaries in philosophy of language and what it means for his own philosophy. To assist us in this, we will make use of John Llewelyn' chapter on Levinas and Language in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Here, Llewelyn delineates the two philosophies of language which were most prominent at the time when Levinas wrote *TI* and *OB*, namely structuralism and linguistic ontologism (Llewelyn 2002, 119). We do believe Llewelyn is correct in choosing these two directions of philosophy of language, but we will in the upcoming discussion focus on ontologism, as it is most relevant to our own work. Structuralism will however also be mentioned.

The said of language is, as we have previously seen, closely connected to the act of disclosing and understanding. It is the "this as that" of identification, in which we understand an object *as* something. There are two important features of identification that Levinas pulls our attention towards. Firstly, the act of identification understood as understanding "something *as* something" is a fundamental and indispensable feature of knowledge. The structure of identification is in fact the structure of our sensible intuition: "The intuition is already a sensibility becoming an *idea*, of another this as this…" (Levinas *OB¸*61). My perception is already an interpretation, as I intuit something *as* something. This must not be meant as an "adding something onto something" in which I add an identity onto what I intuit. In contrast, my intuition is already this identification; it is my relation to a being "…that one always goes beyond and that always is to be interpreted." (Levinas *TI*, 65).

Perception is always already identification, and identification is always already interpretation, or understanding "this as that". Understanding actively proclaims its object "as something", and must therefore be understood as already a disturbance of the passivity of the subject. This proclaiming feature of identification and understanding is the first that must be understood about the said.

The second feature Levinas draws our attention to is the historicity of identification. The identification of the said bases itself on the *already* said of history. The historical should however not simply be understood as a reference to the past, but as an already established historicity; "history" and "past" are already meaningful terms within a history. I am always already absorbed in history, who's past has already opened me up to its themes. This is argued for by Levinas both in *TI* and *OB* (Levinas *TI/OB*, 65/36). Levinas also argues for this in *MS*, where he connects it to the philosophical positions of a number of thinkers like Hegel, Bergson, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Especially Merleau-Ponty is explained as having explicated the fundamental historicity of understanding in its fullest extent (Levinas *MS*, 43). The point is here the same as in *TI* and *OB*; the access to a meaningful object constitutes the meaning itself. Meaning proclaims meanings in order for it to appear meaningfully in the first place. Meaning has already been said, and its meaning as said belongs to the always already meaningful activity of identification as proclamation.

This understanding of our understanding constitutes for Levinas the modern rejection of a separation between thought and language. Levinas argues that we only recently put into question an understanding of discourse that understood it to only reflect and re-present the inner thought of a subject (Levinas *TI*, 205). Such an understanding took the subject to then be the locus and provider of the meaningful content of language. The modern understanding of language understood as said is a refutation of this separation between thought and language. As we saw before, the meaning of language as said has already opened us up to the act of proclaiming this as that. We are already absorbed in the meaningful understanding of something *as* something, the "…dovetailing of ideas…" (Levinas *OB*, 61), equating something with another image of itself, which is an identification that works by being a re-identification. The meaningful is already meaningful before we arrive at the scene, already bears an identity. Understood as such, language and its signification is not constituted on the basis of a pre-existing thought, but rather, "Signification surprises the very thought that thought it." (Levinas *TI*, 206). We are possessed by language before being able to speak it.

Our being possessed by language is one of the fundamental features of what Llewelyn refers to as ontologism in philosophy of language. Llewelyn bases the notion of ontologism in language - or linguistic possession – on an interpretation of the philosophy of Heidegger. On this account, language is not primarily an ability belonging to Dasein, but always already its way of being (Llewelyn 2002, 122). Dasein speaks languages, but this is not added onto an already existing Dasein; "*Da-sein* is and has in its essence to be the place (the *Da*) where language speaks." (Llewelyn 2002, 122). We are then, as we also saw above, always already involved in language. This understanding of Heidegger is reiterated by Levinas himself in *MS* when he explains this pre-original involvement in language in

reference to Heidegger's comments on language being the house of being (Levinas *MS*, 38). Ontologism in philosophy of language is then well applicable to the understanding of the said given above, as it understands language to surprise the subject which speaks it, as it is not added onto a pre-existing subject, but always already possesses the subject in its subjectivity. The same point can be made about structuralism, which according to Llewelyn is naturally critical of the subject. When we understand language as first and foremost a structure, we understand it as a referential, internal system which is meaningful in reference to the totality of the system, and therefore a system which the speaking subject participates in. In some sense, it could be said that the structures speak through the subject (Llewelyn 2002, 120). Structuralism is in this way fundamentally critical of the human, and is identified by Levinas as essentially antihumanistic (Levinas *OB*, 127). But this position is, according to Levinas, "…true over and beyond the reasons it gives itself." (Levinas *OB*, 127), and he claims that "Humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human." (Levinas *OB*, 128).

What we see from the two quotes above is that Levinas does not reject the developments of modern philosophy of language. In *TI*, he calls the idea of language being added on top of a world constituted by pre-existing thoughts to be a myth that this modern direction of philosophy has overcome (Levinas *TI*, 206). Understood as we explicated them above, Levinas is clearly on board with both structuralism and ontologism. Levinas does however believe that these facts of language do not exhaust language and its significations. And it can indeed seem like the ontologist and structuralist understandings of language hitherto explained leaves something to be desired. We might agree with them that linguistic meaning cannot be understood as to have begun in a non-linguistic thought that the thinking subject wants to externalize; but this still begs the question for why we have signification. "…why is language, the recourse to the system of signs, necessary for thought? Why does the object, and even the perceived object, need a name in order to become signification? What is it to have meaning?" (Levinas *TI*, 206). It is these questions that Levinas seeks to answer with his understanding of language as transcendence, which we presented in section A. There is of course the question of whether or not other philosophers in the traditions of structuralism and ontologism have also attempted to answer these questions, with for example Heideggers notion of being-towards-death as a structural movement which forces the subject to reflect and ask questions about itself. Indeed, Llewelyn asks us if it could be possible (although he also points out that such a proposition would have to be investigated and nuanced much further) to explain the difference between Heidegger's and Levinas' understanding of language as the difference between "…question and questionaibility…" (Llewelyn 2002, 122) and "…response and responsibility…" (Llewelyn 2002, 122). This paper is however not about these other possibilities, and we shall not dwell on them for long. The point of this comparison is only to show that Levinas does give his contemporaries in the philosophy of language their due consideration, and also agrees with much they have to say. Nevertheless, he does not agree to them being the end all, as with for example the philosophy of Heidegger. For such a philosophy, Levinas argues, language can be nothing outside disclosure and manifestation. In questionability, being opens

itself up to being, which is the origin and end of its sense. The meaning of responsibility in language is for Levinas not contained in such a schema; "Where are we to situate the residue which is neither what shows itself in the openness, nor the disclosure itself, the openness, idea or truth of what shows itself? Is it certain that manifestation *founds* all that manifests itself? And must it not itself be justified by what manifests itself?" (Levinas *OB*, 67). Levinas investigates language not only in the way which it manifests its meaning and contains them, but also the way in which it transcends. By explaining language as the expression of the Other and the responsibility of the response, Levinas is situating this residue which he himself refers to. For Levinas, language is not only structural ontologies; it is metaphysics.

When we first discussed the said in section A, we explained that Levinas in no way wants to do away with the said, but rather put it in its proper place. As with subjectivity, Levinas seeks to dethrone it, and re-orient it towards the responsibility to the Other. In such a way, saying holds a signification over and beyond what can be manifested in the said, but still leads to the said. His own philosophy is a development over the development of his contemporaries. It is however, according to himself, not a contingent or random development, but one that is quite necessary for our understanding of language not to become a menace. As Llewelyn explains us, structuralism and ontologism run the risk of reducing language to a nonsensical, anonymous murmur, as "…what speaks first and last is language in its totality." (Llewelyn 2002, 132). Such a philosophy is untenable for Levinas, as it not only disallows for the expression of the Other – which breaks with the totality – but also rejects the responsibility of the elected self, which is exactly not anonymous but the one assigned to responsibility. saying is a for-the-other, despite-itself. The signification of saying as despite-itself, for-the-other, is inconceivable in the anonymous neutrum that language becomes when understood only on the basis of structuralism and ontologism.

The neutral anonymousness that language can be understood to consist of when we understood it based on the totality of structures is then in opposition to Levinas' philosophy. As we have seen however, Levinas does not wish to simply return to a pre-structuralist or pre-ontologist philosophy[9], but attempts to show how transcendence breaks through and overflows language *from within* language. Even though an understanding of language on the basis of the said makes it look like transcendence and language are terms foreign to each other, this will only have been because one has missed or neglected *another* signification of language which is not reducible to the said, namely the saying. This is how we should properly understand the place and significance of Levinas' philosophy of language.

As we also saw in section A, the reasons for agreeing with Levinas' analysis would in the end refer us back to the everyday event of responsibility to others. The signification saying supposedly holds over the said comes from the transcendence of responsibility. Language as a metaphysical relation is language held in the ethical regard. It overflows because it answers to the incommensurable

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[9] Although he has said that his philosophy is a return to Platonism *in its own way* (Levinas *TI*, 293)

expression of the Other and my response to the incommensurable. How should we however understand the reference back to our daily experience? Can we deduce Levinas' philosophy from a reflection on our ethical obligations? Llewelyn disagrees with this, as he proclaims that responsibility such as Levinas delineates it must be groundless, and ask for no reasons for justifying itself (Llewelyn 2002, 132). Responsibility for the other is exactly the situation in which I ask no questions of the authority of the Other, where my obligations responds to no fact, situation or insight belonging to myself, but exactly despite-myself. This is echoed by Levinas himself, as he argues that "…the desire to settle things and not let oneself be abused by "nothingness" and words." (Levinas *OB*, 94) – which he also refers to the question of the existence of God – eventually leads back to the thought of totality and unity. The desire to be able to "draw back the curtains" and reveal the true meaning of our lives is exactly what responsibility does not do because it does not reveal itself to disclosure and understanding. The God behind the curtains remain painfully absent. Llewelyn explains that Levinas' philosophy in some sense measures itself up to the possibility of *il y a*; the empty "there is" which is the anonymous neutral murmur we explicated above. There may be only a "there is". "The ambiguity or enigma of this incognitive 'may be'…", Llewelyn explains, "…is necessary to the good beyond being." (Llewelyn 2002, 132).

Levinas is then in a very peculiar situation. The groundless responsibility for the Other is the nexus of his philosophy, "the ultimate situation" and "the absolute experience". The structure of the face-to-face with the Other is the basis of his philosophical analysis. Does this then not necessarily lead us to asking the question of whether Levinas' philosophy is groundless and baseless? Is it not ambiguous whether there is *any* sense to his fundamental claims at all? Perhaps Levinas would concur to this ambiguity, agreeing that we perhaps can never settle the "nature" of the responsibility for the Other. We will have the opportunity to revisit this topic in the course of the upcoming chapters. There is however another question which we can ask. Putting aside the question of the true nature of responsibility, what could in either case ever be *said* about it? More precisely; what could be *philosophically said* about it? The question is of outmost importance, considering our interpretation of language given above. What do we mean when we say that "responsibility is groundless transcendence"? Is it not an identification, a "this as that"? Responsibility *as* groundless transcendence? Language *as* transcendence? It seems contradictory to even attempt to say it. We then catch up with those questions which have been evoked a couple of times throughout this paper. In the forthcoming chapter, we will be reading, commenting and interpreting the way in which Jaques Derrida engages with these question in the once aforementioned *Violence and Metaphysics*. We will argue that the main motive of this essay is not to destroy Levinas' philosophy, but to lure out of it its most interesting, exciting and excruciating implications and difficulties.

Chapter II: The Violence of Language and the Other of Philosophy

1. Introduction to *Violence and Metaphysics*

Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, first published as a two-part essay in "Revue de métaphysique et de morale" in 1964 and then re-published in the essay-collection "L'écriture et la différence" in 1967, is an almost 100-page long essay by Jacques Derrida on the philosophy of Levinas. The essay comments and interprets on almost every philosophical work – as well as some of his theological work - written by Levinas up to and including *Totality and Infinity*, this last work of course being given most attention. Derrida does however add that two important articles by Levinas, namely *The Trace of the Other* and *Meaning and Sense* appeared when *Violence and Metaphysics* was almost completely written, admitting that "…we can make but brief allusions to these texts here." (Derrida *VM*, 396).

In chapter I, we made some anticipations in the form of certain questions which would give the reader a guess at what the main theme of *Violence and Metaphysics* (henceforth *VM*) is. It is a line of questioning in which we have asked about the status of our own terminology – our own language – when discussing the Other, whom is exactly beyond any thematization. We are now ready to admit that this kind of questioning is inspired by Derrida's essay. As Bernasconi writes in *The Trace of Levinas in Derrida*; "The general thrust of "Violence and Metaphysics" is to insist on Levinas's dependence on Western ontology, even (perhaps especially) in his attempt to break with it." (Bernasconi 1988, 15). This is indeed what we claim to be the main theme of *VM*; *what relation does Levinas have to the tradition he is attempting to break with?*

One would perhaps at this point begin to speculate whether one could already begin to catch sight of an answer to this questionnaire; Levinas *is* dependent on the tradition in order to formulate his philosophy, and therefore cannot break with it. The naturalness of such a conclusion is not foreign to *VM*, and according to Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, it has to a great extent influenced the reading of Levinas; "…first, the initial reception of Levinas's work has been to a great extent determined by *Totality and Infinity*. Second, the questions addressed to *Totality and Infinity* by this initial reading have been largely and particularly in the English-speaking world determined by Derrida's "Violence and Metaphysics"." (Bernasconi/Critchley 1991, xii). *VM* then has an important place in the traditional interpretation of Levinas, and how we ourselves read and interpret *VM* will itself be important. On that note however, Bernasconi and Critchley asks the essential question of whether or not this "natural conclusion" outlined above is too simplistic. They argue – both in the text quoted and other places – that to view *VM* as simply a critique is unnuanced to a point that it leads to a misunderstanding of both Derrida and Levinas. This follows from both that the abovementioned conclusion is *not the only one* presented in *VM*, and also because, in the end, Derrida *refuses to give a final answer* to the questions he is posing. It seems to us then, that the main interest of Derrida in *VM* is the *tension* that arises between the necessity and impossibility of the different answers that can be given to "his" questions.

This question of understanding what Derrida's general project in *VM* is, will be a vital question in this chapter.

We put "his" in quotation-marks above because to say that the questions posed in *VM* are Derrida's questions is not an uncontroversial thing to say. This can be shown from a preliminary answer to the important question given above; what is Derrida's intent in *VM*? A preliminary presentation of Derrida's intentions in *VM* can be given on the basis of the many explicit remarks Derrida makes on the issue. Derrida explains that within a certain "…space of interrogation…" he will first give us a "…very partial reading of Levinas's work." (Derrida *VM*, 103). After having done this, "…we will attempt to ask several questions. If they succeed in approaching the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections, but rather the questions put to *us* by Levinas." (Derrida *VM*¸104). The necessity of the above quotation-marks then becomes visible; according to Derrida himself, the questions which will arise in *VM* are first and foremost questions that already belong to the interiority of Levinas' philosophy, and simply have to be drawn out from that context. It is perhaps such a style of writing which Critchley points out in *The chiasmus: Levinas, Derrida and the ethical demand for deconstruction* when explaining that "Derrida's writings are parasitic because they are close readings of texts that draw their sustenance from within the flesh of the host." (Critchley 1989, 92). This is, according to Critchley, a style of reading which traverses between the options of commentary and interpretation.

Two more comments will be made on Derrida's intentions. We start with one that is of vital importance to our own project; the questions which appear in *VM* are, according to Derrida, intimately tied up to the topic of language. Beginning the third section of the essay – the final section in which the questionnaire is mainly presented – Derrida says this: "The questions whose principles we now will attempt to indicate are all, in several senses, questions of language: questions of language and the question of language." (Derrida *VM*, 136). The aforementioned tension, which is the main topic of *VM,* is placed in the context of and formulated as both questions of language and the question of language. Through an inquiry into the philosophical language of Levinas, we will be able to discuss the possibilities and necessities of language in general. The second of Derrida's intentions we wish to comment on is one we have briefly mentioned already, and one which is perhaps better described as a choice. In following Derrida's questionnaire, we will see that, at the most critical points, Derrida will leave his questions open. The essay both begins and ends with questions that are left unanswered, and many examples are found throughout the essay as well. Bernasconi and Critchley addresses this choice by Derrida, and refers it to what they call a "double reading", which they explain is a technique of deconstruction by Derrida in which two paths are drawn out from the same text in order to both oppose them to each other while at the same time intertwining them; "It is not for a double reading to decide between these paths of reading, these two motifs, but rather to render such choice undecidable." (Bernasconi/Critchley 1991, xii). This understanding of a "double reading" will help us when we dive into *VM*.

Two things must yet be said before we dive into the text itself. The first is a practical issue which we have already mentioned in passing; *VM* is a reading of Levinas' philosophy up and until *TI*, meaning that it of course does not refer to any of the developments which may or may not have taken place in *OB*. This is especially important to us, as we will argue in chapter III that *OB* – and especially the distinction between saying and the said - to some extent is an answer to *VM*. We have therefore gone a little ahead of ourselves, since we already discussed this distinction to some extent in chapter I. The reader should therefore keep in mind during this chapter that Levinas had not yet made this distinction when *VM* was being written. Some other terms – more specifically the understanding of "giving" and the topic of the Other as origin or telos – will also have changed, and we will try to point out when divergences occur.

The second and final issue concerns a choice of our own. As we have seen from the hitherto explication, Derrida can be understood to be a quite humble philosopher; humble to the point that he does not wish to refer his inquires to *himself*, but rather understand them as questions which are – implicitly and/or explicitly – posed by Levinas himself. The question then arises; to whom should we refer the statements, convictions, positions, questions and dilemmas presented in *VM*? Sometimes, the reading of Levinas will be so close that it will be obvious that it is a Levinasian position simply retold or re-formulated by Derrida; at other times, Derrida will explicitly admit that he is leaving the genre of commentary (e.g. p. 134). In between these two extremes however, it will sometimes be not only difficult but perhaps impossible to discern to whom certain statements should be appropriated. We will certainly attempt to be as careful as possible when commenting upon and interpreting such statements, but in the end, a choice must always be made. In these cases, we will generally apply such statements to Derrida himself. We believe we are right in doing this, and the argument for it will perhaps concern the grander themes of this master thesis. The argument is that, despite any contexts of textuality, necessary inspirations and possible historical origins, it is still Derrida in a very important sense who is leading the pen; he is the one writing because he is *the one responsible* for writing the text currently present. In other words, Derrida cannot escape the situation that he indeed is the one who is *saying* these things. This is not a return to the conception of the author as a spontaneous, autonomous subject in the Kantian tradition, but rather a *new* way of thinking both the author and the subject; not in its transcendental, self-sufficient identity, but its identity rather understood in a continual, positive deficiency; in its *responsibility* and the *inadequateness of any response*.

