The composition of *Totality and Infinity* can be understood as the unfolding of its twofold title. As we will see, through the concept of "totality," the author characterizes the whole of Western philosophy, whereas "the infinite" indicates the transcendence suppressed by that same tradition. Instead of "totality" and "infinity," the first section of the book, however, most often uses the expression "the Same" (*le Même*) and "the Other" (*l'Autre*). Using the conjunction "and" in its title ("the Same and the Other," 1/31), this section establishes a close connection between *the Same* (which concretizes itself in the behavior of a monopolistic ego) and *the totality* of Greek and European philosophy, whereas, on the other hand, *the Other* (which reveals itself in the human face) is closely associated with *the infinite*. The relation between the Same (or the totality) and the Other (and/or the infinite) is the proper "topic" of the book, whose subtitle ("an essay on exteriority") characterizes the Other as a reality that cannot be integrated or "sublated" into any consciousness, spirit, or other form of interiority. Such a relation is not possible unless its two terms are in a very strong sense of the word *exterior* to each other. Their separation from one another must resist all attempts at fusion or totalizing. They are not and cannot become two moments of one union. This implies their independence: the One and the Other have each a being of their own. For the sameness of the ego, in relation to the whole of its world, this means that its existence is not a part or shadow of the infinite; its concrete mode of existence is described in the phenomenological analyses that constitute section 2 of the book (79–158/107–83). Since the Same reveals itself in the form of the self-centered ego, whose wants and autonomy impose their law (*nomos*) on the
world in which it is at home (oikos), the title of section 2 characterizes it as an "economy" (oikonomia). The independence on the basis of which this selfsame is capable of having a relation of exteriority with its Other, the infinite, is constituted by a primordial and primitive way of being with oneself characterized as "interiority." The title "Interiority and Economy" (TI 79/107) thus indicates that section 2 unfolds the formal but essential structure, which is already put forward in the introductory section. It was presented as "the identification of the Same in the I" or—more concretely—as the relation of an ego and its world, and the constellation of its features was there anticipated in a rapid sketch (7-8/37-38).

The third section (159-225/185-247) of the book contains the descriptions of the Other in its concrete emergence as visage and speech revealing to the I the injustice of its self-enclosure in an egocentric world. Since the exteriority of the other's face can neither be perceived nor respected in isolation from the perceiving ego, the exteriority of the face and of its relation to the I—and thus also the exteriority and independence of the I-at-home-in-its-world—form a constellation that is not a totality but neither is a pure dispersion without connections. This strange constellation is the topic of section 3, "Face and Exteriority." The place and function of the fourth section, entitled "Beyond the Face" (227-61/249-85), are not immediately clear. It contains an original description of erotic intimacy—a relation that in many respects differs from the intersubjective relation described in section 3—but its main purpose is the search for a transhistorical perspective from which the injustices of world history could be overcome.

| The Preface |

A preface ought to state without detours the meaning of the work undertaken.1 The preface to Totality and Infinity does this, but in a surprising way. Not only does it seem to take many detours but it also concentrates on the question of war and peace. True, the opening question—are we duped by morality? (ix/21)—belongs to the main problematic of Totality and Infinity, but it is immediately followed by a bewildering collection of topics, such as the place and function of politics, the relations between faith and thought, history and eschatology, totality and infinity, language

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1 TI xviii/29-30.
and hypocrisy, theory and practice, methodology, ethics, and phenomenology. The approach exemplified by this preface is certainly very different from "an overview, an oracle, or [answers given by] wisdom [itself]," but neither is it common among those who dedicate their time and energy to "philosophical research" (xviii/29–30). Yet, a careful study of Totality and Infinity will show that its preface does summarize its central "themes" and "thesis," although, in the initial reading, this might be obscured by some peculiarities of Levinas's approach.

When Levinas states here "without ceremonies" (xviii/30) the central topics of his book, this must be understood within the context of a question that remains the point of orientation and the background of all other questions throughout all of its 284 pages. It is the question of how the violence that seems inherent to all politics (and thus also to history) can be overcome by true peace.

A second peculiarity of this preface lies in the fact that the author—although not outrightly criticizing his own work—already takes a certain distance toward it. Not only is he aware of the fact that a difficult text risks being misunderstood as soon as it is abandoned by its author, and that it needs help to be freed from being caught in "the inevitable ceremonial" of the linguistic, literary, and conceptual constraints of the situation in which it is produced (xviii/30); but he also knows that—as a thematizing and thetical text—it cannot fully express what should be understood. For both reasons, Levinas tries in this preface—which, of course, has been written after the rest of the book—to "say again" (redire) what he meant to say and to undo "the said" (dédire le dit) insofar as it is inadequate to its own intentions.²

Besides (re)stating from the perspective of violence (or war) and peace the main topic of his book, Levinas wants here also to fulfill another of the tasks we may expect from a preface, namely, "to break through the screen stretched between the author and the reader by the book itself" (xviii/30). A philosophical text is neither a spoken word through which the speaker is immediately present to the listener with whom he communicates, nor is it a "word of honor" ("une parole d'honneur") claiming trust or faith. The immediate character of its communication creates a distance demanding

² TI xiii/30. Thus, this preface announces the development of Levinas's distinction between the Saying (le dire), the Said (le dit), the Unsaying or denial (dédire) and the Saying-again (redire), which will be one of the central topics in AE.
interpretation; abandoned by its author, it is prey to hermeneutical decipherings that inevitably lead to various ways of understanding. A preface might be the last chance of bridging the distance between the reader and the author and of making the screen as transparent as possible. Of course, in doing so, it produces another text, and thus a new screen, but this is the only possible assistance it can give from a distance.

According to the author (xviii/29), the opening sentence of the preface (ix/21) announces "the theme of the work." Morality (or, more precisely, the question as to whether morality is an authentic and original dimension of human existence, and not an illusion) is brought to the fore by opposing it to the dimension(s) of violence, war, and politics. As Totality and Infinity will subsequently show, the world of politics is the world in which traditional philosophy is well at home. Without rejecting all forms of politics, Levinas attacks the idolization (or "absolutization") of politics by defending a pre- or trans-political ethics rooted in the primordial relation between human beings. Thus, he does not confine himself to the traditional question of the tensions and relations between ethics and politics; these relations and tensions stem from a more radical dimension—in fact, it is the most radical, ultimate and "first," one: the originary "dimension" of human existence and Being as such. Totality and Infinity is an attempt to show that the "perspective" of morality is not a particular perspective—and therefore not an aspect or perspective at all—since it coincides with the transnatural and transworldly or "metaphysical" (non)perspective of "first philosophy."