2. Metaphysics, Experience and Language

To summarize what we have hitherto discussed, we could formulate the main problematic of *VM* as such; in his project to write a philosophy about the Other, what does it signify that Levinas is forced to make use of a vocabulary that seemingly betrays his intentions? Or, in other words, is it possible to conceive of the Other as absolutely, infinitely Other in philosophical discourse? This question is investigated by Derrida in multiple different perspectives, or, to use his own words, "…from many

vantage points and in many ways." (Derrida *VM*, 136). It is the "space of interrogation" mentioned above. To summarize these perspectives is impossible, as they point and refer us to so many different aspects of both philosophy and life, and the history in which they both occur. Or perhaps history occurs within philosophy and/or life? The complexity of Derrida's contextualization of Levinas is perhaps the most fascinating and impressive feature of his writing, as it not only refers us to a wide variety of perspectives and dimensions of humanity, but is able to problematize how we think about these perspectives and dimensions by the force of the very contextualization. Among these perspectives are history, tradition, philosophy, nonphilosophy, religion, empiricism, God, war, ethics, violence and the possibility of a death of or a future for philosophy. We will attempt to orient our reading around the most important and fruitful perspectives; perspectives that will however in many ways be intertwined with the perspectives we are not at good at including. To make use of a Levinasian term that Derrida makes ample use of and reinterprets, we will have to be "economical".

  VM is, as said, a very long essay, split into an introduction and three subsequent sections; the first section – "Violence and light" – concerns the philosophical development of Levinas up to *TI¸* the second section – "Phenomenology, Ontology, Metaphysics" – concerns the mature philosophy of Levinas as it is in *TI*, and the third and final section – "Difference and Eschatology" – is a questioning of Levinas' philosophy from the perspective of a range of other philosophers, most important among them Husserl and Heidegger.

  The introduction also opens with a discussion of Husserl and Heidegger and what is identified as a common understanding of philosophy and its relation to history; an understanding which is set as the backdrop for Levinas' break, as it is a break with exactly this understanding. Husserl and Heidegger[10] are by Derrida named as the two most prominent Greeks of modern philosophy (Derrida *VM*, 103), referring to one of the over-arching perspectives of the essay; the historical opposition and coupling between Hellenism and Hebraism. In this scenario, Husserl and Heidegger represents the Greeks, while Levinas represents Judaism. We will begin with the explication of Husserl and Heidegger based on their Greek heritage and their belonging to it; the affinity between Levinas and Judaism however, will be taken up much later. For now we will only say that we in this work will not be able to investigate the full meaning of this juxtaposition of Levinas and Husserl/Heidegger based on Hebraism and Hellenism, but that we still would like to indicate its purpose and importance.

  We begin with our prominent Greeks. The belonging of Husserl and Heidegger to the Greek logos is explained by Derrida as vital to their fundamental conception of philosophy. For both, Derrida argues, it is a question of summoning forth the Greek origin of philosophy – albeit in different ways – in order to once again return to the very opening and possibility of philosophical language. The Greek Logos which founds philosophical language is presupposed at a depth which we have forgotten; and

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[10] The third perhaps most important name in this context is that of Hegel, which is also discussed at many places during the essay

this forgetfulness is what now calls for a reiteration of the Greek element. This, Derrida argues, "…amounts neither to an occidentalism, nor to a historicism. It is simply that the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium." (Derrida *VM*, 100). The fundamental conceptuality of philosophy developed in ancient Greece, where the fundamental foundation for the possibility of both thought and speech was first formulated; and therefore also the foundation for thinking and speaking about this source. The reiteration of the Greek logos is possible only on the basis of the Greek logos, which is the opening to any philosophical inquiry. We are "…already overtaken by the dialogue of the question about itself and with itself…" (Derrida *VM*, 99). It is impossible to think outside or without presupposing and including the historical origin which defined thought as logos; and it is impossible to understand this historical origin without already being overtaken by it. "The knowledge and security of which we are speaking are therefore not in the world: rather, they are the possibility of our language and the nexus of our world." (Derrida *VM*, 101).

This belonging to the tradition of the Greek logos should then not be understood as the dependence to the authority of an accidental historical origin. The point is rather that, for Husserl and Heidegger, in different ways, the Greeks first formulated some transcendental or ontological necessity to which no philosophical thought – including that of the Greeks - can find itself foreign. As Derrida points out in a footnote, it is the case for both philosophers that "…the truth of philosophy does not depend upon its relation to the actuality of the Greek or European event. On the contrary, we must gain access to the Greek or European *eidos* through an irruption or a call whose point of departure is variously determined by Husserl and Heidegger." (Derrida *VM*, 397). No access to the Greek origin of thought will however reach it without already presupposing it, meaning that the reiteration of the Greek element will already be determined by what makes the reiteration possible. This is the way in which Derrida conceives of Husserl and Heidegger's relation to their Greek origin; it is a possessing which is the possibility of their philosophies, which however remains always in some way obscure, as it can only take hold of itself *with* and *in itself*. The different ways in which this transcendental necessity for philosophical thought will be conceived by the two philosophers – namely as phenomenology and the thought of Being - will become clear later; what we however already can make note of is that it will count for both, that no philosophy should be able to conceive of itself without them.

It is exactly as opposed to this conception of philosophy and its relation to history in which Derrida wishes to explicate Levinas' philosophy, or, said in his own words; "It is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble." (Derrida *VM*, 101). This is because "…this thought summons us to a dislocation of the Greek logos, to a dislocation of our identity, and perhaps of identity in general; it summons us to depart from the Greek site and perhaps from every site in general, and to move toward what is no longer a source or a site (too welcoming to the gods), but toward an *exhalation*, toward a prophetic speech…" (Derrida *VM*, 102). Levinas' philosophy is

exactly a radical break with any thought of phenomenality or Being, and seeks to delineate something *other* than that which is presupposed and included in phenomenology and ontology. Levinas' relationship with Western philosophy must then be understood as a drastic departure which seeks to locate a thought other to that of the main current of the tradition. This of course implies a fundamental difference in regard to the general understanding of philosophy and its relation to history. In opposition to the understanding belonging to Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas believes that *it is possible to depart* from the Greek logos. There can be an unanticipated future for philosophy that is something more than the reiteration of the Greek element.

It is of course the Other which, in Levinas' philosophy, breaks with the tradition of the Greek logos. In chapter I, we explicated how Levinas understands language to be the metaphysical relation in which the Other remains absolutely independent. Understood as the original ethical critique of the self, the Other concerns language and philosophy fundamentally, but cannot be encompassed by them. Derrida gives a comprehensive, thorough explication of Levinas' understanding of the Other which we will not repeat in its entirety, as we already presented our own presentation of Levinas' philosophy in chapter I. We will instead focus on some of the most interesting perspectives in which Derrida places Levinas, of which the most important for us will be the topic of *experience*, *language* and *violence*. The topics are in the essay of Derrida so intertwined with both Levinas and the way in which he breaks with Husserl and Heidegger that it will be impossible to treat them separated and in order; by taking up one of them, we will be forced to speak about the other. Let us regardless begin with the topic of violence.

When we said earlier that Levinas' philosophy is a break with the tradition, it is important to understand this break on the basis of the possibility of peace and the violence which threatens it. Quoting the preface to *TI*, Derrida shows how Levinas understands the tradition of philosophy to be one which favors the domination of the totality, and which is fascinated by war (Derrida *VM*, 102). The fundamental reason for why the tradition is explicated like this is because it fails to address the Other without reducing him/her to the powers of the Same; a failure of which Husserl and Heidegger are especially guilty; "Incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other, phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence." (Derrida *VM*, 113). The question of understanding the Other *correctly*, if one could say that, would then be the question of relating to the Other *non-violently*. The possibility of achieving this would be the question of "…liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond…" (Derrida *VM*, 118) the alternatives provided by the tradition. As we mentioned in chapter I, there are of course some exceptions in the tradition in which Levinas finds descriptions of the sort of relation which he envisions, namely Plato's Good beyond Being and Descartes Idea of Infinity[11]. In its entirety however, the tradition has oppressed the Other by not allowing for the *possibility* of this direction of thought.

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[11] And later, in *OB*, *The One* in Plotinus understood by Levinas as the essence of the I (Levinas *OB*, 56)

In an extensive footnote comparing Levinas' understanding of violence with that of Eric Weil, Derrida is able to delineate this concept of violence even more clearly. Violence for Weil is understood to be caring for oneself and others instead of what simply is; peace would then be to abdicate from individuality and personal relationships for the benefit of the unity of the coherent and absolute system. As the extreme contrast to this, Levinas understands peace as respecting separation, and violence as the attempt to reduce and annul this separation in favor of the oppressive totality (Derrida *VM*, 403). In passing, Derrida notes that, paradoxically, what is violence for one of them is peace for the other. Nevertheless, we now understand the way in which philosophy can dominate the Other by disallowing for the possibility of the encounter with the Other, as it is understood by Levinas. As we saw in chapter I, the Other is absolutely independent, and the relation of language in which I stand in a relation with the Other is the one in which it is of crucial importance that the absolute *separation* be maintained. The absolute separation grants the independence of the Other which constitutes the meaning of language as communication between independent interlocutors. Violence would be to reduce this separation, and make the Other contingent on either the self or a neutral authority which would command both the self and the Other; in either case, to not respect the Other as the absolute independent interlocutor in conversation.

It is then in a certain understanding of *language* that we find the potential for a non-violent relation which could respect the Other. This possibility of language could be explained more extensively by comparing it to *vision*, which according to Levinas, Derrida notes, "…*by itself*, contrary to what one may be led to believe, does not *respect* the other." (Derrida *VM*, 123). Levinas explains quite explicitly that vision is unable to respect the absolute distance between the subject and the Other, but rather *consumes* the Other; "Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises a power over them. A thing is *given*, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same." (Levinas *TI*, 194). This is why it is of vital importance that, as we saw in chapter I, the Other *expresses* herself, and again, expresses herself by and in *herself*, independently and without any metaphor. Derrida recognizes the importance of this, and also "…that the expression of this infinity is *the face*." (Derrida *VM*, 122). The fundamental experience then, the absolute encounter *in* the world with what *transcends* the world, this *face-to-face* with the Other should *not* be understood primarily on the basis of vision, but as speech, and speech understood in a very certain way; "I can only, I *must* only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a *case* of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech." (Derrida *VM*, 128). In this "very raising up of speech", the Other may be respected "…*as other*, that is, as that which does not reveal itself, as that which cannot be made thematic." (Derrida *VM*, 128). The relation of language is, as we saw before, the relation in which I speak *to* the Other before I speak *of* the Other.

That we encounter the return of metaphysics, understood in Levinas' sense, in the *face*, would mean, according to Derrida, that Levinas' philosophy in its last analysis "…seeks to be understood

from within a *recourse to experience itself.*" (Derrida *VM*, 103). This is perhaps one of the boldest claims made by Derrida, and we would like to call it an interpretation, bearing in mind however that it is an interpretation that is very faithful to Levinas, and one that he most likely could agree with, at least according to our own reading. We will discuss this question of whether the labeling is correct more thoroughly at a later time; here however, we will discuss another question concerning the recourse to experience. For if Levinas' philosophy is a recourse to experience, then Derrida would also be correct to state that experience at bottom is revealed to be metaphysical (Derrida *VM*, 190), and metaphysics of that special kind which Levinas understands it to be; language.

As we saw in chapter I, Levinas no longer separates between language and thought, and considers the idea of a thought before language as a myth. This is a decision which Derrida is keenly aware of and comments upon plentifully. As he notes, Levinas can of course not separate between the two, as the origin of them both is to be found in the bodily unity of the face that speaks (Derrida *VM*, 129). The thought of the Other – the thought that always exceeds itself – is received from the expression of the Other, which already is language. The recourse to metaphysical experience taken by Levinas then places Levinas, according to Derrida, in a unique and peculiar situation, one which Derrida explains by a comparison between Levinas one the one side, and Bergson and negative theology on the other. For both Bergson and negative theology, language was perceived as an incomplete and failing medium, which was essentially inferior to the superior completeness of non-linguistic truth/experience; being God's perfect understanding in negative theology and silent metaphysical intuition for Bergson (Derrida *VM*, 144-145). Commenting on the both, Derrida writes "Like negative theology, a philosophy of intuitive communion gave itself the right (correctly or incorrectly, another problem) to travel through philosophical discourse as through a foreign medium." (Derrida *VM*, 145). This is however a right that Levinas has waived. For him, as previously said, metaphysics is the relation of language. This is the reason for why Levinas, although he speaks of positive Infinity, transcendence and metaphysics, is not doing classical philosophy. These classical themes are interwoven into the context of the modern coupling of language and thought. The Other transcends the world *in* the world.

If the Other is the irreducible experience of transcendence, if the relation to the Other is a metaphysics which philosophy will always have to find itself *within* but which philosophy will never be able to contain, Derrida raises the question of whether the experience of the Other might not be what the tradition has named *nonphilosophy* (Derrida *VM*, 190). Derrida says of language as it is understood by Levinas that it "…cannot make its own possibility a totality and *include* within itself its own origin or its own end." (Derrida *VM*, 118). If the Other is nonphilosophy, it seems then that this last quote would count for philosophy as well as language, for as the origin of language, thought and reason, the nonphilosophical Other would be the possibility and end of philosophy. It is perhaps this conception of philosophy that Derrida entertains at the beginning of his essay, when he says of philosophy - and its potential dying nature - that "…it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent

way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and its concerns, its death and wellspring…" (Derrida *VM*, 97). We are not sure if Levinas would have accepted the description of the Other as nonphilosophy, and it seems that Derrida does not implicate that neither; it is rather the tradition which Levinas opposes which would label the Other as such. In either case, this conception of philosophy – that it carries within it a moment which overflows itself, and which philosophy therefore cannot contain, even when it concerns philosophy *from the inside* – is perhaps reminiscent of the way Levinas conceives of the relationship between theory and practice. In the preface to *TI*, Levinas announces that his philosophy aims to abolish the separation between the two: "The traditional opposition between theory and practice will disappear before the metaphysical transcendence by which a relation with the absolutely other, or truth, is established, and of which ethics is the royal road." (Levinas *TI*, 29). Philosophy begins with practice, and philosophical language begins *in language*. The nonphilosophical Other then belongs to philosophy in a very certain way; belongs to philosophy as what *animates it and exceeds it*.

We are now able to see how radical the break with traditional logos is for Levinas. His philosophy concerns an irreducible experience which is the beginning of language itself, but which language forever is unable to contain. *It would hold true for language in general and for philosophical language, between which we perhaps no longer can conceive a difference*, although we are not still sure whether "language in general" is nonphilosophical language. In contrast to this, Husserl and Heidegger would have maintained that what permits philosophical discourse is to be located and kept within it; it is philosophy's dialogue with itself about itself. The origin of the question will already be comprehended and determined by this origin itself; and more importantly, it would be this origin which would be the possibility of language, which would have to remember itself and reiterate itself, lest it forget this. *In other words, there would be no language outside philosophical language*. In opposition to this, Levinas argues for the possibility of something completely *other*; something that *cannot* be reduced to what philosophy determines it to be. The philosophy which attempts to delineate this possibility is, according to Derrida, an attempt to liberate thought and language from the classical alternatives, which he also calls a "…wounding of language." (Derrida *VM*, 112) which reveals to philosophy "…that what was taken for its solidity is its rigidity." (Derrida *VM*, 112). The philosophy of Levinas is able to reveal these cracks of philosophy. A philosophy unable to do this, which rather reduces the Other to its own possibilities – instead of taking the Other to be its unpredictable possibility – would do violence upon the Other.

To summarize then, we have seen that Derrida explains Levinas as breaking fundamentally with the tradition of the Greeks, represented here by Husserl and Heidegger. These two philosophers would have taken philosophy to begin and end with itself, as its own possibility and its own main topic of inquiry. This possibility found and adhered to within philosophy would again be the possibility of language in general. In opposition to this, Levinas explains philosophy – and language in general – on the basis of philosophy's *other*, which is the absolute, infinite Other whom reveals herself in her own

ethical meaning. The separation with the Other would have to be respected absolutely; if not, one would commit the same fault and the same violence as the tradition before Levinas, in that one would reduce the absolutely Other to either the subject or to a neutral third. Philosophy must therefore liberate its language for the possibility of the Other. In this way, we see that the Other is deeply concerned with, but also infinitely opposed to philosophy; opposing philosophy with the necessary ethical resistance for rationality to ever begin. It is this that makes Levinas' position so unique in comparison with for example Bergson. The truth which has escaped most of the Western tradition of philosophy must have been both very foreign *and* very close to the tradition, "…a prophetic speech already emitted not only nearer to the source than Plato or the pre-Socratics, but inside the Greek origin, close to the other of the Greek…", but Derrida continues within parentheses, "…(but will the other of the Greek be the non-Greek? Above all, can it be *named* the non-Greek? And our question comes closer.)" (Derrida *VM*, 102). This is indeed the questions which we now arrive at; if the Other is nonphilosophy, what would it mean that it must be *named* nonphilosophy? And what forces Levinas to use the negative determination "in-finity" to describe the idea of the Other (Derrida *VM*, 143)? Or to name what exceeds space as the "most high" (Derrida *VM*, 116)? Or to name what is non-spatial exteriority (Derrida *VM*, 140)? We now arrive at the questions which have been haunting us from the beginning of this work, and they will only intensify as the charge against Levinas - *from* Levinas – grows in power. Having placed these questions in the context of the hitherto explication of Levinas by Derrida, we can see this already. For while classical philosophers had the option of referring us to an outside of language and discourse, to a thought which discourse would be inferior to, Levinas does not have this option; for he does not recognize the separation between language and thought, and locates the Other as the beginning and end of them both[12]. As we move on to Derrida's explication of Husserl and Heidegger, the question will arise; is it possible for Levinas to keep the Other from being assimilated back into philosophy? Can the Other be the origin of language or thought, *or do we perhaps need language and thought in order for the Other to be meaningful as such?* In other words, will Husserl and Heidegger be able to rein the Other back in again into the transcendental necessities for the possibility of phenomena and Being?

3. Phenomenology and Violence

As we have seen, if the Other inspires philosophy without being contained by it, if the irreducible experience of the Other concerns philosophy by exceeding it from within, then we may perhaps understand the Other as nonphilosophy. Beware of the fact that Levinas most likely would have disliked such a negative determination of the Other, we should add that we do not intend a negative understanding of the Other, but only to formulate that the Other is *other* to philosophy, an *alterity*

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[12] The understanding of the Other as the origin and telos of language will be challenged in chapter III with the discussion of the *anarchy* of language

which philosophy cannot comprehend and reduce to its understanding. In either case, if the Other can be said to be nonphilosophy, our main question can be posed as such; how can Levinas, a *philosopher*, write a philosophy about nonphilosophy? What does a philosophy about nonphilosophy look like? *And what does it mean that nonphilosophy must be formulated in a philosophy?* As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of such questioning is not necessarily to undermine Levinas. It could also be that this necessity is one which Levinas himself is aware of, and which he accepts as necessary. Derrida formulates this direction very well:

"We are not denouncing, here, an incoherence of language or a contradiction in the system. We are wondering about the meaning of a necessity; the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it. Why did this necessity finally impose itself upon Levinas? Is it an extrinsic necessity? Does it not touch upon only an instrument, only an "expression," which can be put between quotation marks? Or does it hide, rather, some indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos? Some unlimited power of envelopment, by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be *overtaken*?" (Derrida *VM*, 139).

It might be that, in his project to explicate the nonphilosophical, Levinas – voluntarily or involuntarily, but in either case *necessarily* – brings to light the necessary *possession* by philosophy which no thinker/speaker can escape. In his break with the tradition, the fundamental necessity of it stands forth. In the end, as we shall see, this does not for Derrida necessarily delegitimatize the kind of philosophy which Levinas is attempting. It does however give us a whole new way of understanding the philosophy of Levinas, one that will perhaps lie much closer to him than one would have thought.