The most originary "experience" of the most originary "reality" is already ethical, and from the outset metaphysics is determined ethically. However, Levinas does not argue for the reversal of the traditional order by which ethics, as a particular discipline of philosophy, follows the metaphysical or ontological disciplines in which normative, and especially moral, questions are postponed; the ethical does not belong to any particular discipline or perspective at all; it is as originary as the most fundamental moment of theoretical philosophy because it precedes any

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3 This "thesis" is clearly expressed in the title of the article, "Ethique comme philosophie première," published in G. Hottois (ed.), Justifications de l'éthique (Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1984), 41–51, but already announced in T1 281/304: "Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy."
possible scission between the theoretical and the practical or between description and evaluation (xvii/29). It is, therefore, a mistake to present Levinas's work as an ethics or as a welcome addition to the phenomenological movement. Its aim is much more radical, at least as radical as that of Aristotle's *protè philosophia*, Hegel's *Logic* or Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The "dimension" or "perspective" thematized in *Totality and Infinity* is that of the most originary and primordial, in which practice and theory, metaphysics and ethics, have not yet separated: it is "the common source of activity and theory" (xvi/27), "the metaphysical transcendence" (xvii/29), in which vision and ethics as the source of all morality are still one. In this originary "dimension," "ethics itself is an optics" (xii/23; xvii/29), whereas metaphysics itself is already oriented toward the Good. *Totality and Infinity* may be characterized as an original plea for authentic morality, but this characteristic would become false as soon as it is cut off from the thesis that the moral "point of view" coincides with the ultimate "event" or "fact" or "structure" or "Being."4

A few quick reminders about the ideological situation in which *Totality and Infinity* was written might be helpful in order to understand why Levinas introduces his philosophy by the evocation of key political concepts such as war and peace, violence, freedom, etc. The end of World War II did not terminate the search for an answer to the question of how it had been possible that a nation of great thinkers, poets, and musicians, under the leadership of a barbaric killer, had committed the most extensive mass murder of history. Not only was it barely possible to explain that outburst of modern violence, terror, and tyranny, but similar terrors continued to devastate the face of the earth by means of colonial and imperialistic wars or by systematic torture in the name of communist or capitalistic ambitions and ideologies. The conquest of Eastern Europe, China, and other parts of Asia by communist tyrannies found its most fervent defenders among the French intelligentsia. The literary and philosophical climate in which Levinas prepared *Totality and Infinity* can be partly summarized by pointing to the publications in which, for instance,

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4 In *TI*, "Being" (*l'être*) is still used as the equivalent of the originary and the ultimate, even in the preface, for instance xiv, xvii3, xix3, xiii1-12, xvii22-33, xvi4. It is only later that Levinas consequently rejects the ontological claim that Being would be the ultimate by opposing the Good, as beyond Being, to it.
Sartre and Merleau-Ponty discussed the contradictions (they preferred the word "dialectics") in which ethics (the "yogi") and politics (the "commissary") were involved. Other, non-Marxist voices could be heard, but they did not dominate the literary scene. Eric Weil, who published his *Philosophie politique* (Paris: Vrin) in 1956 and his *Philosophie morale* (Paris: Vrin) in 1961, is one of them, and he seems to have impressed Levinas. Nietzsche's critique of European culture and moralism might have played some role, although during the fifties it certainly did not have the arrogant and peremptory overtones some French interpreters lent it in the seventies.

The preface of *Totality and Infinity* introduces morality and ethics by opposing them to war, which immediately is connected with the world of politics and history. How are ethics and politics related? Are they necessarily opposed? Does the fight of all against all suspend the validity of all moral devices? Does morality reveal itself under these circumstances to be an illusion? In that case, it would not be anything infinite.

A commonplace view on the relation between ethics and politics maintains that an individual's will is free insofar as it can

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5 Levinas refers to Weil in TH 103 and in some pages of his books. The very broad sense of the word "violence," as containing everything that is not rational or reasonable, in the French philosophical literature of the sixties, might have originated in the very important book *Logique de la Philosophie* (1950), in which Weil tried to integrate and to "lift up" Hegel's phenomenological and speculative philosophy. In "Ethique et Esprit" (DL 19 n.1), Levinas writes: "We owe to Eric Weil's excellent thesis *Logique de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1951)—whose philosophical importance and logical strength will impose themselves—the systematic and forceful use of the term 'violence' in its opposition to discourse. We give, however, a different meaning to it—as we already did in our essay ['L'ontologie est-elle fondamentale?'] in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* of February–March 1951." In *Difficile Liberté*, Levinas defines "violence" in fact as "all action by which one acts as if he were the only acting person; as if the rest of the universe existed only for the reception of this action," and—as a consequence—as "all action that we undergo without collaborating in all its aspects. Almost all causality is violent in this sense: the fabrication of a thing, the satisfaction of a need, the desire, and even the knowledge of an object; and also fights and wars, wherein the other's weakness is sought as the betrayal of his personality. But there is also a great deal of violence in the poetical frenzy and enthusiasm by which we become a mouthpiece of the Muse who uses it to speak, and in the fear and trembling through which the sacred carries us away; there is violence in passion, be it the passion of a love wounded by a perfidious arrow" (20).
always distance itself from all material or bodily constraints, power structures, torture, hunger, etc. But this view is too cheap because it naively denies the possibility of techniques that break, submit and enslave, or corrupt any or almost any human will. It is against such naiveté that Levinas maintains that the will is essentially unheroic. In the essay "Freedom and Command"—a hermeneutical retrieval of Plato's meditation on tyranny in the Politeia—Levinas had already shown that individual liberty not only can be robbed of its autonomy and made obedient to physical violence, but also that hunger, torture, money, and seduction through love or rhetorics are capable of corrupting one's heart and so enslave one's soul that it no longer cares for itself, having lost any choice of its own. Protection against such a loss of freedom can only be found in political institutions that urge and sanction the exercise of individual freedom. By obeying objective laws and commands, human freedom protects its own liberty. Impersonal and general laws must save the human life and liberty of individuals.