We begin however with explicating the necessary dependence on the tradition; a heritage to which we seemingly always find ourselves to be overtaken by. We have already referenced a few examples, among them the use of the word "infinity", which Derrida reminds us can and perhaps must be understood as a negation of finity; in-finity (Derrida *VM*, 143). He also gives a splendid analysis of the solidarity between language and spatiality, asking how Levinas should be able to say of the Other that her exteriority is non-spatial (Derrida *VM*, 141). We will however not focus on these analysis, but use the bulk of our time on the explication of Husserl and Heidegger, whom are given most space in Derrida's essay as well. We begin with Husserl.

In his explication of Husserl, Derrida defends Husserl against the charge from Levinas that phenomenology is a reductive philosophy in which everything is essentially reduced to the adequation between objects and the thoughts aiming at them, which would be the violent imperialism of theorism. Derrida shows how this is wrong of for example the Husserlian notion of horizon, which is irreducible to an object as it is what opens up the possibility of the objectifying act in general. The objectifying act itself is in its potential infinite, as it can constitute an unlimited number of objects; and the act itself – in the same way as the horizon – cannot become an object. Derrida asks if not this irreducible nature of the potentially infinite horizon does not keep it from being a totality, which Levinas criticizes it for

(Derrida *VM*, 150). In fact, Derrida asks not only if the critique doesn't fit, but if Levinas can do without transcendental phenomenology at all. Does not the Other *appear* for me? Does not respect presuppose the phenomenon of ethics? Derrida explains that this for Husserl would not mean that phenomenology would have *primacy* over and against ethics, and would dominate it; "It is profoundly foreign to all hierarchies. Which is to say that ethics not only is neither dissipated in phenomenology nor submitted to it, but that ethics finds within phenomenology its own meaning, its freedom and radicality." (Derrida *VM*, 151). Ethics can and *must* find itself within the horizon of appearance in order to be meaningful at all. Derrida also notes how Husserlian phenomenology is "…open for every type of possible object, that is, for every conceivable sense present for consciousness in general." (Derrida *VM*, 151). This means that the phenomenological horizon allows for the constitution of *any* kind of object – theoretical as well as nontheoretical – and can therefore not be taken to be reductive. It is simply the necessary conditions which must be supposed of anything in order for it to appear. "It suffices that ethical meaning be *thought* in order for Husserl to be right." (Derrida *VM*, 151).

Having first defended Husserl against Levinas, and then shown Levinas' dependence on Husserl, Derrida repeats this structure with regard to the "alter ego" of Husserl's philosophy. Derrida argues that Husserl's concern in his explanation on how others appear to us is exactly to understand the Other *as* Other. The necessities of the last paragraph still holds true however; "Even if one neither seeks nor is able to thematize the other *of which* one does not speak, but *to whom* one speaks, this impossibility and this imperative themselves can be thematized (as Levinas does) only on the basis of a certain appearance of the other as other for an ego." (Derrida *VM*, 154). One cannot circumvent the access to the Other as a phenomenon in general. Bearing this in mind, Husserl explicates the Other as the other subject which I am not; appropriator of experiences which are essentially and in their meaning inaccessible to me. "The stranger is infinitely other because by his essence no enrichment of his profile can give me the subjective face of his experience *from his perspective*, such as he has lived it." (Derrida *VM*, 155). The other is then also for Husserl infinitely and irreducibly inaccessible to me; the difference between him and Levinas is then that Husserl understands this "meaning of the other" as a modification for the transcendental ego, meaningful *for* the ego *as* inaccessible, and dependent on other aspects of transcendental consciousness such as the alterity belonging to any object that is outside of me. Derrida recognizes that for Levinas, to explain the Other on the basis of the ego "…would be a violent and totalitarian act…" (Derrida *VM*, 156), but at the same time asks this; is the difference between the two then only that Husserl *allows* himself the transcendental grounding necessary for speaking about the Other, while Levinas denies himself this groundwork which he needs to speak about the Other *while still speaking about the other?*

At this point however, Derrida admits that we can no longer pretend as if our discourse escapes any kind of violence, understood in the Levinasian sense; "To return, as to the only possible point of departure, to the intentional phenomenon in which the other appears as other, and lends itself to language, *to every possible language*, is perhaps to give oneself over to violence, or to make oneself

its accomplice at least…" (Derrida *VM*, 156). Derrida recognizes that this in some sense *is* a reduction of the totally Other, even if it is the slightest one necessary. And this is what he will argue. The violence of appearance itself, that one should enter phenomenality and language, seems indispensable. Without it, we are left with only "…the violence of primitive and prelogical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day…" (Derrida *VM*, 162), a violence which Derrida calls the *worst* violence. Nevertheless, this necessary violence forces the Other to appear as exactly something else than itself, contrary to what Levinas envisions in the expression of the Other and the non-violent relationship to him. The meaning of the Other could only appear and be accessible *as such* if *I* understood the Other to be an other ego *like me*; a condition which again is necessary based on the necessary transcendental grounding to which any phenomenon must make itself familiar; "A necessity due to the finitude of meaning: the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I." (Derrida *VM*, 159). Derrida admits that this is irrational; the Other can only *appear as Other* if the Other *is like me*, making it more other than the absolutely Other which cannot even appear, but at the same time more like me. This signals for Derrida that "…thought is stifled in the region of the origin of language as dialogue and difference." (Derrida *VM*, 159). The necessity of having to determine the Other negatively, that is, in light of what the Other *is not*, speaks to the bewildering violence of original finitude, which we seemingly cannot do without.

In question then, is an original violence that *opens* philosophy by allowing it to name the Other through a negation. It is the necessity of having to formulate oneself in an obscure but required betrayal. Derrida explains it as the essential structure of language, and of the necessity of having to *enter* language in order for discussing the Other *meaningfully*; "Discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself, make war upon the war which institutes it without ever *being able* to reappropriate this negativity, to the extent that it is discourse." (Derrida *VM*, 162). Because it has to allow itself to be *inscribed*, to allow itself the original contamination of the sign which it cannot account for, philosophy is necessarily opened *in* and *by* a violence which it cannot trace back from. Is it however possible to speak of a pre-ethical violence? Derrida himself discusses this, but gives no final answer, which he of course cannot do, because, as we have said, the "original violence" does not reveal its final reason. The final limit of philosophy to the boundaries of the thinkable, sayable and statable cannot think, say or state the reasons for this limit. Somewhat surprisingly however, Derrida leaves it open if whether the Infinite, Absolute Other could be the invisible imposer of these limits. For;

"Upon what basis does one ask questions about finitude as violence? Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse permit itself to be commanded to be returned against itself, to be always, as language, the return against itself which recognizes the other as other? Of course, one cannot *answer* these questions (for example, by saying that the question about the violence of finitude can be posed only on the basis of finitude's other and the

idea of infinity) except by undertaking a new discourse which once more will seek to justify transcendental phenomenology." (Derrida *VM*, 166).

If philosophy then is opened within itself and by itself, as Husserl understands it to be, then the question *why* philosophy is opened still remains unanswered. Within philosophy then, remains an original possibility, a "…silent opening…" (Derrida *VM*, 166) which philosophy cannot comprehend, but still must include. This seems to us very similar to what Levinas understands with the Other; but as Derrida notes, that possibility will itself have to let itself be included in language, and would therefore once again submit itself to the same problematic. Levinas' answer to the *why* of language – that it is the response to the absolutely independent expression of the Other – would itself *already need language* for its answer to be meaningfully articulated and understood; meaning that Levinas' language again would have to justify its own necessity.

We cannot say that we have hit rock-bottom, for we are not *sure* if we have hit rock-bottom. It seems then quite clear, and in agreement with what was said at the beginning of this chapter, that Derrida wishes to conclude with neither the Greek Husserl or with Levinas, while at the same time showing the undying necessity of them both. For while philosophy cannot avoid submitting itself to violence, it would still seem as if philosophy is called by what it cannot include; what it cannot include because when it includes it, it covers it up, disturbs it. But what cannot be included by philosophy is reversely impossible to *not* include in philosophy, because in order for it to enter into language (and there is no thought without or outside language), it has to become something other than what it is. Therefore, Derrida does not want to object to "…the legitimacy of this putting into question…" (Derrida *VM*, 166) of the tradition of philosophy of Levinas, while at the same time maintaining that it seems impossible that this questioning should lead us to any answers. As we have yet to discuss, it might be, again, that this dilemma is much more familiar to Levinas than we would think.

But before we move on, we would like to take up again the notion of pre-ethical violence. For it seems to us that if we indeed *disagree* with the possibility of such a notion, that is, we believe it with Levinas necessary to have established peace between the subject and the Other in order for war to begin, then the question would not only be *why* philosophy is opened by the question, but *why it should* let itself be opened by the question. There is an important difference here, for it is in fact so that Derrida can argue for the necessity of *speaking up* and engaging in an inherently violent discourse only because it is a violence preferable to the violence of night. Even if everything must appear and be said at the condition of a betrayal, it is still better than that we should be blind and mute. The rationale of this obligation rests on the notion of pre-ethical violence; *for if violence did not concern us, we could argue neither for or against more or less of it*. It seems then beyond doubt that Derrida is concerned with violence, for he himself has decided to speak up and articulate himself, in spite of this betrayal of language.

4. Being and Violence

When we now move on to Heidegger; we will see the same formula that was used in the explication of Husserl repeated. Heidegger will first be defended against the critique from Levinas, before it will be shown that Levinas in certain ways must presuppose Heidegger; and finally, it will be shown that Heidegger himself cannot escape submitting to some form of violence, a violence which again will be unable to account for itself sufficiently, as it will need itself in order to state itself. At the very end of this explication, the fundamental questions of this essay will be taken up anew; what solicits violence? How should philosophy relate itself to what escapes it? If the rock-bottom of language and experience is an original dissimulated difference, is not language and experience then in fact bottomless? To revert Levinas' terminology, what lies beneath the bottom?

Derrida reiterates for us the classical Levinasian critique of Heidegger; that ontology in Heidegger's philosophy gains primacy and authority over ethics. According to Levinas, Heidegger understands the relation to the existent (the Other in this case) primarily on the basis of the Being of the existent, and therefore not in the primary inter*personal* relation that it in truth is; the existent is not primarily understood as the existence of *someone*, but primarily on the Being-of this existent. Derrida criticizes this as a misunderstanding of what Heidegger means by the Being of the existent, or the thought of Being. For a variety of reasons, the thought of Being cannot be taken to establish a hierarchy in its relation to the existent in question. First off, the thought of Being should not be understood as a predicate or general principle applied to any existence; Being does not *determine* anything about the existent in question. It should rather be understood as the "…*Being-of* this existent…" (Derrida *VM*, 170) which allows for the possibility of *any* predicative determination, and is therefore implied in every predication. The thought of Being lets Being be *as* what it *is*. This should however not lead us to think that the thought of Being is a general category in which all existents participate. Being "…is *nothing* outside the existent…" (Derrida *VM*, 170), is only the Being-of this or that existent. It is true that for any existent to *be as such*, it must be precomprehended on the basis of its Being. At the same time however, the Being of this existent is nothing more than the Being-of this existent, is not another existent *beside* the existent, or a principle or predicate applied onto the existent. It is simply that this existent is present for thought *as something*; "some-thing" not as the most general thing, but the very "Being-of", "Being-there" or "Being-as" of the existent. The Being of the existent is not another existent, and therefore cannot be thought outside of the existent.

The thought of Being is the possibility of any predicate or determination of any existent, insofar as it lets these existents be. This "letting-be" will now by Derrida be argued to be presupposed by Levinas. For could one respect the Other if one not first let the Other *be*? "[Precomprehension of Being] conditions the *respect* for the other *as what it is*: other" (Derrida *VM*, 172). This conditioning would not mean, Derrida says, that the Other loses his meaning as my ethical interlocutor, but rather that this characteristic of the Other is respected exactly as the *essence* of the existent called the Other. The thought of Being then "lets be" any possible existent (as the possibility of every existent),

"…even those which, *by essence*, cannot be transformed into "objects of comprehension."" (Derrida *VM*, 172). It is then both possible and necessary that we let the Other *be* the Other, in its essence as Other. If the Other could not be *as such*, it could not be *as Other* as well. According to Derrida, this "letting the Other be" should not be understood as comprehension, or "…a "relation of knowledge"." (Derrida *VM*, 174). The precomprehension that opens up the very *possibility* of comprehension and determination of the existent is itself transcategorical, as the possibility of any category. To consider this necessary opening up unto Being that allows Being to be "as such" as a relation of comprehension that subordinates its theme "…is this not to forbid oneself every determination (the ethical one, for example) from the outset?" (Derrida *VM*, 175). To attempt to conceive of the Other as *beyond Being* would be to deny ourselves the possibility of letting the Other *be* as what he/she is; Other.

To think Being is to let Being be as what it is, whatever that is. It is therefore the necessary possibility for the Other to be what it is. In one sense therefore, Derrida argues that "…the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not." (Derrida *VM*, 176). Being is, in one sense, the other of thought itself. Thought is however also always thought *of* Being, and cannot not be that. This of course relates to language, as thought and language no longer can be separated. Language is therefore subordinated to the same necessity; "There is no speech without the thought and statement *of* Being." (Derrida *VM*, 179). With nothing to interpolate them, there could be no thought or speech. At the same time however, as Being is nothing outside the existent - and because, perhaps more fundamentally and crucial to our own work, any existence will always be a *determined* existent – Being is dependent on the letting-be of thought and language; "Being *itself* can only be thought and stated." (Derrida *VM*, 179). In order to *appear*, Being itself must be understood on the basis of a determined existent, which however itself must be precomprehended on the basis of its Being in order for any determination to be possible. This incoherent displacement of the transcendental order, which defies the chronological order a posteriori, is according to Derrida not "…accidental or regrettable…" (Derrida *VM*, 180), but rather the *historicity* which belongs to Being due to the fact that our relation to the existent preexist our explicit understanding of its Being, although it is always implicitly thought in the existent – in every predicate, determination, etc. – in order for the possibility of the determined existent to *be as such*. "Being not existing before the Existent – and this is why it is *History* – it begins by hiding itself beneath its determination." (Derrida *VM*, 180). The Being *in question* will always be a particular, determined existent, and Being could not be thought without it; but the Being-of this existence, which enables its determination, will always necessary be thought or said in it, and will "be" something different than this existent itself. Being can of course itself[13] not be said to *be*, but "…it is impossible to avoid the ontic metaphor in order to articulate Being in language, in order to let Being circulate in language." (Derrida *VM*, 173). This is in spite of the fact that "…Being itself is

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[13] *It*-self; another ontic metaphor which imposes itself on Being

alone in its absolute resistance to *every metaphor*." (Derrida *VM*, 172), which means that "…the emergence of the thought of Being itself [is] the very movement of metaphoricity." (Derrida *VM*, 174). Being always emerges in history as already dissimulated in the determination which it "is" *not*. It appears as difference while at the same time being the *possibility* of difference; it hides itself in the metaphor which it makes possible but which it "is", somehow, different from.

It is then clear that, although it is according to Derrida "…as close as possible to nonviolence." (Derrida *VM*, 183), neither the thought of Being can escape committing to a certain violence. If the thought of Being cannot avoid a certain determination in the very "letting-be" of Being, as Being both must/cannot be differentiated from the determined existent it lets be, and only appear irreducibly within this difference/sameness, then the thought of Being can only let the Other be what it is on the basis of language understood as metaphor and history understood as difference. The Being of the Other could only emerge in the historical movement of metaphorical understanding who's production is possible exactly because the Being of the Other is both the same and something else than the Other. The Being of the Other – the possibility for the Other to be what it is – is both the same and nonidentical, "…appears in difference…" (Derrida *VM*, 184). Following the schema of our investigation in which violence would be to grasp the Other on the basis of something else than the Other himself, it is clear that the thought of Being does violence upon the Other. It is however, according to Derrida, the least bit of violence necessary;

"A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing: in every sense of the word, and first of all the Greek sense, it would be speech without *phrase*." (Derrida *VM*, 184).

It is then the unity of the *phrase* which in language would dominate the Other, as it articulates an order in which the Other must find herself, and in which she must be *different* from herself to be *what she is*. This is because the unity of the phrase is only possible on the basis of an incomprehensible dissimulating difference, forcing the Other to become other to herself within it; forcing, for example, the otherness of the Other to become intelligible on the basis of sameness. "Violence appears with *articulation*. And the latter is opened only by (the first preconceptual) circulation of Being." (Derrida *VM*, 185).

It is so, then, that "…Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear." (Derrida *VM*, 184). But this is perhaps not as far from Levinas' own philosophy, and Derrida says this too. Levinas would not argue against the violent

character of conceptuality as it develops in history, which would belong to any language as its said[14]. The difference would again be the *opening* and *end* of language; "From [Levinas'] point of view, the origin and the possibility of the concept are simply not the thought of Being, but the gift of the world to the other as totally-other."[15] (Derrida *VM*, 185). The dissimulated difference which allows for the ontological difference - the determination of identity of existents in their Being and the thinking of the difference between the existent and its Being as such – would for Levinas be possible on the basis of the critique of the Other, whom expresses himself outside any difference and only in himself. As Derrida notes, and which of course Levinas himself admits, the expression of the Other would have to be transhistorical; it would need to transcend history (Derrida *VM*, 185). This for Derrida signals the ultimate difference between Levinas and Heidegger. For Heidegger, the thought of Being occurs originally within the violence of history, marking the irreducibility of its veiling in its very unveiling; "That language, thereby, always hides its own origin is not a contradiction, but history itself." (Derrida *VM*, 186). Being is for Heidegger "…the *first dissimulated*…" (Derrida *VM*, 186). For Levinas on the other hand, "…Being (understood as concept) is *the first dissimulating*…" (Derrida *VM*, 186), as the dissimulation is not the origin of its own meaning, but rather has an *other* origin, which *transcends* it. The existent Other is not meaningful based on an irreducible difference in its determination, but breaks its ontic determination by infinitely overflowing it: "The ontic content of infinity would destroy ontic closure." (Derrida *VM*, 187). The existent that opens the subject up to the Being of the existent would not be the precomprehension which allows the appearance of the existent in the first place, therefore belonging to it, but rather the existent Other which ruptures its determination in its expression of itself. The difference between Heidegger and Levinas – and their associated understandings of history and language – would be a profound difference of an origin which *belongs to* or *breaks with* what it instigates; "Opening of the horizon, and not *in* the horizon." (Derrida *VM*, 187).

5. Metaphysical Speech and the Necessity of Violence

In one way then, the movement through Husserl and Heidegger and the explication of the necessity to stay with them and within their framework; this movement has delineated even more clearly the exact radicalness of Levinas' break with Husserl and Heidegger, and the Greek tradition they represent. Levinas conceives of the Other beyond phenomenality and Being out of another necessity (or perhaps a new possibility), namely the absolute independence of the Other; for both cannot conceive of the Other without in some slight way bringing the Other back into the transcendental necessities of appearing and/or being, necessities which will necessarily reveal that the Other must be something else than what she is for it to be possible to think or state the Other as how she appears/what she is.

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[14] There is however the question if he would limit their violence only to the cases in which they violate the Other. This seems to be another divergence between Derrida and Levinas, in that the former argues for the otherness and resistance of the world in general (Derrida *VM*, 117)

[15] As we saw in chapter I, this understanding of "gift" develops in *OB*, where one gives oneself in giving

This is the least necessary violence for Levinas as well as Husserl and Heidegger, signaling still however a difference between them concerning how we should understand this violence; for the latter two, the violence would be conceivable on the basis of the incomprehensible possibility of violence itself, while for Levinas however, the origin of violence would also be located within the violent medium – thought, speech and history – but not as violence itself, as the *other* origin[16], also included in language, but for too long ignored; the Other, and the original *peaceful* relation to her. What would the Other be, included in language while at the same time breaking with it, appearing in history as that which transcends it? The Other is to be located, argues Derrida again, in the recourse to experience, named "…*empiricism*. For the latter, at bottom, has ever committed but one fault: the fault of presenting itself as a philosophy." (Derrida *VM*, 189). It is the experience of the Other – the infinitely, absolutely independent Other – which refuses itself to be subjected to even the most basic transcendental necessities of philosophical discourse; and quite strangely, this experience is the *primary experience of discourse itself*. Derrida shows that Levinas himself is not opposed to explaining the Other on the basis of experience and empiricism, citing Levinas on calling the expression of the Other a "radical empiricism" and "experience par excellence" (Derrida *VM*, 190). We would like to suggest that another reference to experience in Levinas' work, present both in *TI* and *OB*, and referred to by ourselves in chapter I; the daily experience of my extraordinary responsibility for others.

The extraordinariness of ordinary life formulates in one way the uniqueness of Levinas' position, and is perhaps another way to explain the reconciliation between theory and practice. The experience of the Other does not lie outside philosophy's ordered domain in such a way that it does not concern it or does not enter it; or, which would be the same only to a less degree, enters it only as a *fall* (Levinas *OB*, 6), and therefore ultimately concerns language and understanding second-handedly, in an impure form. This is not the case for Levinas, whose emphasis on this point is relentless; we do experience the Other *positively*; and this experience is language itself in each of its moments, in which the subject is opened up to reason, objectivity and philosophy. The irreducible experience of absolute alterity cannot be contained by philosophy, but it fundamentally concerns it as its possibility and end. Derrida recognizes this; "By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverses it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics." (Derrida *VM*, 190). Empiricism, which "…always has been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*…" (Derrida *VM*, 190) is shown to concern philosophy in a primordial fashion. It questions and challenges philosophy, showing, as was said, that "what was taken for its solidity was its rigidity". It questions philosophy rather than being questioned by philosophy. "Therefore, nothing can so profoundly *solicit* the Greek logos – philosophy – than this irruption of the totally-other; and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its

[16] As said at the beginning of the chapter, in *OB* Levinas will *not* characterize the Other as neither the telos nor the origin of language

origin as to its morality, its other." (Derrida *VM*, 190). The insertion of the Other into philosophy forces philosophy to again formulate its own possibility in the most rigorous way possible, while also revealing its fundamental incapacity; an incapacity which does not refer to what lies beyond the limit of philosophy, but that which solicits it from within. This is again what would separate Levinas from someone like Bergson, who appeals to non-linguistic intuition as what lies beyond a defined border of philosophy; a border that Bergson perhaps illegitimately must construct with philosophy's own logos.

Derrida has however not forgotten the question of Levinas' own language, for the unavoidable necessity of the *phrase*, the "…indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos…" (Derrida *VM*, 139) continues to impose itself. For if language is nonviolent only when it is this "…very raising up of speech…" (Derrida *VM*, 128), this saying *to* the Other and *for* the Other, then nonviolent language is "…a language without phrase." (Derrida *VM*, 185), and as Derrida asks, could it *be* language in this silent intention? *What* would language be, a language freed from all violence, "…which would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication." (Derrida *VM*, 184)? Again, for someone like Bergson, this question would not be of the same gravity, because he would be able to place what escapes the Greek logos – understood here as phrase – outside of the Greek logos. For Levinas however, it is a question of liberating thought and language from within; he must declare and defend this silent intention of language *within* language. But language could not be language only in silence, and quite clearly is more than this, which means that Levinas must answer this question; "Why does the phrase impose itself? Because if one does not uproot the silent origin from itself violently, if one decides not to speak, then the worst violence will silently cohabit the *idea* of peace? Peace is made only in a *certain silence*, which is determined and protected by the violence of speech." (Derrida *VM*, 185). The phrase is inevitable, for if we did not enter into the violent phrasing of language, we would remain only in silence; a silence in which it would be seemingly impossible to respect the Other as the *absolute*, *infinite Other*.

In the end, Derrida formulates Levinas' main philosophical intention as such;

> "It is the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A *pure* thought of *pure* difference…We say the *dream* because it must vanish *at daybreak*, as soon as language awakens. But perhaps one will object that it is language which is sleeping. Doubtless, but then one must, in a certain way, become classical once more, and again find other grounds for the divorce between speech and thought." (Derrida *VM*, 190).

It is a dream which Derrida is sympathetic towards, and in a seemingly honest way. The idea of a hetero-logical thought – a thought of an *other* logic entirely – would pose the most profound challenge to philosophy, and with no greater force than that which Levinas is able to amass as he reveals to philosophy that this *other possibility* – which philosophy can neither anticipate nor include – belongs to and concerns philosophy in a primordial fashion, as its possibility and end. It is for Derrida however equally important to include that this *other possibility* itself will find that it must – in a primordial

fashion – be anticipated and included in philosophy, in order that it appear or be stated at all. Speaking of the experience of the Other, Derrida says;

"…one must reflect upon the necessity in which this experience finds itself, the injunction by which it is ordered to occur as logos, and to reawaken the Greek in the autistic syntax of his own dream. The necessity to avoid the worst violence, which threatens when one silently delivers oneself into the hands of the other in the night. (Derrida *VM*, 190-191).

The necessity of the awakening into the Greek logos is that of avoiding the *worst violence*, the violence of night, in which one is incapable of *phrasing the difference* between the silence of peace and the silence of violence. It is then this question which, although he does characterize it as an objection, Derrida seemingly challenges Levinas to answer; would it not be violence itself to "deliver oneself into the hands of the other in the night", that is, *to be subjected to the Other whom, by approaching us as the Good beyond Being, approaches beyond light, beyond appearing and beyond determination?* The slightest amount of violence necessary needed for the Other to appear and be stated in language is then for Derrida the least violence necessary in order that we do not fall into a deep darkness, in which we would have no determination, no phrasing, and therefore no language. "The philosopher (man) *must* speak and write within this war of light, a war in which he always already knows himself to be engaged; a war which he knows is inescapable, except by denying discourse, that is, by risking the worst violence." (Derrida *VM*, 146). Understood as such, formulated language understood as the articulation of phrases is not only a transcendental necessity for phenomena and Being; phenomena and Being are themselves an ethical imperative, in order that anything appear, be or be stated at all.

Derrida questions even the possibility of determining violence in general without already having committed to the violent medium of articulated language (Derrida *VM*, 160-161). *On the other hand*, Derrida never affirms that the notion of pre-ethical violence, which we discussed at the end of the explication of Husserl, is intelligible; he only supposes it in order to explain Husserl's position (Derrida *VM*, 160), and the same can be said of Heidegger. For both, the original difference which produces meaning allows this only at the cost at some violence; violence then however, must be understood as pre-ethical violence, for ethics must find its meaning within the room prepared by violence. We then return again to the question of the possibility of pre-ethical violence, which Levinas of course would not allow for. "War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other…" (Levinas TI, 199). It seems that it is this possibility which Derrida leaves open for Levinas when he asks of Husserl "Upon what basis does the original violence of discourse permit itself to be commanded to be returned against itself, to be always, as language, the return against itself which recognizes the other as other?" (Derrida *VM*, 166). It is however again not Derrida's intention to answer this question.

6. The Equal Necessity and Impossibility of Hellenism and Hebraism

The refusal to give a final answer; to what extent does this choice of Derrida reflect the position of Levinas? This is an important question to our work. Derrida, in *VM*, applies this impossibility to give a final answer to Levinas himself; "We live in and of difference, that is, in *hypocrisy*, about which Levinas so profoundly says that it is "not only a base contingent defect of man, but the underlying rending of a world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets" (*TI*, p. 24)." (Derrida *VM*, 192). The reference to the prophets in this quote awakens a reference that was promised at the beginning of this chapter; the relation between Hellenism and Hebraism. Aware of the intense complexity of the question regarding the relationship between philosophy and theology, knowledge and faith, we must however admit that we are only able to give a condensed and inadequate discussion of this question here. We evoke it for three reasons mainly; first off; it seems to us as a too important topic in *VM* that it should go unmentioned - secondly; it will serve as an excellent opportunity to discuss the question mentioned above – thirdly; it will also serve as an excellent opportunity to summarize the discussion of *VM* as it has hitherto been undertaken, as the question of God is another way to pose the same questions which we have been discussing.

Derrida explicitly says that his choice to call "…this experience of the infinitely other Judiasm…" (Derrida *VM*, 190) is for him a mere hypothesis; although the choice of this hypothesis is taken for important reasons. First off, it is important to note that Levinas himself in *TI* makes the reference to religion in general – or perhaps, as Derrida formulates it, "…the religiosity of religions…" (Derrida *VM*, 119) - explicitly in a number of ways, for example by the invocation of prophetic eschatology[17] in the preface. Eschatology is there discussed as that which has always served to proclaim the ultimate destiny which justifies politics and history, as that which philosophers always have distrusted, and also as that which should not, according to its own meaning, be reduced to philosophical evidence (Levinas *TI*, 22). That eschatology should summon history to its due judgement from a *beyond* history does however for Levinas *not* mean that eschatology is "outside" of history: "It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. The eschatological, as the "beyond" of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility." (Levinas *TI*, 23). Levinas goes on to claim that eschatology will be located *within experience*, "…the experience of morality…" (Levinas *TI*, 23), which Derrida acknowledges and recognizes when he writes of Levinas' philosophy and its relation to messianic eschatology that "…it is but a question of designating a space or a hollow within naked experience where this eschatology can be understood and where it must resonate." (Derrida *VM*, 103). Derrida explains that Levinas' philosophy in this way does not *depend* on its religious affiliation; it will rather be theology and the various religions *themselves* which will have to be able to refer to and

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[17] Escatology: a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind

respect this fundamental experience. This experience is of course the face-to-face with the Other, and here understood more explicitly in its religious meaning; "The foundation of metaphysics – in Levinas's sense – is to be encountered in the return to things themselves, where we find the common root of humanism and theology: the resemblance between man and God, man's visage and the Face of God." (Derrida *VM*, 134). This is a reference which Levinas himself explicitly embraces, both in *TI* and other places; "The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face." (Levinas *TI*, 78) and "To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity." (Levinas *TTO*, 359).

It must however be added that, especially concerning the concept of the Trace of God, that Derrida asks whether or not there is a "…complicity of theology and metaphysics in *Totality and Infinity*." (Derrida *VM*, 135). This is because the idea of "The face of God which commands while hiding itself…" (Derrida *VM*, 135) is strongly reminiscent of the way in which Yahweh – the holiest name for God in the Hebrew bible – reveals Himself to Moses; not allowing Moses to see His face, but only by putting him in a clift of the rock, covering him with His hand while he passes by and then removing it, allowing Moses only to see His back parts and not His face. We will not extensively discuss this question of a possible complicity here, but only say that Levinas himself came to make this reference explicit; at the very end of *TTO*, when discussing exactly how we, when face-to-face with the Other, stand in the Trace of God, Levinas asks us if this idea is not expressed in Exodus 33 (Levinas *TTO*, 359). We can say therefore that, independent of what consequences it might have/should have, Levinas himself openly admits this affiliation. He probably did so because he saw it as unproblematic; in his philosophy, the reference is itself first justified by the eschatological experience of the Other. It is then perhaps, as Derrida said, a question of designating a space in which such a reference can resonate. Either way, we will not discuss it further here.[18]

Standing face-to-face with the Other we stand then, according to Levinas, in the Trace of God. "A proposition readily converted into atheism: and if God was an *effect of the trace?* If the idea of divine presence (life, existence, paraousia, etc.), if the name of God was but the movement of erasure of the trace in presence?" (Derrida *VM*, 135). This possibility can be explained by another reference to Husserl and Heidegger; for in *VM*, Derrida also gives a discussion of the way in which both discusses God. The question for both is whether God *already must have meaning* for the transcendental ego/Dasein *before* any revelation of His glory; a meaning which would then serve as the *possibility* of the name of God. We begin again with Husserl. Comparing this structure with the one concerning the alter-ego, Derrida explains that, for Husserl, although God as well as the Other is independent of me, He would need to have meaning for the ego in general (Derrida *VM*, 164). This "meaning of God" would be presupposed by atheists as well as theists. In much the same way, Derrida explains,

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[18] If one would like a more thorough discussion of this question, the beginning of Adriaan Peperzak's *Levinas' Method* is a great place to start

Heidegger presupposes a precomprehension of the "…Space of the Sacred…" (Derrida *VM*, 182) for the possibility of a revelation of God; we must already have a precomprehension of the Being of God for his Divinity to have meaning, and this precomprehension belongs to theism as much as it does to atheism; "Both presuppose it." (Derrida *VM*, 182). This "Space of the Sacred" is explained as the *promise* of an encounter with God, which however is never, in accordance with its own meaning, fulfilled, marking therefore simultaneously "…the *limit* and the *wellspring* of finite-Being as history." (Derrida *VM*, 182).

""Ontological" anticipation transcendence toward Being, permits, then, an understanding of the word God, for example, even if this understanding is but the ether in which dissonance can resonate." (Derrida *VM*, 183). It is this structure which we believe is meant by Derrida when he asks if it is not possible that "God is an effect of the trace"; if the meaning of God presupposes both the promise of His presence and the limit of His absence – and the play between them – then the Name of God could quite possibly be only the production of this play, in the same way that the reverse could be true; we could quite possibly be in the Trace of God. This is why this understanding of the meaning of God must be presupposed by both believers and non-believers; both faith and lack of faith is intelligible only in a world where God both could or could not exist. Nevertheless, still remaining within the possibilities of this framework, there is a possibility that Heidegger still has overlooked something. For, even if this play between presence/absence is necessary for the meaning of God, could this play of difference be said to encapsulate the meaning of God? "Is not God the name of that which cannot be anticipated on the basis of the dimension of the divine? Is not God the other name of Being (name because nonconcept), the thinking of which would open difference and the ontological horizon, instead of being indicated in them only?" (Derrida *VM*, 187). If the Space of the Sacred is the transcendental necessity for the meaning of God, then this could still be said to be insufficient to be able to *think* God; for the possibility of God could be possible only by the force of God Himself, which would in that case originally open the difference. "In other words, perhaps one might say that ontology precedes theology *only* by putting between brackets the content of the ontic determination which, in post-Hellenic philosophical thought, is called God: to wit, the positive infinity." (Derrida *VM*, 187). In this case, ontology would only bracket the play of difference within the Space of the Sacred after-the-fact; but this difference could be said to signal a possibility that would transcend this difference. The understanding of God which anticipates His revelation could not be said to contain what it anticipates, leaving therefore a possibility of something *more*; something *beyond* this anticipation.

Standing face-to-face with the Other, we stand, *perhaps*, in the Trace of God. This possibility, that the entrance of the Other is the eschatology which opens man up to the dimension of the Divine, would - *perhaps* – exceed the thought which determines it, and which only posteriorly could be said to constitute the necessary anticipation of the Divine. The possibility of the Absolute Infinite Other would not be signaled *in* difference, but would *signal difference*. "It is doubtless the *true order*. But it

is indeed the *order of truth* which is in question. Levinas's thought is maintained between these two postulations." (Derrida *VM*, 135). We believe Derrida is very correct in this analysis, and that this is fundamental to Levinas' conception of philosophy; for in order for metaphysics to be sustained and the responsibility for the Other to be absolute, it must in a certain way remain uncertain. This concerns the absolute separation, which in a certain way does not allow for certainty. Ethics is not deducible from the face-to-face; it is a *groundless* responsibility. It does not explain itself, only justifies itself by itself. *In other words, we never discover the meaning of life.* Still, responsibility summons us with a gravity which cannot be questioned. It is perhaps exactly this which Levinas means when he opens *Totality and Infinity* with a rewriting of a poem from Rimbaud ""The true life is absent." But we are in the world. Metaphysics arises and is maintained in this alibi." (Levinas *TI*, 33). To be in the world is to be in the absence of the final truth, but still called undoubtedly to responsibility; the hypocrisy referred to above. It is, however, a hypocrisy which Levinas would see redeemed by the Good which calls for it (Levinas *OB*, 11). It would however also be, according to these last analysis, fundamentally and essentially in its own meaning a *possibility*. This is then the preliminary answer to the question which started this discussion, of whether Derrida's decision to not answer the fundamental questions of his essay was in line with Levinas' own intentions or not. Having completed this discussion, and made the reference to Hellenism and Hebraism understood, the final comments of *VM* now takes on a new meaning:

> "…does the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek, peace itself, have the form of the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel, the living logic which *reconciles* formal tautology and empirical heterology after having *thought* prophetic discourse in the preface to the *Phenomenology of the Mind*? Or, on the contrary, does this peace have the form of infinite separation and of the unthinkable, unsayable transcendence of the other? To what horizon of peace does the language which asks this question belong? From whence does it draw the energy of its question? Can it account for the historical *coupling* of Judaism and Hellenism? And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the *copula* in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet"?" (Derrida *VM*, 192).

That Derrida, in this scenario, does not choose between Hellenism and Judaism would then belong to the meaning of them both. We will summarize this scenario on the basis the over-arching theme of both Derrida's essay and our own work: language. As we have seen, the Greek logos understood as the irreducible, original violence to which no language can find itself foreign cannot itself state its own possibility; the transcendental violence which allows for the phrase does so in a negative movement which it cannot retrieve, but which still remains its obscure, silent opening. In the thought of Levinas however, the Absolute, Infinite Other remains the possible inspiration of language *in* language which nevertheless, by always transcending language and absolving herself of its forms, is never *given over* in language; remains the one which I give language to. Both are found *in* language, however in

different ways; for Husserl and Heidegger as that which is *opened in and by language*, and for Levinas as that which *opens language in language from beyond language*; opens language by a third route, an excluded middle, by being that in language which language speaks *to* and not *about*. For Derrida then however, the question would again be if language can *be* language in this "silent intention". This is the question Levinas would have to answer. For Husserl and Heidegger, the question would be whether they can account for the origin of their violence, and therefore if they can *justify* the meaning of pre-ethical violence and the use of it against a worse violence; and also of their incapacity of dealing with what they must designate as nonphilosophy.

7.   The Saying of Writing

The questions addressed to Husserl and Heidegger above are surely of interest, but this essay is however about language as it is understood in Levinas, and it is therefore his question which we are interested in addressing. We will begin to address it here, as an entrance into our third and final chapter, with a coupling of our own; a coupling of the topic of saying and again the question of whether Derrida is right in leaving his questions in *VM* unanswered. *For although it might belong to the meaning of Levinas' philosophy that it is a possibility – that the Infinite, Absolute Other is a possibility – belonging to its meaning also is that Levinas has chosen to follow this possibility*. He has chosen to follow the possibility of an Ethics that would justify the use and need of the violence of the said, which in other words might be said as such; he has chosen to understand his own philosophy, and that of his colleagues, as a *saying*. This would then for one time at least show a divergence between Levinas and Derrida's presentation of Levinas in *VM*. Let us address this issue by exploring another topic in *VM* which we have yet to address; that of the question of the relation between speech and writing. This topic does not concern the above-mentioned problematic directly, but will serve as an excellent entrance into it, and is in either case relevant to our work.