"War," as contrasted with the possibility of effective morality, seems to be a pars pro toto for all kinds of violence. In a situation of war, harming others, killing, cheating, and lying become "natural" and "normal"; they are even seen as patriotic obligations. The validity of the moral norms is shaken and seems to be suspended. The conflicting interests and forces of any somewhat extended society constitute milder or fiercer forms of war. No one can escape altogether from this violence, which seems to be inherent to the world of modern politics, even if the existing antagonisms have been harmonized by a temporary balance of powers and strivings. In the light of politics, it seems, therefore, impractical, naive, unrealistic, and even ridiculous to believe in the originary force of pure morality.

The classical answer to the question of how we can overcome violence says that reason, as the source of universality in all our behavior, as well as of rules and insights, can justify and found an "objective" organization that preserves and protects the freedom of all individuals by applying to them the same universal law—the law of reason. As coming forth from reason itself, the imposition of these laws on human subjects is nothing other

8 266–67/CPP 17–18.
than the (re)shaping of their inner and outer life by their own innermost and typically human possibility. Body and psyche are made reasonable, i.e., human, by realizing corporeally one's own true, essential, and practical reason or will. Insofar as it is the universal law of reason that is made powerful by an objective institutionalization, it treats all individuals with justice as individuals having equal rights, etc. By giving up exorbitant claims and by limiting the range of their desires, individuals become members of one whole, whose collective freedom and well-being they share. In exchange for the sacrifice of their egoism, they receive a reasonable satisfaction of their needs. According to this social theory, the peace aimed at by all politics is based on a compromise of interested forces within an encompassing totality under the auspices of universal reason. Its keys are universality, totality, neglect of the individuals' unicity, equal needs and rights, and the conception of sociaity and intersubjectivity as constitutive elements of bigger collectivities.

Levinas's search is oriented to another peace: a prepolitical one that does not result from the calculations of a rational or reasonable compromise, destroyed as soon as the balance of powers is shaken, but rather—as an originary peace—one that precedes the emergence of any violence. This peace is inherent to the originary relationship of unique individuals, a relationship that precedes the constitution of any state or totality based on roles and functional definitions of the participating members only. Before politics and world history, there is the original peace of a lost paradise. It is not the dialectical counterpart of war, for such a counterpart would belong to the alternation of violence and nonviolence typical for the dimension of politics; neither is it the kingdom of a golden age somewhere at the beginning or the end of our history. As originary, "true" peace, it is as much a lost memory as the promise of a future beyond all history. Instead of "originary peace," it can, therefore, also be called eschatological or—in a more biblical terminology—a messianic peace. The political peace of "Greek" and European philosophy is, thus, founded in a peace beyond all peace announced and remembered by the prophets of Israel.

Retrieving the biblical opposition between the king and the prophet, Levinas will try to show from a philosophical perspective that the only way of taking morality seriously implies another conception of peace—and therewith of politics, ethics, individuality, universality, reason, and philosophy itself—than that of the classical tradition of European civilization. According to
Plato and Aristotle, the art of living an authentic human life consisted in the beauty of a courageous, liberal, prudent, and contemplative praxis in which the ethical concern of self-realization was interwoven with the performance of political tasks. As the two inherent possibilities of social communication, war and peace dominated both politics and ethics (for instance, but not only, in the form of courage). Levinas refers to Heraclitus's aphorisms about Polemos as "father" and source, as well as structure, of all things and suggests that Heidegger's evocation of Being's "polemical" character continues the tradition of Western ontology insofar as this conceives of Being as a dialectical totalization of "warring" oppositions.9

The prophetic message of an eschatological peace that would be based on a fair judgment about the injustice of political history interrupted the "polemology" of Greek philosophy. A new, unheard-of concept of peace was announced that belonged to a pre- or post-political morality. Insofar as Western civilization accepted it without abandoning its Greek perspective, it became divided in itself and hypocritical.10 It did not solve the conflict between the "Greek" search for truth and the prophetic proclamation of the Good (of which Plato, too, had had an inkling). Modern philosophy has tried, with Hegel and Marx, to synthesize both traditions in a secularized eschatology by conceptualizing the image of a history that would compensate for all human sufferings and sacrifices by a future of full freedom and satisfied humanity.

The secret and source of authentic morality, eschatology, and peace is a relation ignored, forgotten, or neglected by Western philosophy. This relation cannot be absorbed or dialectically integrated by any whole, for it resists all synthesis and transcends all possibilities of totalizing. It is, therefore, "beyond" or "before" or "transcendent with regard to" the dimensions of politics,


10 TII xii/24: "an essentially hypocritical civilization, that is, attached both to the True and to the Good, henceforth antagonistic . . . attached to both the philosophers and the prophets." In the discussion that followed his paper "Transcendance et Hauteur" (TH 103), Levinas gives the following commentary on this passage: "It is the fundamental contradiction of our situation (and perhaps of our condition), which is called Hypocrisy in my book, that the hierarchy taught by Athens and the abstract and somewhat anarchic ethical individualism taught by Jerusalem are both necessary to suppress violence." Does Levinas hint here at an unconquerable contradiction—and an unconquerable choice between onesidedness or hypocrisy ("perhaps of our condition") or at the task of discovering a new form of synthesis?
economy, history, and ontology in its classical and modern synthetic or dialectical form. This relation is not a moment of the universe; it is the original relatedness to the infinite. This reason of transcendence, with all its consequences for the issues of human existence and philosophy, is the theme or topic of Totality and Infinity. Against all philosophies of "totality" (in which Levinas includes not only Hegel and his predecessors but also Marx, Husserl, and Heidegger), Levinas will show how a nontotalitarian transcendence is possible and how its recognition leads to a radical transformation of the very project of philosophy.  

In sketching the core constellation that will be unfolded from many sides in the course of Totality and Infinity, the preface stresses the peculiar character of the originary relation of transcendence. It relates me, the subject, to the infinite, which overflows my capacity of encompassing it. The infinite is not the adequate correlate of some intention that—in accordance with the Husserlian conception of intentionality—would connect a noema with a noesis by an adequate correspondence; the infinite surprises, shocks, overwelms, and blinds by confronting me with another human face. The transcendent or "metaphysical" relation with the invisible infinite is speaking (parole) or a respectful and dedicated looking up to the Other. The infinite reveals itself neither in philosophical theses nor in dogmatic articles of any faith but rather in concrete hospitality and responsibility with regard to another woman, child, or man. The shock through which the revelation of the infinite conquers my consciousness can also be characterized as a form of "violence," as Levinas does, for instance, in stating that violence "consists in welcoming a being to which it is inadequate" (xiii/25) or that the transitivity of all acts "involves a violence essentially" (xv/27); but this "violence" differs absolutely from the

11 In "Freedom and Command" (1953), too, Levinas draws the line between violence and nonviolence differently than those who, like Eric Weil, equate nonviolence with rationality in the broad sense of a reason that includes Vernunft as well as Verstand. According to Levinas, a rational system like that of Hegel's objective spirit is violent because it would reduce all individuality to an instance of a universal concept. Levinas himself defines violence through its opposition to the basic human relation of transcendence. Violence is, thus, equivalent to narcissism. It does not permit the Other to surprise, to accuse, or to convert me but tries to find out to what extent the Other's freedom can be captured, used, reduced. A violent person avoids looking at the Other's face and seizes persons from the perspective of universality, i.e., from the perspective of the (other) individual's absence.
violence of political war and peace. Whereas the latter is an essential element of Western civilization and ontology, the inadequacy of the infinite opens a space beyond the dimension of politics, civilization, and their history. Without such a space, we would be caught in the reasonable order of a tamed but not conquered violence that, at any moment, could explode again in the terror of a systematic destruction, unrestrained by absolute morality.

The Same and the Other

In a way comparable to Aristotle's ontology and Hegel's logic, the first section, called "preparatory" at the end of the preface (xviii/29), and the conclusions (263-84/287-307) draw the main lines of the "first philosophy" comprised by the analyses of Totality and Infinity. These texts are difficult because they have to introduce a radically new starting point for philosophical thinking, and also because they show the coherence of such a thought by approaching it from many different angles. The first part (A) of this section is especially difficult because its understanding presupposes an acquaintance with several parts of the phenomenology accomplished in the course of the book. Many anticipations are, thus, necessary. If the study of one of Levinas's own summaries¹² is not enough, only a second reading of Totality and Infinity can clarify the meaning of its beginning.

The meaning of the qualification "preparatory," as the author calls this section (xviii/29), is not that it can be read as an easy introduction but that it "sketches the horizon of all the investigations" of the book. The titles of the section and of its first part (A. "Metaphysics and Transcendence," 3–23/33–52) are programmatic, as is the content of the five subsections of part A. Since Levinas sees the whole Western tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger as a philosophy of the Same, the "and" in the title of the section is polemical. He does not, however, fall into the trap of a contrary opposition. Indeed, he does not defend a philosophy of the Other (and not either—as we will see—a philosophy of dialogue), for without any sameness, unity, and totality, only the dispersion of an extreme atomism would remain, which

¹² See PHI (with the commentary given here in the second and third chapters above) and TH, which gives the text of the paper Levinas was invited to present at the Société Française de Philosophie on 27 January 1962, together with the discussion that followed it.
would be the end of all philosophy and thought in general. The “and” of the title “Metaphysics and Transcendence” does not express an opposition but announces that transcendence, when taken seriously—namely as the relation from the Same to an irreducible Other—cannot be respected unless by a thought that overcomes the totality of physis, and, in this sense, is metaphysical. At the same time, it gives—under the cover of the Aristotelian term “metaphysics”—homage to Plato, whose questions and attempt will be often alluded to in the course of the text.

The division of part A (3–23/33–52) can be explained in the following way: the first subsection (“Desire of the Invisible”) states—with allusions to Plato—the basic structure or “principle”; the second one (“The Breach of Totality”) contrasts this with the monistic principle of (Western) philosophy; the third (“Transcendence Is Not Negativity”) and the fourth (“Metaphysics Precedes Ontology”) set it off against Hegelian dialectics and Heidegger’s thought of Being, and the fifth subsection (“Transcendence as the Idea of the Infinite”) shows that the father of modern philosophy, Descartes, in his Metaphysical Meditations has given an account of transcendence that can be retrieved in a promising way.

In my commentary, I will concentrate on the positive aspects of Levinas’s thought and leave out what has already been explained in former chapters of this book. For the moment, it may suffice to say that Totality and Infinity announces itself as an attempt to write a post-Heideggerian and, therefore, also post-(neo-)Platonic metaphysics.

Without immediately asking critical questions about the possibility and the inner coherence of Levinas’s beginning, I simply observe that the first pages state the relation of the Same and the Other (or true transcendence) as the ultimate horizon that should replace the question of Being or the question of Being, beingness, and beings. Levinas’s strategy is no longer the reversal of Heidegger’s move from beings (and their essence) to Being, as he announced in the title of his early book From Existence to Existent, but it is an altogether new start. As most modern philosophers do, he begins with the outline of a sort of (onto-)logic, the “logic of the relation that unites and separates the Same and the Other,” but neither the word “logic” nor the characteristic of its “theme” as something ontic or ontological is adequate to

13 Cf. Chapter Two above.
indicate his concern. Moreover, he does not begin by stating an abstract relationship as more fundamental than any other but by the phenomenological analysis of what he, in this book, still calls an “experience”: the experience of desire, which reveals that relationship to be a concrete movement of transcendence. Aside from this phenomenological aspect, the beginning has also a hermeneutical one because it should be read as a retrieval of Plato’s texts on eros and desire in the Symposium and the Philebus, and it has a polemical aspect insofar as it opposes, from the outset, some central convictions of classical and contemporary philosophy.