Naming it a "…separate consideration in and of itself." (Derrida *VM*, 126), Derrida includes in *VM* a discussion regarding the relation between the notions of "living speech" and "writing" as they are presented in *TI* in relation to the topic of the expression of the Other. In general, Derrida asks if it is not so for Levinas that only the living speech of the Other face-to-face is able to express the Other as independent, and that the written work for him will always only be a sign (Derrida *VM*, 126). After *epekeina tes ousias*, this would be the second most important Platonic theme in *TI*; for is this not the same arguments given by Socrates in *Phaedrus* in defense of living speech and as a critique of the written word? Is it not the question of being able to *attend* to one's own speech, in order to remain the master of the expression which then remains exactly an expression expressing itself *by* itself? This critique is not at all unsubstantial, and is somewhat called for. Levinas writes himself on the topic of language in *TI* that "He who manifests himself comes, according to Plato's expression, to his own assistance." (Levinas *TI*, 66). The theme of attending ones speech is also taken up in *TI* in the section named *Work and Expression*, where Levinas explains that the author of the work is present as a

content that must be interpreted on the basis of context, and does therefore not attend *independently* to her manifestation as in the expression of the Other, but is rather *dependent* on a referential structure (Levinas *TI*, 177-178).

In opposition to this, Derrida asks if "…it is not possible to invert all of Levinas's statements on this point?" (Derrida *VM*, 126). Could it not be, suggests Derrida, that the author of the work be said to better be able to assist her expression in writing by absenting herself from empirical contingencies and allowing herself the time to express herself in the way she wants? Of course, Derrida also admits that writing itself can turn violent, and asks therefore whether not "The limit between violence and nonviolence is perhaps not between speech and writing but within each of them." (Derrida *VM*, 127). Having pointed this out, Derrida still admits to understanding the fundamental point of Levinas' reference to original living speech, who's possibility Derrida admits is necessary if writing is to be more than "…a grammar or a lexicon without language, for cybernetics or electronics." (Derrida *VM*, 127). The original situation of living speech is necessary for language and writing, although writing must not necessarily be thought of as a lesser medium after this fact. And in the thematic of the trace, Derrida believes there might be a potential for a rehabilitation of the thematic of writing in Levinas' philosophy.

We would however ask if such a rehabilitation is completely necessary, and if the distinction is not already made in *TI*. Both in the above mentioned chapter on work and expression and in what we discussed in chapter I, Levinas states that the contextual content of the said is always presented to someone; "He to whom the question is put *has already presented himself*, without being content." (Levinas *TI*, 177). And when Levinas at the end of the discussion on separation and discourse refers to his own work, we wonder if not the same point is made; "And if I set forth, as in a final and absolute vision, the separation and transcendence which are the themes of this book, these relations, which I claim form the fabric of being itself, first come together in my discourse presently addressed to my interlocutors: inevitably across my idea of the Infinite the other faces me – hostile, friend, my master, my student." (Levinas *TI*, 81). It seems then that Levinas does not wish to forbid writing from partaking in the infinite discourse with the Other; he sees it rather as that necessary part of writing that always *exceeds* writing, in that it exactly addresses its content to the Other.

We have come to know this theme in Levinas as the distinction between the *saying* and the *said*. In chapter I, we explored this topic as it as it was discussed in *OB*; saying is the turning-to the Other of signification, in which I turn myself inside-out *towards* the Other as a sign; a signification Levinas believed to be irreducible to the contents of the said. Does the distinction of saying or said however only relate to the spoken word, or the written as well? We should be quite capable of showing that Levinas believes this distinction to be applicable to writing as well as living speech, and we will be able to show this aplenty in the coming chapter. For now however, we will show this by another route; by showing how Levinas in his short article *Wholly Otherwise* explicates Derrida' own writing on the basis of its saying.

Wholly Otherwise (henceforth *WO*), the only writing by Levinas that comments on Derrida directly, is a short article of only 6 pages which concerns the philosophy of Derrida, seemingly most concerned with *Voice and Phenomenon*. It was first published in 1973, one year before the publishing of *OB*. In it, Levinas explicates Derrida's philosophy as a continuation of the critical project, in which critical philosophy once again is separated from dogmatic philosophy (Levinas *WO*, 3) After this critical adventure taken on by Derrida, we might only be able to understand the history of philosophy as "…a growing awareness of the difficulty of thinking." (Levinas *WO*, 3). Derrida is shown through his method of deconstruction to reveal to philosophy its underlying dogmatic tendency towards presence and the present; "The presence of the present, gathering and synchrony." (Levinas *WO*, 4). The construct of Western metaphysics understood as presence is by Derrida not destructed, but deconstructed, thereby liberating the significations of presence beyond the options of truth and falsehood (Levinas *WO*, 5). Everything is left uncertain, "…uncertain even of the uncertainties which flicker everywhere." (Levinas *WO*, 3). The world is suddenly made strange and unfamiliar. "Everything is otherwise if one can still speak of Being." (Derrida *WO*, 5).

Levinas then shows how Derrida still must, among the strange architecture of the deconstructed construct, employ "…the present tense of the verb "to be" in predicative propositions." (Levinas *WO*, 5). This would seemingly lead to a critique similar to the one which *VM* traditionally was understood to pose, where the use of the logocentric language to criticize logocentrism would in turn refute the critique, on the basis that it would be contradictory. This is an option Levinas himself refers to, but which he himself warns against. For it would involve a risk; "One would risk missing the incompressible nonsimultaneity of the Said and the Saying, the dislocation of their correlation." (Levinas *WO*, 5). Levinas then commits to reading Derrida with the signification of both its said and its saying in mind, criticizing those "…who – dreadfully well-informed, prodigiously intelligent, and more Derridian than Derrida – interpret his extraordinary work with the assistance of all the key-words at once, without having or leaving time to return to the thinking of which these words are contemporary." (Levinas *WO*, 6).

What would this signification of the saying hold over the said in Derrida's philosophy? We already have some answer to that question; it is the proximity to the Other, the "for-the-other" of signification. In the aftermath of our discussion in this chapter however, this question takes on a new meaning, for, as we said at the very beginning of the chapter, the distinction between the saying and the said could perhaps be understood to be Levinas' answer to the questions of *VM*. For if one of Derrida's most crucial questions in *VM* is exactly what language would be for Levinas, if it is a language without phrase, the answer to that question would perhaps be the signification which language has over and beyond its *said* in the very *saying* of it. It would then be the very opposite of a mute silence; it would be "the very raising up of speech" understood as *speaking up* at all, and again, not only "…as an apparitor presenting essence and entities." (Levinas *OB*, 46), but in its *ethical* significance as proximity to the Other.

For Levinas, the dislocation of the saying from its said "…certainly sets language apart from everything empirical which exhausts itself in presence and in the lack of presence." (Levinas *WO*, 7). Levinas will then continue to argue of the unique character of language, understood as the metaphysical relation in which we witness and partake in transcendence. He will however perhaps have developed his position further in order to answer for some of the questions posed by Derrida. In regards to the necessary betrayal into the determined phrase, Levinas says this in *WO*; "One can see nothing without thematization, or without the oblique rays which it reflects back, even when it is a question of the nonthematizable." (Levinas *WO*, 6). He is then ready to admit that even the nonthematizable cannot avoid having to make itself appear in thematization. He does however hold onto this hypocritical and paradoxical notion of the nonthematizable.

8. Summary and Future Prospects

In summary then, we have gained from Derrida a number of key insights. First off, we have come to acknowledge the necessity of allowing our language to circulate in the violence of difference. Nothing which is stated, thought or which has appeared will be able to circumvent this necessity. Secondly, we have learned that the possibility of a yet unsayable and unthinkable transcendence of the Other within language will have to understand itself exactly *as a possibility*. This would belong to its own meaning as that which commands while hiding itself; as the one whom does not give himself over in *any* way, but concerns me only in my groundless responsibility toward him. These two profound insights was for Derrida questions which belong to the interiority of Levinas' work, and we would like to agree with him, although it is beyond question they owe their explicitness and intensity from Derrida's reading of Levinas. These insights has then not only allowed us to understand the radicalness and uniqueness of Levinas' understanding of language, philosophy and their relation more clearly, but has also made clearer the challenges and difficulties which belong to Levinas. These difficulties will occupy us in the last and final chapter of our own work.

Staying however for a short while longer with this chapter, we would like to return to the question of Derrida's choice to leave his questions unanswered. Two things shall be said about it; first, that which we have already have said, that if it already belongs to its meaning in Levinas' work that his philosophy must be understood as a "possible route of thought", then it also belongs to its meaning that Levinas has chosen to follow this route. A difference between Levinas and Derrida would then be that Derrida choses to not chose. In the context of the discussion of saying however, we would like to problematize this choice. For, if it is understood on the basis of its *saying*, *VM* would already be "the very raising up of speech" of which Derrida speaks of concerning Levinas, but which would perhaps also be applicable in the discussion of Husserl, Heidegger and necessary violence. For when it is said that one must combat violence with violence, does this then not already refer to a choice of raising up, *despite everything* – despite uncertainty for example – and doing philosophy? And although Derrida will not allow *an answer* which would explain *why* violence turns on violence for the sake of a better

violence without pointing out that this answer would again need violent discourse to justify itself, when he himself continues to make use of this violence for the sake of *some* good; *would this not signify something in and of itself?*

Chapter III: The Heart of the Chiasmus

In the two preceding chapters, we have been able to investigate and discuss the intriguing dialogue and debate between Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida from the perspective of language. Let us make a very short summary of what has been done so far. We have in the first chapter explicated the possible understanding of *language as transcendence* in the way Levinas delineates it, as always involved and implicated in the plot of the *ethical*. In the second chapter, we have seen what it would mean and what implications it would hold to consider language transcendent, as Derrida was able to show both the necessity that any thought of transcendence find itself to a certain degree *betrayed in language*, due to the slightest amount of violence necessarily belonging to *articulated* language, and the necessity that transcendence consider itself a *possibility* in accordance with its own meaning *as* transcendence. As we have already discussed aplenty, Derrida's reading of Levinas should not simply be read as a critique. In one way, Derrida's reading of Levinas' philosophy has, by situating it so deeply in the tradition which it attempts to break with, more sharply brought out the *radical potential* of Levinas' philosophy. It was also shown that the original violence of the tradition was unable to account for itself, leaving then open the question of the possibility of philosophy's own opening. It has however also, to be sure, been brought certain challenges into Levinas' philosophy in the form of questions to which he must presumably answer; perhaps most important among them being exactly *what* language would be when robbed of the phrase, aside from a "silent intention". For how can philosophy conceive of transcendence in language as *anything else* if the articulated phrase already belongs to the violence of ontology?

In this chapter then, we will attempt to delineate the way in which Levinas responds to these challenges. As was said nearing the end of last chapter, this would lead us to a revisit of the topic of the *saying* and *said* of language as it is presented in Levinas' later *magnum opus*, *OB*. We of course already discussed this distinction in chapter I, but the distinction will take on a new meaning in the perspective of the new possibilities and challenges delineated in chapter II. In the second part of this chapter, we will once more allow Derrida to voice himself, in the hitherto not discussed article *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*. This article is Derrida's own discussion of *OB*, and will bring our discussion even further. After this, we will attempt to delineate some concluding remarks.

A) Wisdom of Love

1. Understanding Philosophy as a Saying and a Said

We begin then by returning to *OB* and the distinction there made between the said and the saying of language, which we now wish to investigate further. First however, we should take up a small but not insignificant point; to what extent can we argue that *OB* responds to the problematic raised by Derrida

in *VM*? After all, Derrida is mentioned explicitly naught but once in *OB*, in a footnote which is seemingly only distantly related to the topic of our discussion (Levinas *OB*, 189). Critchley and Bernasconi asks the same question. They argue that "…it seems clear that Levinas has carefully read and assimilated Derrida's essay.", but add right thereafter that "Because Levinas has not referred to "Violence and Metaphysics" by name in any of his books or essays, all such argument, however plausible, are for the most part based upon allusion and conjecture." (Critchley&Bernasconi 1991, xiii). We would have to admit the same. As however Critchley and Bernasconi mention again right thereafter, and which we ourselves has seen nearing the end of chapter II, Levinas do give us a discussion of Derrida's philosophy in *WO*. Here, two topics are discussed which are also essential in *OB*, and which will be of great importance to us now; the aforementioned distinction between saying and the said, and the relation between philosophy and skepticism.

  In either case, let us begin with what is our main problematic here. As said, the challenge received from Derrida is how we are to maintain that transcendence takes place in language, when language seemingly makes use of phenomenological, ontological and dialectical structures which violate transcendence. The problem is two-fold; on the one hand, if transcendence does not betray its meaning and enter into language, there would quite literally be *nothing to talk about*. On the other hand, if we accept this necessity (which Levinas does), then transcendence will seemingly be contaminated the moment it enters language, begging the question of what we intend to *mean* when we utter the word "transcendence". The difficulty is, as we saw in chapter II, especially difficult for Levinas, as he places transcendence not outside of and foreign to thought and speech, but as belonging to them quite intimately. Thought, speech, understanding and *philosophy itself* is implicated, in each of its moments, with what transcends it. The difficult task belonging to Levinas then, is not only to show that language in general is transcendence, but also to show that his own language - *at the very moment of uttering it* - is transcendence. It is exactly this, that Levinas' philosophy must *show* that it is more than *can be shown*, which is so extremely difficult and intriguing. If transcendence escapes the event of disclosure in general, how can we *conceive* of this?

  It will be shown, as stated, with a renewed discussion of the distinction between *saying* and the *said*, or more precisely, in a discussion of *how we can understand philosophy itself to be both a saying and a said*. This will be done with a discussion of both the said and saying, their correlation and non-simultaneity, and the way in which we can conceive of philosophy in light of all these elements. As we shall see, this discussion will review the diachronic ambiguity inherent to language as both a said and a saying, and include a surprising and interesting discussion of the relation between skepticism and philosophy. First however, we will focus on the *said* of language, for although the said might be conceived of as the enemy of transcendence, Levinas is attentive to including it, for the said "…has its hour and its time." (Levinas *OB*, 46). The correct place of the said of language will be shown to be *justice*.

2. The said: Justice and Appearance

Before however diving into the topic of justice, let us state something that should perhaps be clear by now; what Derrida explicated as the *articulated phrase* belonging to language in chapter II is the same dimension of language which Levinas understands by its said It is what we in chapter I explicated as the "this as that" of identification and the transcendental necessity of always already being absorbed in this play of identities in order for the world to be meaningfully accessible; indeed, the idea that there could be a "world" *an sich* beyond its meaningful representation in the said would be a myth. We now see the clear resonance this bears to Derrida's discussion of Husserl and Heidegger in chapter II, and we did indeed already in chapter I discuss the said of language as the *ontologism* of language. The understanding of the said of language is of course predominantly discussed in *OB*, which we now have argued is an answer to *VM*. We therefore see that Levinas accepts and integrates into his own philosophy the ontological dimension of language. Not only that, but as we shall soon see, *Levinas acknowledges that his own philosophy is a formulated said*. This we have already seen in a certain way at the end of chapter II, when Levinas in *WO* stated that even the nonthematizable would have to show itself as a theme. This will be true of *Levinas' own philosophy*. He will nevertheless also maintain that his language is *also a saying*, and that "The plot of the saying that is absorbed in the said is not exhausted in this manifestation." (Levinas *OB*, 46). This remains to be shown; now however, we need to outline the correct place and time for the said of language; for in order to show how his language does not remain only a said, Levinas will need to show why the need for the said appears in the first place. It is therefore time to show how the said of language relates to justice.

According to Levinas, the said enters into language for a quite literally *just* reason or necessity, a necessity Levinas acknowledges as both important and worthy of outmost respect; "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." (Levinas *OB*¸ 156-157). We then not only see the respect given to the said, but also the explicit stating of what we mentioned above; Levinas considers his own exposition as holding to the norms of truth and essence, the elements of the said. His philosophy is indeed a thematization, a showing and stating of what appears as such and such, "this as that". But again, why the said? "Why know? Why is there a problem? Why philosophy?" (Levinas *OB*, 157). In accordance with the conclusions Derrida reached about the phrase – that it cannot account for its own necessity – Levinas will also explicate the said as "coming about" due to a necessity not belonging to it. It is the necessity of *justice in a society*, which Levinas explicates as such; the necessity of measuring between the immeasurable. This necessity shows itself, according to Levinas, not in the original situation between me and the Other, in which my groundless responsibility for the Other would be literally unquestionable: "A question would not have been born, nor consciousness, nor self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters." (Levinas *OB*, 157). The entrance of the third party problematizes the originally straight-

forward relationship between me and the Other, because I am now forced to consider the Other not only on her terms, but also in regards to the relationship between her and the third, and vice versa. The straight-forwardness of my responsibility must begin to navigate and distribute itself. In other words, I have to address the issue of the coexistence of the Other and the third. "Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing before a court of justice." (Levinas *OB*, 157). That all should be treated as equals before the court does for Levinas originally not depend on *my* rights in comparison to the Other – before whom I am infinitely guilty – but rather depends on the rights of the Other compared with the third.

Justice then, as the "….comparison of incomparables." (Levinas *OB*, 158) does imply for Levinas a certain betrayal, and we would perhaps add, in the context of our discussions in chapter II, a certain violence. In order to be comparable, the Other must become representable[19] so that he can be measured, moderated and given over to the calculus of society. The original straight-forward responsibility for-the-other must gain the ability of comparison in order to organize itself; "The saying is fixed in a said, is written, becomes a book, law and science." (Levinas *OB*, 159). The necessity for appearance and the articulated phrase occurs then for Levinas because of the complication of organizing society, in which my unlimited responsibility for the Other must limit itself in order to address the equally unlimited responsibility for the third, and the issue of their relationship to each other (which can be the only justification for me branding someone a criminal).

We see then that the justice of political society for Levinas is inconceivable without the original (or, as we shall see later, *pre*-original) situation of the proximity to the Other. The question concerning the individuality and universality of ethics in a society appears here, and is of outmost importance to Levinas, but cannot be addressed in its full measure here. We will nevertheless outline what is important for us to know in our discussion. For Levinas, in order that justice not be understood as "…a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn…" (Levinas *OB*, 159), it is important that we begin with the subject in proximity to the Other, obsessively concerned with justice. "Justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity." (Levinas *OB*, 159). This necessity can be compared with the idea of the entrance of eschatology in history discussed near the end of chapter II; eschatology, or the epiphany of the Other, submits the whole of politics and history to judgment within political society. What is then the relationship between the Other in proximity and the "children in Africa"? In what way does the eschatology of the Other call me to all others? Levinas writes in *OB* that "The other is from the first

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[19] Examples can be given aplently; the Other must be represented in registers and statistics, or more essentially, as a criminal, minor, soldier, judge, etc. It could probably be shown of all general categories applied to persons that they can fit with this schema of justice outlined by Levinas, where the different roles within society establishes the synchronical relations between us; the assemblage of society

the brother of all the other men." (Levinas *OB*, 158), while referring to the sub-chapter "The Other and the Others" in *TI*. In this sub-chapter, Levinas explains that already when face-to-face with the Other, "The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice." (Levinas *TI*, 213). According to Levinas, the Other opens me already to humanity and fraternity. We will not discuss this topic further here, but only conclude that, for Levinas, the justice of society primarily and (pre)originally concerns the face-to-face with the Other, relevant in each encounter with an independent, singular other.

Justice understood as the necessity of *making appear* and *ordering into themes* plays then a very important role for Levinas. The assemblage of Being, which would thematize, state and make apparent not only the world, but also each other, would have its "time and place" as the necessary measurement of what cannot, in principle, be measured. It is the necessary adjustment for the inadequateness of my response; for my incapacity to rise up fully to my responsibilities. The state is then interpreted in quite a compelling way; the just cause of institutions is that they should take care of everyone I myself come to short in helping. To be a member of society is then to make sure these institutions are doing as well as they could be doing in handling this divine responsibility; a responsibility who's divinity would transcend the state. The importance of maintaining this transcendence however - which neither justice nor knowledge could deduce from themselves[20] - is then for Levinas of the highest order. *One only serves the State if the State serves the Other.* If we did not understand this role of the state on the basis of the original and asymmetrical proximity to the Other, the state would be understood as a neutral authority to which its members would submit not *for the sake of each other*, but for the sake of the State and its coherence. That would be the ultimate violence of totality for Levinas[21], in which the Other would be subjugated and dominated. The question of avoiding a conception of the state as totalitarian then rests for Levinas on whether or not we are able to think this *inspiration* of proximity as the ultimate goal of the state; "The judge is not outside the conflict, but the law is in the midst of proximity." (Levinas *OB*, 159). In each of its moments, politics owes its meaning – the meaning of its strategies and pragmatics – to the immeasurable responsibility for the Other. The judge sets himself outside of the conflict *for the sake* of the conflict, because he is *already implicated* in the conflict.