The first sentences of the opening subsection of part A (3/33), “The Desire for the Invisible,” contain the declaration that metaphysics should be reinstated against all post-Hegelian attempts to take away from philosophy its most noble moment by leveling it to a surface without any elevation. These attempts, in fact, bring the hidden spirit of the Western tradition to the light: the “transcendence” of its antitheism and antihumanism. In order to show the sense in which the old Platonic conception and practice of philosophy must be retaken, Levinas chooses as his point of departure a phenomenological analysis of desire, as he did in “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite.” These allusions to Plato’s description of eros in the Symposium and the Phaedrus were obvious, but another less obvious association refers back to the Philebus (50e ff., especially 51b), where “alongside of needs whose satisfaction amounts to filling a void, Plato catches sight also of aspirations that are not preceded by suffering and lack, and in which we recognize the pattern of Desire: the need of someone who lacks nothing, the aspiration of someone who possesses one’s being entirely, who goes beyond one’s plenitude, who has the idea of the Infinite,” as Levinas writes in TI 76/103. Probably the Platonic eros still has too many features of a need to be a model for a description of the desire without lack that opens up the most radical dimension.

The way Levinas introduces this desire (3/33ff.) confronts us with three voices: that of Rimbaud, whose exclamation “the true life is absent,” in expressing the nihilism of our epoch, simultaneously expresses an eternal desire of the human heart;¹⁴ that

of Heidegger, the greatest philosopher of our century, who determined the human mode of existence as "being in the world"; and that of Plato, who formulated the task of philosophy as an ascension toward the truth "yonder" and "up there." Metaphysics" is the name by which Levinas, in this book, indicates the thinking that, by taking all of these three voices very seriously, occupies the space between the "here-below" in the world (ici-bas) and the "elsewhere" (là-bas). Its turning to the otherwise and the height of the "elsewhere" is not, however, fleeing away from worldliness. Loyalty to the human world does not imply at all the betrayal of all transcendence or "trans-ascendence" (5/35); the otherness of true life is not an alibi by which we can excuse ourselves for not taking full responsibility for the adventures of our history. On the contrary, it is the absolute condition for a humane world. A total immersion in the factual histories and customs of our "fate" would be the triumph of the Same; an exodus must be given to us, but this will not be possible unless the otherness of a shocking surprise disrupts the coherence of our immanence and autonomy.

*Desire* is the concrete way of human transcendence to the (truly or absolutely) Other. It must be sharply distinguished from any form of need. While the satisfaction of needs stands for the whole economy of the Western way of life and thought, desire is a radically different "principle" that shakes and reorients the customs and reflexes of that economy.

All the features of desire are marked by the exceeding character of the desiring instance and the exteriority, the strangeness, or the otherness of the desired. Needs are always directed to a satisfaction, which indeed can be found, albeit only for a certain time. "Need" is the name for all human orientations toward something that is lacking or makes an achievement incomplete. It is accompanied by a certain pain, the pain of privation. Hunger is a good example, but we are also in need when we have fallen from an agreeable position or chased from some sort of paradise and when we are nostalgically longing for some situation of inner peace. Radically different from need, desire cannot be satisfied because it cannot be fulfilled. Through a need, a human subject lacks certain goods that it can assimilate and make part of its own body, surrounding, or world. Such an integration is not possible for desire. Its transcendence to the exterior is not an anticipation of fulfillment or of a beginning integration. On the

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15 Cf. Chapter Two above.
contrary, its "hunger" is intensified to the same extent to which it approaches the desired. The desired is not anything that can become familiar to me; it cannot have a function or place in the economy of the desiring one. The impossibility of being integrated gives the desired not only the character of exteriority but also of height: the Other resists any attempt to convert it or him or her into something that is my own; the Other is not even a theme or a noema that I could "grasp" or encompass by representing or comprehending it. Insofar as all visible realities can be mastered by putting them before me, by presenting them through perception, and by representing them through reflection, the desired is invisible, irrepresentable, and nonconceptual. Desire and desired do not correspond as correlates that "fit" adequately into one another. *Desire does not have the structure of intentionality.* It is, thus, neither the natural tendency that was thematized in Aristotle's ethics as a teleological striving for self-realization nor a nostalgic "existing" toward a contentment that—although delayed—could fulfill the longing subject and bring it to its rest.

If the relation between the desiring subject and the desired Other is essentially insatiate and insatiable, the distance that separates them cannot be abolished by any caress or comprehension. Their separation is an essential impossibility of fusion or union. The desired Other resembles in this respect *death*. Both surprise and shock me by their absolute otherness: neither death nor the Other can take a place within the unfolding of my possibilities. The difference between need and desire is that between a self-centered love and the goodness of being—and thus also suffering and ultimately even dying—for the Other.

But, more concretely, what or who is "the Other"? To what or whom does the desire transcend and relate? In a programmatic statement (4/34), Levinas declares that the alterity of the desired is the alterity of *Autrui* (the human other) and that of *le Très-Haut* (the Most-High, or God). The "and" of this phrase announces a problem that can be formulated in several ways—for instance, as the problem of the relation between morality and religion. *Totality and Infinity* concentrates on the relation between ego and the human Other, who is—in the sense indicated above—the desired invisible and absolute Other, although some of its passages begin to clarify also the relation between this Other (*Autrui*) and God, but it is only later on, especially in "The Trace of the Other" (1963), "God and Philosophy" (1975), and *Otherwise Than Being* (1974) that Levinas thematizes that question extensively.
The double-sidedness of desire as separation and relation opens the space for an analysis of human existence as two-dimensional reality: as separated individuals, we are independent and egocentric, centers and masters of an economy that is also an egonomy; as transcending toward the Other, we live in a different dimension, the structure of which is made of transcendence, alterity, and the impossibility of totalization and identification. The difficulty of Levinas’s enterprise lies in the task of showing—in the form of a thematic, and thereby necessarily gathering, discourse—that gathering, coherence, and unity do not constitute the ultimate horizon of such a discourse, and that otherness, separation, and transcendence are irreducible to any unity.

In the second subsection, “The Breach of Totality” (5/35ff.), Levinas analyzes the paradoxical structure of the relation that was found in desire. The Other reveals itself as impeding certain ways of approaching him or her. He/she resists and condemns my trying to submit any otherness to the rule of my self-centered economy. This way of meeting me is not equal; it is not even remotely similar to my meeting the Other. The Other and the I reveal themselves as radically different. My relation to the Other (whose “height” was stated in Platonic terminology) is asymmetrical, not symmetrical. My relation to the Other is different from the relation of the Other to me. In this sense, Levinas calls the relation of transcendence (or the “metaphysical relation”) “irreversible” and also “nonreciprocal.” He does not consider the concept of a double (or reciprocal) asymmetry.

The asymmetrical relation is not a relation between two people that can be observed by a third person from the outside or from “above.” Seen from an outside standpoint, the encounter of two or more persons is the relation of two or more equal and similar instances of a universal class or genus of beings. In this perspective, the asymmetry, with all nonrelative otherness and transcendence, has disappeared. By this perception, the observer embraces the people involved and reduces them to similar realizations of the Same. The only concrete way in which the relation of transcendence and nontotalizable alterity can be saved is the position of an I that does not escape from the face-to-face to which it is brought by the Other. I must remain in the position that places me before the surprising Other and not surpass the relation in which I am caught—for instance, by reflecting or talking about it from a higher, nonengaged, and universal standpoint.
But what am I doing when I write such a sentence or a book about transcendence, the Other, and the metaphysical relationship? I am treating them, including myself, as a moment of my face-to-face with the absolutely Other, as a moment of a discourse in which all human beings can be "I" or "Other" and in which "the I," "the Other," and their "relation" inevitably acquire universal meanings. This contradiction between the concrete relation of me(-now-here) to you(-now-here) as my (here-and-now-concrete) Other and its appearance in the text of my putting it into words constitutes a fundamental problem that will command important developments of Levinas's thought after Totality and Infinity. In the form of the relation between the Saying (le Dire) and the Said (le Dit), it is one of the main topics in Otherwise Than Being. In Totality and Infinity, we are confronted with a double language: the universalist discourse that is practiced insists continually on the necessity of a speech that involves the speaker in a relation of transcendence toward a concrete Other with whom the speaker is confronted. The strange and extraordinary contradiction between these two discourses is maintained, but we must understand that the basic and transcendent language is the "apology," that is, the logos or discourse that departs "from" the one and is directed to the Other who faces the one, whereas the reflective text of the book is a secondhand and second-rate language from which the absolute Other and the engaged ego have disappeared.

The separation that is essential to the relation of transcendence is not possible unless both terms "absolve" themselves—as absolutely different and independent—from their being tied together by their relation. For (the) ego, this means that its mode of existence must be identical with itself independently from or "before" any encounter with an Other. This self-identity of Me is more than a logical tautology; it is the concrete activity of self-identification through which I establish myself as inhabitant and owner of my world. The concrete way of my being what I am—in the supposition that we can make an abstraction from all encounters with other people—is the egoism of my enjoying, ruling, and transforming the world in accordance with my needs. This egoism is, thus, a condition for the possibility of transcendence and dedication to the nonego that is the Other. Herewith Levinas has "deduced" the theme of section 2, "Interiority and Economy" (79–158/107–83), in which the concreteness of the Same is shown to lie in the economy of a hedonistic autonomy.

The separation and "absolution" or absolvedness of the (human) Other will be brought to the fore in section 3, "The Face
In subsection 2 of section 1, part A, Levinas already contrasts the separation with various forms of relative otherness, such as that of spatial distance, tools that can be handled, perception, and representation, which integrate all beings as moments of an overview. The irreducible Other is a stranger who cannot be reduced to a role or function within my world; he/she is not even a member of “my” community but rather the life of someone who comes from afar and who does not belong to it. If the Same is the life of an egoistic I, how then can I and the Other still be related? What is the structure of this most radical relation? How must it be qualified? To what extent does the face-to-face escape from the text in which the observer’s perception and philosophical thought try to say their truth?

In order to prevent a fundamental misunderstanding of the constellation sketched above, it might be helpful to state here, by way of anticipation, that Levinas’s philosophy does not fix the opposition between a narcissistic ego and a moral law of altruism that should be urged upon its egoism. Ego is at the same time turned and returned to itself by the spontaneous egoism of its being alive (a zooion or animal) and transcendent, that is, exceeding its own life by desiring, i.e., by a nonegoistic “hunger” or generosity for the Other. This duality is not the classical twofold of body and spirit. The reflexivity of ego’s self-identification is as corporeal, sensible, and affective as ego’s orientation and dedication to the Other. Being good without having hands and material goods is empty, while all “spiritual” goods that promise satisfaction fall under the law of hedonistic economy. Being good means giving your life or letting it be taken away, but to suffer and even to die for another implies that I would enjoy the good things that are taken away from me.


Levinas agrees that the play of yes and no in Hegelian dialectics cannot fathom the extent and the height of the distance between the Same and the Other. Taking his lead from Being (on) and Nonbeing (mè on), or “Nothing,” Hegel reduces all the
versions of their opposition to an onto-logical totality (spirit, history, logos, reason, self-consciousness, being), without respecting the radical and absolute otherness of to heteron, which cannot be reduced to a lack, a shadow, or an imperfection of to auton and still less to an adventure of Being. The whole of Totality and Infinity can be read as one long refutation of the attempt to understand the difference between the Same and the Other as an opposition within the unique horizon of a totality (which, in that case, would inevitably be the Same of the all-encompassing ontology).

The fourth subsection starts with a general critique of traditional philosophy, which Levinas—in opposition to Heidegger—does not characterize as metaphysics but as ontology. His main purpose here is to show that Heidegger’s thought is still a version of classical ontology. The pages in which this is argued (15–18/45–48) belong to the clearest pages Levinas wrote on Heidegger. Without defending all the elements of his interpretation, I will formulate here the leading thread of his critique.

Classical philosophy, being a discourse about the beingness of beings, did not and could not do justice to singular beings in their "tode ti" (this-here-now), for the essence of ontology is the comprehension of things, events, etc. by means of a mediation, i.e., by means of a comprehension that perceives or conceives them in the light of a third, anonymous term, a universal concept, or a horizon. By thus understanding the singular event or thing as an instance within the surrounding framework of some generality—Being, history, idea, spirit, substance, etc.—ontological thought reduces and forgets that which constitutes this-here-now as this unique something. It does not respect it in its ownness but drowning it in an anonymous whole or universal.