This is of course also true of language and of the relation between the *saying* and the *said*. Two correlations between this discussion of the state and language can be made here, for first off, language is of course of itself intimately tied up with politics. This was already said when we explained the necessity of ordering, arranging and in general make apparent relations between the Other and the third, who in principle transcends all order. In the language of the said, we deduce and

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[20] It is important to note that the impossibility of deduction goes both ways; one cannot *deduce* justice from the transcendence of responsibility. One is rather *called to justice* without however clear instructions being given, a situation which is reflected in the *difficulty* of justice and politics as the situation of being responsible for measuring the immeasurable

[21] Or the ultimate peace for Weil

decide on the categories and structures used to organize society[22]. Secondly however, the correlation is of course also relevant because of the non-simultaneous correlation between political strategy and divine responsibility; the same non-simultaneous correlation that "holds" between saying and the said. "The concern for justice, for the thematizing, the kerygmatic discourse bearing on the said, from the bottom of the saying without the said, the saying as contact, is the spirit in society." (Levinas *OB*, 160). To conceive of the difference between the saying and the said is then important in the same way that it is necessary to conceive of the difference between the totality of the state, the absolutely independent others under its jurisdiction, and my absolute responsibility and incomparability to the others. Themes and topics are called for, but called for by what they can measure only by betrayal.

Having made mention of my incomparability to the others, we have the opportunity to discuss a question from Derrida which was formulated in chapter II. There Derrida asked if it would not be violence itself to "give oneself over to the other in the night". As we have seen already and will continue to see in our discussion of subjectivity, Levinas only *intensifies* his emphasis on the asymmetry between me and the Other in *OB*. The subject is there described in the terms of the signification of saying, as turning itself inside-out to the other. It is the despite-myself, for-the-other of substitution. Levinas pushes this asymmetry to such an extreme that the subject is said to bear "…even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor." (Levinas *OB*, 75). Levinas will then not relax this asymmetry which Derrida accuses of being violence itself. Nevertheless, in the name of justice, there is opened a possibility of some hope for the self. Because of the inevitable betrayal of the original asymmetry brought on by the entrance of the third, "…I am approached as an other by the others, that is, "for myself"." (Levinas *OB*, 158). The meaning of bearing responsibility even for the persecution against myself would perhaps then mean that I must stop this persecution *not for myself*, but for the others whom might later become a victim of it.

In either case, we now see the necessity and just place for the said of language; it is the necessary measurement of what in another sense cannot be measured. It is the necessity of justice between the Other and the third. That saying should become a said is then not an event that *opposes* the saying; the relation between the saying and said of language is not hostile or allergic. Still, as we have seen, we cannot stay only with the said. The betrayal of the pre-original relation of proximity in which this relation is *made to appear* must be reduced by philosophy. That philosophy is that enterprise of knowledge best suited to take on this task will be shown later. First, we will discuss the above mentioned *non-simultaneous* correlation between the saying in the said, in which the saying is exactly not fully absorbed in the said, not synchronized, but rather remains always an ambiguous and anarchical *diachrony*.

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[22] Categories and structures we of course always already presuppose in order for such notions as "politics" and "society" to be intelligible in the first place (although they, for Levinas, of course also requires the situation of proximity in order to have their primordial meaning)

3. Saying: Diachrony and Trace

As stated above, the saying enters into the said, and in the philosophy of Levinas which *thematizes saying*, saying itself appears as a theme, as a said. It is a betrayal "…which philosophy is called upon to reduce." (Levinas *OB*, 152). The first step of this un-doing will be to present, *as a theme*, how saying transcends language in its said, by refusing to be exhausted in it. We must however bear in mind that if we, at the end of this analysis, are able to follow the path Levinas has chosen, then this discussion *which we at this very moment are having* must *not* only be understood as the presenting of themes – that is, as said – but also as a saying. "We must stay with the extreme situation of a diachronic thought." (Levinas *OB*, 7). We should bear this in mind as we return to the topic of saying.

The signification saying bears over and beyond the said was already discussed to some extent in chapter I, and shall begin with a quick summary of that discussion. There we learned that saying must be understood on the basis of proximity to the Other, and more specifically as the response of responsibility, that is, as the ethical saying in which I turn myself into a sign for-the-other, despite-myself. I un-do my essence in substitution, which is the signification of saying. It is the restlessness of a subject exposing itself to its responsibilities. This restlessness comes about involuntarily; I am elected to responsibility. As we explained, this does not mean that I am a slave to the other; in contrast, the non-freedom of the encounter lies therein that *I cannot avoid choosing*. I am the assigned one which in my responsibility am the one who can answer. This we already know. What we would like to investigate further were also both mentioned in chapter I, but not sufficiently discussed. It is the *diachrony* of language, in each of its non-simultaneous moments, and the ambiguous *trace* it imprints on language.

We begin with diachrony, which for Levinas in short means that language always belongs to *two times*. Language is diachronic because of its irreducible *anarchy*, a word which must here be understood in both of its meanings; as both anarchy (without order) and an-archy (without beginning)[23]. The an-archic element of language does not have a beginning in (my) time. This can be understood with reference to the involuntary election which we spoke of earlier, for the assignation to responsibility "…slips into me "like a thief"…" (Levinas *OB*, 148). We could perhaps add to Levinas' quote "like a thief *in the night*", for Levinas explicitly states that the assignation does not appear (Levinas *OB*, 145). As said, it is however not only in reference to representation understood as appearance that the assignation does not show itself; it also escapes my *time*. "In proximity is heard a command come as though from an immemorial past, which was never present, began in no freedom." (Levinas *OB*, 88). The responsibility which slips itself into me before I notice it therefore does not only escape my *presence* but also my *present*. I am always, according to Levinas, *too late* to the encounter with the Other (Levinas *OB*, 150). If we then understand consciousness as we did with

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[23] The etymological of "anarchy" lends itself to both these meanings, as the Greek *arkhos* (ruler, leader) is derived from *arche* (beginning, origin)

Husserl and Heidegger in chapter II, as the necessary transcendental ground in which experience is synchronized and represented[24], the Other *transcends consciousness*; "…it overwhelms consciousness that tends to assume it. It is unassumable like a persecution." (Levinas *OB*, 87). It is therefore wrong for Levinas to name the Other the *origin* of language, as we sometimes did in chapter II; origin is for Levinas always the consciousness of origin, or the origin of consciousness, who's meaning belongs to the dimension of the manifested said called for by justice (Levinas *OB*, 65). The Other is rather pre-original, and my saying for-the-other, that is, *my very subjectivity*, is a "Latent birth, for prior to an origin, an initiative, a present designatable and assumable, even if by memory." (Levinas *OB*, 139). As the assigned "I", in the saying in which I expose myself to the Other, I partake in transcendence; I am in my very subjectivity torn up from myself to and before the Other whom was never a presence and never present. The subjectivity of saying is diachronical; it cannot assemble itself into *one time*, but is already in its birth *broken up*. I substitute myself for-the-other.

This diachrony is however due not only to being summoned by an immemorial past, but also that my responsibilities are endless, and only grow in the measure of which I take them on (Levinas *OB*, 12). It is the idea of Infinity in the subject; "The subject is born in the beginninglessness of an anarchy and in the endlessness of obligation, gloriously augmenting as though infinity came to pass in it." (Levinas *OB*, 140). It is the subject receiving the idea of Infinity, which already in *TI* was described as "…an idea whose *ideatum* overflows the capacity of thought…" (Levinas *TI*, 49). The diachrony of language is Infinity in the subject, beyond the categories of origin and telos.

This extreme situation of the anarchical subject can, as said, become a theme, as it does in Levinas' work and as it is also presented in *this* work, at this very moment. At the cost of betrayal, transcendence can become a theme in philosophy. If Levinas is correct however, the very *saying* of that betrayal would leave a trace of the non-assembled diachrony which we have come to know as "…the *passing itself* of the Infinite." (Levinas *OB*, 150), irreducible to our knowing of it. This incredible conception of saying would mean that saying is the obedience to a command before hearing it (Levinas *OB*, 148). The summon to responsibility was never present in my presence, never given over to my consciousness. *But I do come to hear it*, although as betrayed, for the Infinite leaves its *trace* in the diachrony of my saying. In my saying of the said, what cannot be contained is presented as contained, but still contests this containing in its ethical meaning; "The refusal of presence is converted into my presence as present, that is, as hostage delivered over as a gift to the other." (Levinas *OB*, 151). In my own saying, the trace of the Infinite is signaled by the very diachrony of saying, the unsolvable ambiguity of my words as both a said and a saying. "The unheard-of saying is enigmatically in the anarchic response, in my responsibility for the other. The trace of infinity is this ambiguity in the subject, in turns beginning and makeshift, a diachronic ambivalence which ethics

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[24] While this perhaps is an unfair treatment of Heidegger, Levinas shows and argues in other places (Levinas *OB*, 66) that Heidegger's philosophy of Being, in which the dissimulating play of veiling and unveiling constitute Being's mystery, still remains tied up to the disclosure of entities

makes possible." (Levinas *OB*, 149). I answer before hearing the call, but *in my answering* and in the incommensurable diachrony of that answer being both a saying and a said – being both my ethical sincerity and the always "coming to short" of its manifestation – there is left, betrayed, a trace. The saying is left in the said, but cannot be contained by it. "Its signification has let itself be betrayed in the logos only to convey itself before us. It is a word already stated as a kerygma in prayer or blasphemy. It thus retains in its statement the trace of the excession of transcendence, of the beyond." (Levinas *OB*, 151). The said is unable to remain only a said, and to reduce the saying of it to the said; a diachronical break-up of time leaves its trace.

We then see *how* the signification of saying is supposed to always transcend language, and how it, even when it is betrayed by being shown as a theme in the said, is never fully exhausted in it. As the always ethical answer to a summoning of which I hear only the trace of as that which already has passed, the passive restlessness of my saying *to* the Other disturbs the said in each of its moments. The said is never able to catch up with and synchronize this time; it remains a contradiction, a betrayal and therefore also a glorious transcendence. We can see *how* this is supposed to work. *But what is the status of our own very words?* It is indeed that which *is in question*, the question Derrida in *VM* refused to answer, and which Levinas calls the ambiguity and enigma of language being both a said and a saying. The wish to *resolve* this ambiguity will shortly be shown to be the very question of God's existence. In either case, we see what is at stake. It is the difference between understanding our thematization of saying only in its said, or also in its saying. What role could philosophy play here? This will now be shown in a discussion of philosophy and its relation to skepticism, which would lead to a literally reverted meaning of *philo-sophia*, and which would grant it a difficult but perhaps fitting role; "Philosophy, in its very diachrony, is the consciousness of the breakup of consciousness." (Levinas *OB*, 165).

4. Skepticism and Philosophy

If philosophy is the consciousness of the very breakup of consciousness, it would mean that if we in our exposition are nearing a better understanding of the themes we are discussing, we are getting a better *grasp* of what *cannot be grasped*. It is this difficult situation which will be our theme in this last section covering the distinction between the saying and the said, the diachrony itself; for what does it mean that we at this very moment are *showing this diachrony?* To be sure, diachrony must as said let itself be betrayed in order to be assembled in a showing; but is not this notion "diachrony" meant not to designate an assembled meaning, but rather the defying of the assembling itself? When we claim that a trace interrupts language and keeps it from being a totality, are we not making a thematic statement which is meant to convince us of *understanding* language in such and such a way? *Can we get away with stating that we are understanding what cannot be understood?* Levinas is not blind to these objections, and formulates them very well himself; "What about our discussion, narrating, as though they were fixed in themes, the anarchy and the non-finality of the subject in which the Infinite

would pass?" (Levinas OB, 155).). How should we understand the fact that we are putting into themes that which would escape themes? We do perhaps already understand it in some way; everything is betrayed in language by becoming shown in the said, but retains an ambiguous trace. But how should we again understand this *statement* that "the saying of language leaves an ambiguous trace"? That this statement is thematic would belong to the betrayal of language, *but the very stating of the statement would be supposed to convince us that language is not exhausted in its statements*.

Levinas is again aware of this incoherence; "By the very fact of formulating statements, is not the universality of the thematized, that is, of being, confirmed by the project of the present discussion, which ventures to question this universality? Does this discourse remain then coherent and philosophical?" (Levinas *OB*, 155). Do we not surrender to thematization simply by doing philosophy, and therefore betray not only the meaning, but *any intent whatsoever* at pointing toward such a meaning? But Levinas continues the above quote by maintaining that this is not the only possibility of understanding neither language nor philosophy; "But does not coherence that would be lacking in this discussion consist in the immobility of the instant of truth, in its possibility of synchrony? The objection would then presuppose what is in question: the reference of all signification to essence." (Levinas *OB*, 155-156). That *speaking about transcendence* would convey before us *everything that transcendence could ever mean* would only be intelligible if we already accepted the thesis that *all signification possible in language is shown in its showing*. It is a thesis who's possibility Levinas admits, and it is of course an *other* possibility which Levinas has contested. This is again the question, which was discussed near the end of chapter II, of why Levinas considers his philosophy exactly a *possibility*. The trace of Infinity does not give itself over, but remains ambiguous, "…the trace of a passage which never became present, and which is possibly nothingness." (Levinas *OB*, 91). The wish to settle this uncertainty is described by Levinas, as we also mentioned at the end of chapter I, as the wish to know certainly if God exists or not, in fright of being "…abused by "nothingness" and words." (Levinas *OB*, 94). This impossibility of revealing what is "behind the scenes" belongs for Levinas to the ambiguity of responsibility, and the freedom of accepting or neglecting it. This also once more explains why the call first is heard in the answer given to it; "…the surplus over pure nothingness, an infinitesimal difference, is in my non-indifference to the neighbor, where I am obedient as though to an order addressed to me." (Levinas *OB¸* 91). The signification of saying is present to me only *as my responsibility*; a term which we have explained as *impossible* to be understood on the basis of essence; for in rising up to responsibility, I divest myself of my essence and *blindly* give myself over in substitution.

We have then perhaps shown everything that can be shown, and, by having shown now towards the end how Levinas' philosophy necessarily considers itself a possibility, we can perhaps do nothing more than *claim* it. We would then perhaps need to leave the realm of what can be shown; for after having shown all this, the objections are still possible. One could still chose to interpret everything that has hitherto been shown as a thematizing said, as themes and statements argued for

and taken only in the way in which they synchronize essences and identities. One could understand Levinas' philosophy - this delineated possibility of a breakup of consciousness and essence – as being, primarily, a "this as that". "All that is possible! The diachronic ambiguity of transcendence lends itself to this choice. But is this choice the only philosophical one?" (Levinas *OB*, 95). To contest that it is the only philosophical choice is what Levinas does, perhaps in the same way which skepticism contests, again and again, that its affirmation is dismantled by its negation.

To show what cannot be shown and, more importantly, still *claim* that it cannot be shown requires then perhaps, argues Levinas, as much boldness and audacity as *skepticism*: "Skepticism, which traverses the rationality of logic of knowledge, is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said." (Levinas *OB*, 167). Skepticism, which contests the impossibility of truth, is refuted in its said, where it is shown to be itself a statement of truth, who's impossibility it itself states. Still it returns, as the legitimate child of philosophy[25]; skepticism continues to maintain the affirmation that there is no truth, although reflection each time comes to negate the affirmation as contradictory. The eternal return of skepticism would then signal that skeptical thought refuses to stay within the synchrony of the said, for it continues to wage the possibility that everything is impossible. It is in this same way, however with a different topic in mind, that Levinas wishes to conceive of his own philosophy. "Philosophy circumscribes the life of the approach and it measures obligations before the third party with justice and knowledge, with wisdom; it does not undo this life. It says to the other who is outside of themes." (Levinas *OB*, 168-169). The philosophy of Levinas conveys by betrayal the saying of language which his own language (and mine) at the same time *is* and at the same time *betrays*, which of course is the anarchical diachrony of language. Being in two times, his language (and mine) does not "undo" the saying of language by betraying it, for it still is it. Or, in his own words;

"The interruptions of the discourse found again and recounted in the immanence of the said are conserved like knots in a thread tied again, the trace of a diachrony that does not enter into the present, that refuses simultaneity. And I still interrupt the ultimate discourse in which all the discourses are stated, in saying it to one that listens to it, and who is situated outside the said that the discourse says, outside all it includes. That is true of the discussion I am elaborating at this very moment. This reference to an interlocutor permanently breaks through the text that the discourse claims to weave in thematizing and enveloping all things." (Levinas *OB*, 170).

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[25] Here, a very important question of translation reports itself. As Simon Critchley points out in the translators notes to *Wholly Otherwise*, the phrase "Pour revenir en enfant lègitime de la philosophie" which appears several times in *Otherwise than Being* is translated in *OB* consistently as "illegitimate child" or "bastard child". Critchley however believes that this is a mistranslation, and translates the same phrase when it appears in *WO* as "legitimate child" (Critchley, "Translators notes" to *Wholly Otherwise*, 9). The difference in meaning between the two options is of course essential. We have chosen to go with Critchley, as his translations seems better both in relation to the French language and due to it thematically fitting better

What it would mean to interpret this address by Levinas as sincere has now been sketched out, as exactly what would disrupt and transcend the very sketching itself. It is an *other* possibility of philosophy; a conception of philosophy which takes it to thematize what can only be thematized by betrayal *while at the same time being implicated in that which it thematizes without being able to recuperate it*. Such a conception of *philo-sophia* would be literally revolutionary; for it would interpret it first and foremost not as the love of wisdom: "Philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love." (Levinas *OB*, 162). "The wisdom of love at the service of love", meaning both the *knowledge of saying* and *the saying of knowledge*. This is the diachronic thought which Levinas asks us to stay with.

Levinas then institutes both a critique and affirmation of philosophy in his philosophy. On the one hand, philosophy is criticized for having denied the possibility of an irreducible transcendent saying; "…for Western philosophy the saying is exhausted in things said." (Levinas *OB*¸168). In its final moments, Western philosophy has always referred to the ultimacy of disclosure, leaving no room for an other possible way of thought in which philosophy would be called upon by what it cannot disclose. Still, Levinas, at the very end of *OB*, continues to refer himself to the "…spirit of Husserlian philosophy…" (Levinas *OB*, 183) and the phenomenological method, as he did also already in the preface to *TI* (Levinas *TI*, 28). "It remains," he states, "faithful to intentional analysis, insofar as it signifies the locating of notions in the horizon of their appearing…" (Levinas *OB*, 183). This horizon of appearing has been the said of language, which philosophy must reduce "…several times…" (Levinas *OB*, 183). Philosophy then cannot describe saying *positively*, but must show how it interrupts and breaks open the said. As he says both in *MS* and *TTO*, if the trace of Infinity in no way belongs to phenomenology, then "…we can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts." (Levinas *MS*/*TTO*, 61/356)[26]. But does this not mean that we are again in a negative theology? This is not the case: "All the negative attributes which state what is beyond the essence become positive in responsibility, a response answering to a non-thematizable provocation…" (Levinas *OB*, 12). It is the positivity of responsibility itself, positive always in its response to the Other, the positivity of ethics, which keeps Levinas' philosophy from being a negative theology. In the last analysis then, we can perhaps do nothing but to refer again to the extraordinary experience of daily life, in which we are responsible to others; siblings, students, parents, friends, neighbors and strangers. We can only refer to it and *claim* that it holds a meaning which philosophy finds itself implicated in without being able to contain it, even when it might appear to.