Heidegger’s thought of Being is a very important version of ontology. Indeed, according to him, Dasein understands phenomena in the light (the “phosphorence”) of Being and in the space (the “clearing”) opened up by it. The horizon of Being has taken over the mediating function of the classical concept or idea. Being, too, is neutral and impersonal, embracing and encompassing, an active and transitive “exist-ing” that makes beings be. It grants them their conatus essendi, their perseverance and maintenance in being, as Levinas will say in later works, and it grants us the openness and the light that are necessary in order to grasp them as phenomena that appear. Verstehen is, thus, understood as comprehension: a totalizing seizure of things,
events, and relationships as moments belonging to an anonymous totality. The famous Seinlassen ("to let be"), which suggests receptivity on our part, is, in fact, an approach by which the thinking subject maintains the position of a center for which the universe of beings unfolds itself within the horizon of an—albeit more aesthetic than trivially hedonistic—economy. It lacks respect for the surprising unity of the singular, and especially for the shocking emergence of a human other.

This emergence is, indeed, shocking because it calls the spontaneity of my egonomy and egology into question. The condition of respect is the acceptance of this fundamental criticism. It procures the basis of metaphysics as a critique of ontology. The ownness of the Other reveals the greed and the violence of egology and ontology if these are not founded in, and surpassed by, metaphysics. Metaphysics respects the unique; ontology is subordinate to it. To be true to the critical "appearance" of the tode ti of the Other, I must let the Other criticize my spontaneous will to power, I must not flee from the face-to-face that accuses me. To do justice to the Other, the "liberty" of ontological "transcendence" must be subordinated to the vocative of my being spoken to by the Other and my speaking to him/her. If I talk or write a book about the Other (or about our relation), this can only be an appendix to the truth of our face-to-face. The reduction of the Other to an element of my text about him/her can only be redeemed by offering this text to him/her.

Freedom or justice? Even if we stress, with the later Heidegger, that understanding or thinking is obedience to Being, he still conceives of it as an unfolding of the possibilities of my modes of being as "I can." As long as understanding is practiced as approaching beings from some wider horizon (such as Being, the clearing, the granting event of appropriation), it does violence to the irreducible, nonmediatable, and absolutely immediate "fact" of the Other who refutes my egocentrism, as well as the all-encompassing character of the horizon. The secret of Western ontology is its basic sympathy with political oppression and tyranny. In this sense, the celebration of physis as an impersonal and generous mother without face could conspire with the vulgar guide for terror that was Mein Kampf. A society based on ontology cannot be just, although it might try to create a balance out of the polemos to which the liberties of its monads inevitably lead. Originary respect, metaphysics as critique of spontaneously violent autonomy, is the only possibility of a just society.
To conclude this summary of the fourth subsection, I would like to make only one observation with regard to Levinas's interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy. One could object that, since Being is not a being at all, it can neither be a third, mediating term nor distort or tyrannize any appearance or beingness. To this, Levinas could answer that in this case it is not only useless and misleading but also false to write about Being as if it were anything at all. Even the no-thing-ness posited by Heidegger as that which grants the possibility of beingness and understanding still is or gives a "space," a "horizon," a "light." If "Being" were nothing other than the "name" for the fact that there are phenomena, and that we are able to receive their message or to understand them in a meaningful way, then there would be no reason at all to suggest that this "fact" or this "ultimate condition" should be treated (and treated in a solemn, venerating, almost religious way!) as if it were some One or One-ness or some "It" that grants.

Whether Levinas's critique of ontology would be valid if ontology were able to do justice to the uniqueness of humans and their absolute alterity for one another, i.e., if the "Being" of ontology were neither anonymous nor a denial of human separation and plurality, I will not try to solve this question here. It should be noticed, however, that Levinas himself, in *Totality and Infinity*, very often or almost always uses the language of ontology in order to criticize it—for instance, when he finds "the metaphysical desire" in "a relation with being such that the knowing being lets the known being manifest itself while respecting its alterity and without marking it in any way whatever by this cognitive relation."

After *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas had to choose between two possibilities: *either* he could have tried the way of a new analogy of Being by developing an ontology in which the personal, the intersubjective, and the human alterity would *not* have been forgotten or repressed,16 *or* he could try to exorcise all ontology from his writing and reflection, *or else*—if the second way was not possible, *either*—he would have to use ontology in

16 In *TI* 53/80 Levinas seems to consider the possibility of an analogy of Being, from which any univocity would have been excluded, but he maintains his rejection of "ontology," understood as a philosophy that denies the equivocity of the term "Being," as applied to God and created beings, by gathering them into one totality. Elsewhere, e.g., in *Philosophie et Religion* (1977), 539, he rejects any form of analogy between God and Being because it is unable to maintain their abyssal difference.
order to overcome it by the refutation of its ontological meaning. What he chose was, in fact, a combination of the second and the third way.

Levinas’s discussion of the idea of the infinite, as analyzed in Descartes’s third *Metaphysical Meditation*, has been introduced in the essay that was analyzed in Chapter Two above. I can, therefore, be brief in rendering subsection 5, “Transcendence as Idea of the Infinite” (18–23/48–52). After a few hints about the possibility of finding something similar in Plato’s *Phaedo*, Levinas tries to show that Descartes defended a truth that is essential for metaphysics but is forgotten or rejected by most or all contemporary philosophers. This truth is hidden in Descartes’s meditation on the idea of the infinite, an idea that is as originary as the cogito itself and even more originary than the idea of the cogito (i.e., self-consciousness). In contrast to all philosophies for which the finite is the ultimate, Descartes maintained—with the whole patristic and medieval tradition, not mentioned by Levinas—that the infinite is originally present in consciousness, rejecting thereby every attempt to construct or compose its idea on the basis of other finite ideas. There is no doubt that Descartes did not see any difference between the infinite and God (the God of his Catholic faith), but Levinas separates the formal structure of the idea of the infinite from its concrete content.