5. Language and Ethics: The Enterprise of Philosophy

And perhaps we need not even refer to an *outside* of philosophy which philosophy is implicated in? For is not philosophy *of itself* a practice in which normativity bears an essential and irreducible

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[26] The quote is the exact same in both places

meaning in its very *strictness*? The very act of *reading carefully* and respecting one's source-material, of overturning what one believes is wrong and passing on and revitalizing what one believes is right; lies there not therein an irreducible element of the ethical which the philosopher can never fully *comprehend*, which the philosopher herself must presuppose in order to begin and continue doing philosophy? This ethical dimension of the enterprise of philosophy, understood in its strictness; is it not due to a *gravity* which philosophy finds itself in without being able to contain? It is perhaps this theme Levinas refers to at the end of both the first and last chapter in *OB*, where he discusses both the strictness of philosophy and the perhaps needed *relaxation* of this strictness;

> "Philosophy thus arouses a drama between philosophers…it is realized as the history of philosophy in which new interlocutors always enter who have to restate, but in which the former ones take up the floor to answer in the interpretations they arouse, and in which, nonetheless, despite this lack of "certainty in one's movements" or because of it, no one is allowed a relaxation of attention or a lack of strictness." (Levinas *OB*, 20).

The very respect given and demanded of each other within the philosophical community - in which both the most sympathetic effort to understand and the radical effort to overturn is called for – seemingly implies, in order that we take it *seriously*, the indeclinable call to/of ethics. It is, perhaps, implied in the *effort*, and also in the *risk*; the risk of misunderstanding, misinterpreting, mispresenting, misrepresenting; in general the risk of betraying. One continues to provide one's best efforts, "despite this lack of certainty in one's movement", which perhaps signifies the very peculiar position of the philosopher, who sets out to make sense of things while knowing nothing more than that *sense must be made*. Even in his humble beginnings, the naïve philosopher knows that he must learn more. Philosophical curiosity would of course explain this situation partially, but perhaps not exhaustively; and perhaps especially in regards to the abovementioned respect, seriousness, strictness and gravity related to the questions and answers of philosophy. We do not take our themes and topics, our determinations and definitions lightly. The philosopher would also be in the situation of the restless subject which Levinas describes, which traumatized and unsettled attempts to *rise up* to her responsibilities.

In respect to this however, there is the question of whether or not an *relaxation of essence* is called for. It is this possibility which Levinas attempts to outline, and which we have investigated in the view of language and its relation to philosophy. It is a possibility in which philosophy, understand as the critical and skeptical thinking, writing and discussion of themes and topics, allows for a possible opening unto itself which philosophy would not be able to reappropriate and reduce. The possibility will itself have been laid out in themes, but one will, perhaps incoherently, have claimed that what was laid out was not therein exhausted. Is this possibility possible? One would perhaps object that this question does not belong to philosophy. Two retorts can be given; first off, one could answer that it might be reasonable for philosophy to include in itself questions and themes which philosophy itself

cannot fully comprehend. The possibility of ethics might be such a question, and Levinas has given us an understanding of ethics which would not allow it to be reduced to or deduced from a theme. Secondly, one might ask if not philosophy is especially equipped to handle such themes and topics, as it has always been the enterprise which, in its investigation of the understanding, also has exposed the *limits* and *failures* of the understanding. Philosophy, understood as a critical and skeptical enterprise, is perhaps the most excellent of human practices when it comes to addressing and thematizing what we *do not understand*.

The uniqueness of Levinas' philosophy will have been to delineate the possibility that the nonthematizable does not lie beyond a limit which philosophy is pressed up against, but rather concerns philosophy first-handedly. Ethics is *first philosophy*; it is the irreducible signification of philosophy as the attempt to answer the Other. Philosophy would from the get-go be at the service of the Other, and its first task would therefore be to delineate this irreducible, extraordinary situation of service. Such a possibility would subject philosophy to standards which philosophy itself would not be able to deduce nor contain; but it should nevertheless, and at the very least be possible to *state* this possibility. One might consider this a weakness, but:

"This weakness is needed. This relaxation of virility without cowardice is needed for the little cruelty our hands repudiate. That is the meaning that should be suggested by the formulas repeated in this book concerning the passivity more passive still than any passivity, the fission of the ego unto me, its consummation for the other such that from the ashes of this consummation no act could be reborn."

The strictness of truth, of justice and of justifying oneself and that which one says; of correct deduction, critical reflection, nuanced analysis and openness of thought; could it be that these activities, *at this very moment*, find their meaning in a passivity, in which I am exposed and delivered over to the Other?

B) <u>In the Service of whom?</u>

It is surely a strange conception of philosophy which we have received from Levinas. Philosophy is the thematization of the non-thematizable; it is the understanding of what in our understanding, in our writings and discussions, cannot be understood, as the very *saying* of it. Or can it be understood? Levinas says in *Enigma and Phenomen* (henceforth *EP*) of the understanding of ethics that

"To the idea of the Infinite only an extravagant response is possible. There has to be a "thought" that understands more than it understands, more than its capacity, of which it cannot be contemporary, a "thought" which, in this sense, could go beyond its death. To understand more than one understands, to think more than one thinks, to think of what withdraws from thought, is to desire, with a desire that, unlike need, is renewed and becomes

ardent the more it is nourished with the Desirable. To go beyond one's death is to sacrifice oneself. The response to the Enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the knows and the unknowns, without calculation, for going on to infinity." (Levinas *EP*, 76).

It is the *transcendent thought of the Infinite*, always *more*, always *overflowing* in its movement towards the Other. It is a "passivity more passive than any passivity", an incoherent thought? Or, perhaps, the possibility that there is a passivity which is not exhausted in its manifestation, which is always *more* than what it *is*, wrenches itself further towards the Other, divests its essence *for* the Other, thereby being more than what it is in its transcendence?

And this impossible possibility, which would wholly break with formal logic and ontology, would be true of the language which I am *at this very moment* making use of; not only making use of, but *exposing myself* in. Which is true in at least one sense; a work is also commonly referred to as an *exposition*, and the exposition I am currently leaves me vulnerable to judgement and bad grades. This would however for Levinas perhaps belong primarily to the realm of justice, in which the event of responsibility is structuralized and institutionalized. It is a structure in which the movement returns to me, in the form of being graded in accordance with my performance. As we said of the said above, society is the situation in which I am taken as *an other* by the others.

More importantly however, my writing would also be, at bottom, an effect of this irreversible asymmetry in which, despite that others might take me for an other, I am still the elected subject of an indeclinable responsibility which I alone can answer to: "The ego involved in responsibility is me and no one else…" (Levinas *OB*, 126). Despite all structures and norms of society, I am *alone* in my responsibility, that is, my very *subjectivity* lies therein that I am assigned to a responsibility to which *I alone* can rise up to. This is the new understanding of solitude which Levinas gives us. One is alone in being able to answer to the Other. To be sure, others can also be responsible; *but it is my responsibility that they be responsible*. Or, as was said in *TI*, there is an unavoidable, irreducible asymmetry in that I cannot expect of others what I can expect of myself (Levinas *TI*, 53).

And again, this would be true of this moment. It would be true that, *at this very moment*, *in this work*, *here I am*. He will have obligated.

1. Three phrases + 1

With these four phrases, we will again return to Derrida in order to let him voice himself; for these four phrases express perhaps Derrida's main concerns in this (for our sake) final addition to the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida. These phrases and their strangeness is at once made topical – topical in the sense which Levinas will have made of that word, meaning *more* than their themes – in the very title of this essay, *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am*; and the first phrase, which is " – He will have obligated (*il aura obligè*)." (Derrida *AM*, 11). And he continues;

"At this very instant, you hear me, I have just said it. He will have obligated. If you hear me, already you are sensible to the strange event. Not that you have been visited, but as after the passing by of some singular visitor, you are no longer familiar with the places, those very places where nonetheless the little phrase – Where does it come from? Who pronounced it? – still leaves its resonance lingering (*ègarèe*)." (Derrida *AM*, 11).

It is this strange event of reading and writing which is made *thematic* in the sense outlined above in Derrida's text, and which will occupy us - and perhaps also implicate us - in the final portion of *this* work. As said before, we will only be able to achieve a meager beginning of a reading of this very dense and complicated text, in order to leave us with certain questions about what we hitherto have been taught about the transcendence of language. These questions will primarily revolve around the notion of *receiving* and *responding* to Levinas' work, which in turn evokes two equally important questions; who is speaking in Levinas' work, and who is speaking when we respond to him? And how will we be able to show this disturbance in language which Levinas calls us to? These questions are of course intimately related, and will be addressed all at once as me move in to the text.

As we are quite limited with regards to the time and space we have left, we will in our reading be relying more heavily on secondary commentary, and more specifically on of Critchley's and Bernasconi's own readings of this text, in *"Bois" – Derrida's Final Word on Levinas*[27] and *Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy*. Even more specifically, we will be relying quite heavily on how the former – Critchley – explicates the *narrative structure* in *At This Very Moment In This Work Here I Am* (henceforth *AM*), which is complicated both as a structure, and also in how one is to interpret it. We will also, once again, leave the questions from Derrida open. This is not only because of our limited space, but also because it seems to us that Derrida also here does not want to conclude for us. He does not, as in *VM*, explicitly state that he is not going to answer, which perhaps of itself signals a development. We will discuss this later. Nevertheless he does not explicitly state any conclusions as well. In contrast, he leaves us with what can perhaps be only described as a *disturbance*.

This disturbance should be taken note of, for it would have to be said of *AM* that the topics presented there are not only discussed, but *at work themselves*. This is because, as we said above, the topics in Levinas which this work responds to concern the very act of reading – receiving - and writing – responding - themselves. Therefore, the topics which we believe to be the most pressing in *AM* – the interruption of the said, the enigma of language being both a saying and a said, contamination and betrayal, the diachrony of language – belong to *AM* in two ways; as both themes and, perhaps, as *more than what can be exhausted in them as themes*, in the very Saying (Writing) of the text itself. It is this obsessive disturbance of language which Derrida in many ways calls us to in his text, and which we

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[27] The title of this article allows us to comment on an important fact; *AM* would not be Derrida's final word on Levinas. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, we find the speech Derrida gave at Levinas' funeral in addition to his contribution to the colloquium organized to mark the one-year anniversary of Levinas' death. Critchley's article was published before this text was available. We have unfortunately not been able to include this final book in our exposition due to limits of time and space

will attempt to give a very preliminary outlining of now, in order to show the many very interesting directions, intriguing dilemmas and perhaps the very *ambiguity of ambiguity* which are evoked by the thought of transcendence in language from Levinas.

2. Context

Before diving into the text itself, we should take a moment to consider a matter of context; more specifically, the context of the publication of *AM*. As both Critchley and Bernasconi explains and discusses the consequences of, *AM* first appeared in the collection *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, "…a collection of essays, where each text is, in a very obvious sense, *for* Emmanuel Levinas, destined *for* him, to pay him homage, and forms part of a Festschrift, a commemorative work where friends praise the author like guests seated at a symposium." (Critchley 1991, 164). The context of the publication was then a collection in which one would pay homage to Levinas and his work, and Derrida specifically states in the text that the text itself is meant to be given to Levinas; "Given according to his name, in his name as much as to his name." (Derrida *AM*, 13). It is for this reason that we stated above that our focus on this text would be on the question of *receiving* and *responding* to Levinas, for the context of the text is precisely that it is a *gift given* to Levinas. We begin now to see what complexity such an attempt will take on in regards to the philosophy of Levinas, in which, as we have discussed, the subject *gives itself* to the Other, for the Other, in the signification of saying. Another theme in Levinas that we have however not commented upon yet, is that the giving of subjectivity, understood as sacrifice, *must expect nothing in return*. It requires, according to Levinas, "…an *ingratitude* of the other." (Levinas *TTO*, 349). Why? Bernasconi explains it well; "Because gratitude would return this movement toward the other back to the same and reduce the gift to a moment in an economy of exchange." (Bernasconi 1991, 155). Levinas of course conceives of his own philosophy as delineating a movement which would not return to the self, and compares in *TTO* his own philosophy with that of the story of Abraham who wanders towards an unknown land, and opposes it to the adventure of Ulysses returning to Ithaca (Levinas *TTO*, 348). If Levinas' work then *works* as this radical generosity of saying, then the question of *receiving* and *responding* to Levinas' evokes a very interesting dilemma, which Critchley argues obsesses Derrida; "The logical and ethical necessity that haunts Derrida's essay is that by writing a text *for* Emmanuel Levinas, by paying homage to his work and recalling how his work works, one would return the work to its author, thereby betraying the ethical structure that Levinas' work tries to set to work. How, then, does one write a text for Emmanuel Levinas?" (Critchley 1991, 165). This excruciating dilemma, taken in all its implications, is at the core of Derrida's text.

Let us now move on to the structure of *AM*. According to Critchley, *AM* is also a *double reading*, in a however different way than in *VM*. First off, the critique and the defense are more

sharply divided into the first and second half of the essay[28]: "There are two moments of reading at work in "At this very moment": first, Derrida tries to find out how Levinas's work *works*, and second, "he" tries to show how Levinas's work *does not work*." (Critchley 1991, 170). The first half explores the arguments and elucidations of Levinas on Levinas' own terms; or rather, it attempts to show how Levinas, by interrupting and retying his discourse, is trying to show what in language *exceeds* arguments and elucidations, as the very saying of it. We will see this later. First however, what is "Derrida" doing in the second half, and why did Critchley and we ourselves put he/Derrida in quotations-marks? This is because *AM* is inhabited by not only *one* interlocutor. This can be shown by taking a quick overview of the narrative structure of the text, which will immediately bring us to one of the problematics of the text; who is the author of the text? This question reports itself in relation to the question of structure, for one of the things which becomes apparent from the beginning is that there is not only one, but at least two "voices in the text". Commenting on the "-", the dash which we by no accident left when quoting the beginning of the essay earlier, is commented upon by Critchley extensively: "The horizontal dash (-) that precedes the first word of the essay indicates that somebody is speaking in the text…Turning the pages of the essay, one finds nine more of these dashes, each denoting a change in the textual voice." (Critchley 1991, 171). These other voices in the text *interrupt* the discourse both formally – by breaking up the text – and thematically, by introducing a *feminist critique[29]* to Levinas. The feminist critique constitutes according to Critchley "…the second moment of reading…the response of feminine alterity, the interruption of the woman reader in Levinas's work." (Critchley 1991, 171). This introduction of several interlocutors would then also separate *AM* from *VM*, although they are both seemingly double readings.

3. Understanding Levinas

Let us then dive into the text, and we begin with the first moment, in which Derrida attempts to explain and understand Levinas on his own terms. In this section, Derrida gives voice to many of the concerns we have raised earlier in this chapter, namely of how Levinas is supposed to be capable of showing what cannot be shown. He does however try himself this daunting task by delineating this *other* possibility of philosophy, by of showing how Levinas shows what cannot be shown: "How does he manage to give a place there to what remains absolutely foreign to that medium, absolutely unbound from that language, beyond being, the present, essence, the same, the economy, etc.? Mustn't

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[28] This division is not complete, for the female reader, which we soon will discuss, also interrupts the text in its first half. The longest interruption and the "conclusions" of the feminist critique does however come towards the end

[29] We would like to note in passing that the topic of feminist critique ties together *VM* and *AM*. In the final footnote to *VM*, Derrida notes that *TI* "…pushes the respect for dissymmetry so far that it seems to us impossible…that it could have been written by a woman." (Derrida *VM*, 412). Not only does this tie in to *AM* thematically; Derrida indeed quotes himself on this exact same point we just quoted in *AM*, without however giving a reference (Derrida *AM*, 40). Critchley makes some comments on the possible meaning of this self-quoting (Critchley 1991, 180)

one reverse the questions, at least in appearance, and ask oneself if that language is not *of itself unbound* and hence open to the wholly other, to its own beyond, in such a way that it is less a matter of exceeding that language than treating it otherwise with its own possibilities." (Derrida *AM*, 16-17). Derrida then himself opens up for the possibility that language can be thought wholly otherwise, as not being entirely reducible to presence and the present. He does however go on to say that in order to show this, one would have to negotiate even what is nonnegotiable, which is perhaps another way of saying what Levinas says of thematizing the nonthematizable, at the cost of betrayal. Derrida goes on to say that he will interrogate this response from Levinas, however immediately criticizing himself for using the word "interrogate", stating that he is not yet able to "…qualify what is happening here between him, you, and me that doesn't belong to the order of questions and responses." (Derrida *AM*, 17). In accordance with this, Derrida suggests if it is not possible that it is Levinas who is interrogating us, echoing the similar statement in *VM* that the questions there should be understood as coming from Levinas himself.

In either case, Derrida continues being interrogated by Levinas by following the use of the three utterances present in the title of his essay – "at this very moment", "in this work", "here I am" – as they are used by Levinas himself in mainly *OB*, but also other works by him. For, as we shall see, these three utterances which make up the title to Derrida's essay have been gathered from, or received from Levinas' work. We begin with the phrase "Here I am", which in Levinas' work characterizes the subject as exactly being nothing more than the one who says "here I am" when summoned to responsibility. Derrida discusses Levinas' decision to *quote* this utterance, arguing that Levinas with this wants to show how the phrase both *belongs to* and *interrupts* language; "The phrase describes or says what within the said interrupts it and at one stroke makes it anachronistic with respect to the saying, negotiated between the said and the saying and at the same time interrupting the negotiation while forthwith negotiating interruption itself." (Derrida *AM*, 19). This utterance, "here I am", is both a said and a saying, and must be irreducibly understood as both. This is why, as we have discussed much already, the transcendence of language must go beyond language *in* language: "The passage beyond language requires language or rather a text as a place for the trace of a step that is not (present) elsewhere…*Logos* remains as indispensable as the fold folded onto the gift, just like the tongue (*langue*) of my mouth when I tear bread from it to give it to the other. It is also my body." (Derrida *AM*, 20). We then return to the necessity of Logos, although it seems that we now can say more comfortably that Derrida and Levinas are on terms with each other. The indispensability of Logos is accepted, and transcendence is all the while maintained in the voice which makes use of the words "here I am" in the giving of herself over to the Other in substitution.

The next phrase interrogated by Derrida is "at this very moment". Derrida traces how this phrase is uttered by Levinas in different contexts in his work. Levinas makes use of this phrase both when discussing the possibility that the totality of the said will, in the end, reduce the saying of language, *and* when he contests exactly this, and claims that his discourse "at the very moment" of

conveying it cannot be reduced to its contents. The repeated usage of this phrase interests Derrida greatly. First off, Derrida argues that the phrase differs from the previous "here I am", as it is no longer quoted: "The words there describe (constate) and produce (perform) undecidably a written and a writing immediately implying the "I-now-here" of the scriptor." (Derrida *AM*, 22). This strange breaking-forth of the voice in the text *disturbs* and *interrupts* language in its saying. This utterance, says Derrida, *implicates* the reader in the text on a wholly new way. "Your reading is thus no longer merely a simple reading that deciphers the sense of what is already found in the text; it has a limitless (ethical) initiative." (Derrida AM, 25). It opens up a chance, which however must be understood as a chance, "…because one is never constrained, even when obligated, to read what is thus rendered legible." (Derrida *AM*, 24). This possible ambiguity of saying will, as we have said before, remain a *possibility*, as one is called but never forced to surrender oneself to language understood as responsibility. Language understood as saying is "…never assured, perceptible, or *demonstrable*: neither a demonstrative conclusion nor a phenomenal showing." (Derrida *AM*, 25). It remains *enigmatic*, a possibility of understanding what is happening at this very moment.

The *repetition* of the phrase is however also of great interest to Derrida, as repeated both in the context of possibly being reduced to the said and in the possibility of disturbing the said: "The "first" one, which formed the element of reappropriation in the continuum, will have been *obligated* by the "second," the other one, the one of interruption, even before being produced, and in order to be produced…The "at this very moment" only coheres with itself by means of an immeasurable anachrony incommensurable with itself." (Derrida *AM*, 22). The two moments *form* an irreducibly *diachronical relation*; they assemble the unassembled, unite the rupture. This series then exemplifies both the *necessity* and *impossibility* of retying the tears in the text, for "…that very tear would not have been possible without a certain hooking back (*èchancrure*) of the second moment and a sort of analogical contamination between the two, a relation between two incommensurables, a relation between the relation as ontological *rècit* and the Relation as responsibility for the Other." (Derrida *AM*, 26). The interruptions of discourse must be *resumed*; they find themselves, in their exposition, as thematically structured moments that, in order for the rupture to *stand forth*, are knotted together. This is once more the necessity of betrayal and contamination, which Derrida finds intriguing, as it "…holds his writing in suspense…" (Derrida *AM*, 26). His work must weave its own tears together in such a way that the diachrony is not synchronized. And we then arrive at the last utterance, the "in this work".

The main focus of Derrida's analysis when interpreting Levinas' explicit references to his work – "this work" - focus on the final and complex remarks made at the very end of *OB*. Derrida shows how Levinas *delivers* the claims made in his book, *contests* them without *posing* them; ""*The thesis*" is therefore not posed, it is imprudently and defenselessly exposed, and yet that very vulnerability is…the provocation to responsibility for the other, it leaves place for the other in a taking-place of *this* book where the *this here* no longer shuts in upon itself, upon its own subject."

(Derrida *AM*, 31). The book itself can no longer be shut up in itself; in its very saying, which language and philosophy always is, it comes to hear the *trace* of the Infinite in its very exposedness. This trace now becomes topical again, as Derrida cites the very last paragraph of *OB*, which we also would like to do ourselves:

"In this work which does not seek to restore any ruined concept, the destitution and the desituating of the subject do not remain without signification: after the death of a certain god inhabiting the world behind the scenes, the substitution of the hostage discovers the trace, the unpronounceable inscription, of what, always already past, always "he," does not enter into any present, to which are suited not the nouns designating beings, or the verbs in which their essence resounds, but that which, as a pronoun, marks with its seal all that a noun can convey."
(Levinas *OB*, 185)

This mentioned "he", unpronounceable, is once again this return of God – in an *other* way than that of a "world behind the scenes", which the subject wishes to unveil in order to be cleared of doubt – as the trace of *illeity* discussed by Levinas, among other places, at the end of *TTO* (Levinas *TTO*, 359). *It is also the subject of the fourth and final phrase in Derrida's text,* which we have mentioned, but not yet had time to comment on; "he will have obligated". And it is the final concern of Derrida when he wishes to conclude – before letting an *other* voice interrupt – what could possibly be said of Levinas' work (although it is no longer certain, as we shall see, that it *is* only Levinas' work):

"That is its dislocation: the work does not deport some utterance, or series of utterances, it re-marks in each atom of the said a marking effraction of the saying, a saying no longer a present infinitive, but already a past of the trace, a performance (of the) wholly other. And if you wish to have access to "his" work, you will have to have passed by what it will have said of the Work, namely, that it does not return to him. That is why you have to respond for it, you. It is in your hands, that can give it to him, I will even say more – dedicate it to him." (Derrida *AM*, 38).

The work of Levinas does not begin nor end with Levinas. In its saying, it is an an-archy without limit; a beginninglessness and an endlessness, always already marked by "he" who enters no present, who will have passed. Who will have obligated.

4. Critiquing Levinas

"He will have obligated". This last phrase stands out in that it is one of Derrida's original creation, or at least in this specific formulation, which Derrida himself states explicitly when discussing the phrase; "To my knowledge he has never pronounced it as such, it matters little. He will have obligated to "read" it totally otherwise." (Derrida *AM*, 12). Herein lies perhaps a philosophical point, which we will attempt to investigate now; for that Derrida should find it necessary to contribute with his own original creation – perhaps faithful in theme but still *differing* – speaks perhaps to the themes

announced at the very beginning of this section of *receiving* and *responding*. For if *AM* is a gift from Derrida to Levinas in which the very act of *giving* is interpreted as necessarily expecting the *ingratitude* of the receiver; and if "…I must conform my gesture to what makes the Work in his Work, which is older than his work, and whose Saying according to his own terms is not reducible to the Said, there we are, engaged before all engagement, in an incredible logic, formal and nonformal. If I restitute, if I restitute without fault, I am at fault. And if I do not restitute, by *giving* beyond acknowledgment, I risk the fault." (Derrida *AM*, 14), then to simply *repeat Levinas faultlessly* would perhaps be the worst fault of all. One must perhaps risk a fault and betrayal in order not to "…become deaf to what he addresses to you." (Derrida *AM*, 14). It is this possibility which we would now like to explore, again with the help of Critchley. It will be centered around the original contribution of Derrida, namely the phrase "he will have obligated", and a daring suggestion concerning who "he" could be.

First a question of authorship. If we take Levinas' analysis seriously, his work would not in the end be signed by Levinas, his proper name, but rather "he" who "seals all a noun can convey"; and as Critchley points out, ""He" is not Levinas…Levinas's work *works* insofar as it resonates with the (masculine) third person singular pronoun that provides the condition of possibility of ethical obligation." (Critchley 1991, 168). At work in Levinas work is first and foremostly *he*. To receive and respond to Levinas must then not let itself be dominated by Levinas; "To write a text *for* Emmanuel Levinas is to create a work that is neither *for* him nor *against* him, but where the modalities of for and against become inseperable yet inassemblable conditions for the possibility of ethical Saying." (Critchley 1991, 166). To *respond responsibly* to Levinas is not simply to give back what he has given, but lies irreducibly between accepting/denying. In some sense then, it necessitates a violent ingratitude; "…in order to maintain the ethical moment, Derrida must commit an ungrateful violence against Levinas's work: he must show how the work *does not work*." (Critchley 1991, 169). This is of course the second moment of *AM* which we mentioned above, and revolves around the phrase "he will have obligated".

Critchley explains how this necessity to formulate Levinas *differently* than he does himself can be traced in Derrida's text as the continuous development of the phrase "he will have obligated": "The structure of "At this very moment" can be said to move between three formulations of an ethical imperative or performative: "Il aura oblige," "E.L. aura oblige," and "Elle aura oblige."" (Critchley 1991, 170). Both transformations are suggested by the *other* voice in the text, the first transformation coming about directly after the end of the citation of the final paragraph of *OB* in which Levinas discusses the pronoun – he – itself as that which seals everything that can carry a name. The other voice remarks that "he" comes in a certain way "…as if in place of a signature…" (Derrida *AM*, 33)[30], but continues by arguing that "I do not think that between such a pro-noun and a name or the bearer of

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[30] To quote this in Derrida's name is perhaps not problematic, but undertaken out of necessity

a name there is what one could call a difference or distinction." (Derrida *AM*, 33)[31]. The voices therefore replaces the pronoun "he" with the signature of Levinas: E.L. will have obligated. For what reason does this change come about? Is it because the absolute asymmetry of responsibility makes of Levinas the Other which stands in the trace of Illeity? We will not discuss this further here, but only note that the change has come around, and move on to the question of the *final* transformation, that from *Il* (he) to *Elle* (she).

This other voice in the text is, as we have stated, the female interlocutor. Already quite early, she comes to interrupt the discourse in order to ask for a clarification around the use of the pronoun "he". The main voice continues the discourse by responding to why he does not clarify it; it is, to Levinas, probably secondary (Derrida *AM*, 19). This secondary status granted to the question of the privilege given to "he" over "she" initiates in the final part of the text a feminist critique of Levinas. The voice which has interrupted the text at a few key junctures is now given four pages in which "she" (for is this not still Derrida writing?) discusses this secondary position given to the question of sexual difference, beginning it by stating that "In listening I was nonetheless wondering whether I was comprehended, myself, and how to stop that word: comprehended." (Derrida *AM*, 39). The question of comprehension and mastery in relation to the secondary status of the feminine is what will occupy "Derrida" in this last portion of the work, until the obscure ramblings with which the works end. We will not be able to present this complex discussion fully; not only because it, paradoxically, is in a sense secondary to our purposes, but also both because of its complexity, and also because it references works by Levinas which we in our own work have not addressed.[32]

Commenting on the preference of "he" to "she" as the one whom signs everything that can be named, and also the topic of the son in *TI*, the female readers begins quite simply by asking why it is so. The reader then continues by commenting on the interpretation of this by Levinas himself, in the abovementioned works which we have not addressed. The reader shows how Levinas in these works explains how the sexual difference between man and woman is *secondary* to the primordial plain of the human, which nevertheless has its beginning in a "he". The argument is that, although the sexual difference between man and woman is one in which the feminine is derived from the masculine – in that Eve is made from a rib from Adam, or that the Hebrew *Ichah* (woman) is grammatically derived from *Iche* – after this fact, both man and woman find themselves in a still more anterior – because an-archical - situation of responsibility, in which they answer to a He who has already passed. Sexual difference must be understood as secondary here, although, as the reader notes, within this context masculinity is still given a primacy; "Once sexual difference is subordinated, it is always the case that the wholly other, who is *not yet marked* is *already* found to be marked by masculinity (he before he/she, son before son/daughter, father before father/mother, etc.). (Derrida *AM*, 40). The reader shows

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[31] See above

[32] "Judaism and the Feminine" in *Difficult Freedom* and "Et Dieu Créa la Femme" in *Du sacré au saint*

how Levinas is aware of this secondarization in his commentary on the scripture, and also shows how Levinas does not understand himself to be taking sides on this matter, but rather simply comments. "But the distance of the commentary is not neutral." (Derrida *AM*, 42). By choosing to *not* displace this secondarization of sexual difference, Levinas would let it silently continue, oppressing it by not addressing it.

The work of Levinas would then inhibit a secret, unaddressed *mastery* of the feminine, in which the sexual difference between the masculine and the feminine – in which the masculine is the origin to the feminine – is subordinated to the plot of the ethical in which, again, the masculine "he" has primordially passed. But this now takes on a very interesting turn, for this unsaid oppression would perhaps mean that the feminine Other, by being subordinated in the philosophy of Levinas, is also the *excluded* one, and therefore perhaps more Other than the wholly Other?

"Does it not show, on the inside of the work, a surfeit of un-said alterity? Or said, precisely as a secret or as a symptomatic mutism? Then things would become more complicated. The other as feminine (me), far from being derived or secondary, would become the other of the Saying of the wholly other, of this one in any case; and this last one *insofar* as it would have tried to dominate alterity, would risk (at least to this extent) enclosing *itself* within the economy of the same." (Derrida *AM*, 42-43).

Dramatical reversal. The feminist critique, by revealing the excluded *other* to Levinas' wholly Other, would release language from its domination, while Levinas' philosophy would be charged with having subjected alterity within his own work. The female reader will have read of Levinas what is *otherwise* in his work than he himself understands the work, while Levinas in his work will have remained, in this regard at least, within the movement of the same. It is this critique which now, perhaps, possibly, allows for the last turn of phrase in the utterance "he will have obligated": "If feminine difference presealed, perhaps and nearly illegibly, his work, if she became, in the depths of the same, the other of his other, will I then have deformed his name, to him, in writing, at this moment, in this work, here indeed, "she will have obligated" (*elle aura oblige*)?" (Derrida *AM*, 46).

5. Critically understanding Derrida

Immediately after this quote, the first voice (we assume with Critchley (Critchley 1991, 185)) comes back to interrupt: " – I no longer know if you are saying what his work says. Perhaps that comes back to the same. I no longer know if you are saying the contrary, or if you have already written something wholly other. I no longer hear your voice, I have difficulty distinguishing it from mine, from any other, your fault suddenly becomes illegible to me. Interrupt me." (Derrida *AM*, 46). After this, the essay ends with a continuous speech in all big letters, a rambling, disturbing speech – which seems incoherent but, as Critchley shows (Critchley 1991, 186), touches upon and weaves together themes from the whole essay – which seemingly interrupts itself continuously. We will come back to a

possible way to understand what is perhaps the meaning of this later. First, let us address the unease and concerns raised in the portion we just quoted. There, the voice is now no longer sure if the female reader is speaking contrary or in allegiance with Levinas, and also if he can any longer distinguish his own voice with that of the female reader, or "from any other". This unease is perhaps already visible in the last quote given by herself; an unease as to whether her critique leaves *too harshly* or leaves *at all* the work of Levinas, or that which, in his work, make his work work. This is also expressed earlier; "As a woman, for example, and in reversing the dissymmetry, I have added rape (*viol*) to it. I should have been even more unfaithful to him, more ungrateful, but was it not then in order to give myself up to what his work says of the Work: that it provokes ingratitutde?" (Derrida *AM*, 46). The female reader is herself no longer sure about what she is doing.

Are we in debt or not? Are we at fault or not? Are we inspired? Are we writing a homage? Are we violating and misinterpreting? Are we, by violating and misinterpreting, receiving and responding gratefully? Are we *then* violating and misinterpreting? How *should* one, how *could* one receive and respond to Levinas' work? Or how could we avoid it? Are we, at this very moment, *obsessed with the Other?* Are we in the ambiguous trace, which never lends itself to demonstration? The diachrony of saying? Or are we simply returning this "said" to Levinas, enacting in accordance to his commands, performing what his philosophy would have told us to? Or is our conformance not in accordance with his work, but the Work which makes the work in his work work? Why the big "W"? Is it a simple rhetoric? Or does it thematize, by betrayal, the very transcending of language at this moment? Is philosophy in the end a game of cleverness? Or does the virtue of cleverness find its meaning first in the gravity of the responsibility which calls for strictness in philosophy?

These questions then, which are surely no longer only those of Derrida, but questions which he will have inspired in me by implicating me in the disturbance of his text, testify, perhaps, to an *ambiguity of ambiguity itself*. The enigmatic enigma. Could we say, lending his language, that it is an ambiguity still more ambiguous than any ambiguity?

The final address by Derrida in *AM* – the aforementioned coherent rambling, a continuous sentence with no punctuation and interrupted only by squiggly-lines (~) – testifies perhaps in its turn to Derrida's obsessive madness with Levinas. This is at least what *we* will have said of it, bearing in mind that we do not at all pretend to understand it. Nevertheless, it would seem to us, as was mentioned above, a still more inappropriate response not to mention it at all. Is this true? Is not silence also, at times, a virtue? At times yes, but we will have calculated that we in this work have been far to implicated with Derrida's text without addressing its dramatic and obscure end.

Conclusions

In this work, we have received from Levinas a possible understanding of both language, philosophy and their relation. Language is transcendence; in language, I am in a relation to the absolute Other whom remains infinitely separated even within the relation. This is true both when the Other addresses

me and when I address the Other; neither the Other's expression and my response in its saying can be reduced or synchronized. Language is a breakup of both spatiality and temporality. The synchronizing feature of language, in which spatiality and temporality is organized, would not be allergic to this breakup, but rather called by it; it would be the necessity of having to measure between the Other and the third, which is to measure the immeasurable. It is the need of justice in society. Philosophy would find itself in a peculiar position in this schema; it would be that enterprise of justice in society called on to reduce the betrayal of transcendence necessary for the sake of justice. It would itself make use of a synchronizing, thematizing language; but it would invoke this language primarily to interrupt it, by showing it that it is itself incapable of tying all its threads together. Understood as *critical understanding*, philosophy would deconstruct human understanding by showing its incapacity to include in its analysis the complete and whole picture. Philosophy would *disturb* knowledge, show how it includes presuppositions it didn't know about, how it assumes what it cannot justify. It would of course not be the only thing it could do; in certain circumstances, philosophy could surely also contribute with new answers. Its main practice would however be that of the question; to show how what we believed to be final answers can in fact lead to many new questions.

It would of course be doing this while at the same time being called on by what is beyond questioning and doubt in general; the responsibility for the Other. Philosophy's primary task would therefore to explicate the way in which it is called by that which it cannot itself suppose, but must always already be presupposed in a manner that is wholly other than of themes and topics. This is what we understand with Levinas' definition of philosophy as "The wisdom of love at the service of love". It is the *necessity* of having to *describe* how *normativity* precedes *descriptivity*.

To claim that normativity is indispensable for philosophy could be understood in quite a familiar way. Not only because one must *choose* to engage with philosophy in the first place; but also after one is implicated in it, one sees that philosophy is undertaken with a seriousness and strictness which guides one's analyses. What we in this work will have outlined is the possibility is that this gravity adheres to reasons which philosophy – or any other institution of knowledge – cannot give to itself. It is always the receiving and teaching which the responsible subject, rising up to its responsibility by partaking in the adventure of knowledge, cannot deduce from itself. This is perhaps the vulnerability of the adventure of knowledge. It is always the transcendence towards the Other, a movement without return or beginning, and therefore also without a final conclusion or security. We never discover the meaning of life.

Which of course is why the ethical always remains *ambiguous*. To interpret language in its ethical meaning is and must remain always a *possibility*, in accordance with its own enigmatic meaning.

But we have of course also in this work problematized what we should understand by the term "enigmatic meaning", and how we should respond to its possibility after having received it from Levinas. For if any philosophy must betray the meaning of ethics by making of it a presented theme,

then this would of course also be true of Levinas, and that would perhaps imply that we in turn must criticize him and overturn what he says of ethics. If however normativity motivates the critique, then it is perhaps the same normativity which Levinas himself spoke of, leaving it again ambiguous whether or not we are simply conforming to a system or doing something *more*. This critical interpretation of Levinas by Derrida will have opened us up, in many ways, to the difficulty of understanding and responding to Levinas, and challenged perhaps Levinas himself to reformulate his own philosophy in order to address certain questions; questions who have been at the heart of this exposition and at the center of these concluding remarks.

To understand Levinas in *any* sense of the word – either in his work or in the Work of his work – must then be understood as difficult to the point of traumatization; it leaves us unsettled. To understand what Derrida means by formulating this unsettledness in *his* work would itself adhere to the same difficulty. We interpret it as the difficulty of the impossibility of answering and equal impossibility of *refraining* from answering.

We therefore wish to conclude with some remarks regarding the notion of conclusion in a work itself, in view of what we have discussed in this work. To conclude can be understood as the act of shutting up and enclosing the circle of argument, and we will not attempt to contest this meaning. To conclude is to draw a very necessary line, which ends the discourse in a text. No matter how one does it, a text will and must end. This understanding of conclusion must however not be understood as in opposition to what have been said of the work in this work. The work does indeed exceed itself in its anarchical saying. The necessity of concluding must therefore, on the one hand, be interpreted as the pragmatic requirement of justice. The saying calls for the said, in which language measures and calculates its response to the Other. It can perhaps also be understood in an other sense. To conclude is perhaps the necessity of speaking up despite the lack of security. It is to take a position and maintaining it firmly, even when one knows that one's answer is incomparable to the summon. To conclude is then in no way to pretend that the text end or even began here. It is to formulate oneself in a painful exposure despite not knowing where the "why" goes or where it came from.

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