Retrieving the expressions with which Descartes qualifies the infinite, Levinas characterizes it by the terms “exterior,” “absolving” or “having absolved itself” from the relation (i.e., from our idea of it), and “overflowing” our capacity of thinking it. In “having” the idea of the infinite, one “thinks more than one can think.” An immediate “too much” has always already awakened and oriented human consciousness and has undermined, made impossible, the full circle of its reflection upon itself. All beings and their beingness are seen as finite because they are preceded in our consciousness by their relation to the infinite. This has, thus, nothing to do with the “bad infinite” of an endless series or a quantitative or qualitative “more” or “most” or “highest” or “total” or “ultimate.”

Separating this structure of a relation (“idea”) that relates the cogito originary to the infinite before all possibilities of experience or reflection, Levinas asks: Where, in which phenomenon and in which “intentionality,” does this relation

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“appear” concretely? Not in the religious awe or gratitude before God but rather only in the encounter with another, in the human face-to-face, is the “experience” in which that relationship becomes concrete. The infinity of the other’s face, that is, its exteriority and absoluteness, its impossibility of being ranged among the phenomena of my world and of being seen as a figure against a wider background, is the only possible revelation of the infinite as described before. The word “face” can be replaced by “expression” or “word” or “speech” (la parole). Face, speech, and expression are the concrete manners by which the irreducibility of the Other comes to the fore and surprises me, disrupts my world, accuses, and refuses my egoism. In order to bring out the exceptional and disorderly character of this infinite, Levinas uses the word “epiphany” and “revelation” instead of “phenomenon” and “manifestation” or “appearance.” The only adequate response to the revelation of the absolute in the face is generosity, donation.

In reading part B of section 1, entitled “Separation and Discourse” (23–53/53–81), we discover that Levinas’s titles do not help very much to get an overview of the structure according to which his book has been composed. There seems to be no systematic scheme but rather a series of fragments that have been (re)arranged after their writing. And yet, the fragments form a coherent text not broken by abrupt disruptions or startling turns. One of the difficulties is, however, that they move rather quickly from one topic to another in order to show a certain coherence between them and to convince the reader that the traditional views must be rethought in their entirety. Levinas’s meditations perform a spiraling thought, starting from the main themes of philosophy, such as truth, freedom, language, knowledge, respect, and so on. By following that movement, the reader is confronted with constellations rather than with single phenomena; many repetitions, which most often are also further developments of insights expressed before, make a patient reader acquainted with a surprising but revealing approach and challenge.

In order to give some hints for a possible path in the seeming arbitrariness of the analyses contained in part B, I resume the

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questions that should be answered first, if the new beginning, as stated in part A, must command the rethinking of all the problems of philosophy. If neither Being in its relation(s) to beings nor any other form of "totalitarian" principle is the starting point of philosophy, but rather the metaphysical relation of transcendence, it must become clear how I, "the Other," and our relation should be characterized and how they form one constellation. As was said before, "the Other" has two meanings, united by an "and"; both Autrui and God are invisible, absolute, and high, but Autrui is in a way the "visible" invisible, whereas God does not appear at all (4/34). We may, therefore, expect that Levinas will proceed to a clarification of the elements that are constitutive for this relation: in the first place, the position of Me ("the I"), the peculiarities of the Other (in both senses), and the special structure of their relation. In a sort of anticipatory way, Levinas indeed gives here a first analysis of these "elements" by stressing the following aspects.

For a nondialectical relation, it is necessary that I be not a moment of the Other or of a synthesis that reduces "us" to its moments but that I, on the contrary, pose myself as an independent will. Ego's freedom expresses itself by its mastery of a world that is its own. This does not go together with a behavior that testifies to its being immersed in a surpassing whole, as conceived in the primitive religions of magic and mythology. An independent and completely secularized I has gotten rid of all gods and sacred powers; it is atheistic because it is free. As "psychism" or "interiority," it lives a private life and has time for the satisfaction of its needs and for delaying the threats of hunger and death. This time of self-centered mastery is not the temporality of works and functions out of which the time of history is made, for in history, no individual survives, except as names of certain works that have become mere elements of culture. Ego's economy, thus quickly sketched, will be analyzed extensively in section 2 (79–158/107–85).

The Other is not an element of history, either, but the reason for this is a different one. As coming from afar and from "on high," the Other breaks through the network of phenomena, relations, forms, and figures that can be conceived as composing parts of a universe. The Other cannot be possessed or overpowered, not even by the most spiritual thought or imagination that gives him a place or function in a conceptual or representational whole. Ego's mastery is practiced in calling back—by means of memory and reflection—objects and themes that have already
passed and gathering them through the recovery of reflection. But the Other cannot be treated in such a way, since it presents itself as someone who cannot be grasped or objectified. The Other's face is not a form; it is naked, and this is precisely the reason why it commands and obligates. The only possible response to the Other's invocation is respect and donation. The Other's emergence is the first and definitive refutation of my egoism and therewith the fundamental dispossession that is needed for the possibility of universalization and objectification by putting the world of things in common.

The face-to-face of a living discourse is the concrete way in which the fundamental relation is practiced. It is neither mediated nor otherwise preceded by an originary "we" or "being-with"; on the contrary, all forms of association or community are founded in the relation of the Same and the Other. The straightforwardness of the face-to-face forbids the ruses and the violence of all rhetoric that is directed at catching or changing the other by approaching her/him obliquely. Discourse in search of truth is not the mere monologue of a lonely observer or thinker who spreads the world of things and humans out before his synoptic eye, for all language and all search of truth are preceded by the response of the One to the Other, who commands in an asymmetrical relationship that cannot be surpassed by any higher perspective. To search for the truth is primarily to be true to the metaphysical relation that excludes indifference as well as domination or fusion, and even—as Levinas often says—"participation."

The "atheism" of the will, as a necessary condition for ego's independence, goes together with true religion. The question of how "the Other" must be understood receives an answer in several formulas by which Levinas tries to explain that the relation to the human Other and the relation to God coincide completely and without fail. The only way of having a relation with God—is his conviction—is to respond to the interpellation of the human face, to be good. This correspondence is neither a form of participation nor a parallelism between two worlds; God does not incarnate himself in human beings, but there is no other relation to God possible than the generous approach of the human Other in his/her misery. Autrui is the absolute that orients the world and its history.

In contrast with part B, part C of the first section (54–75/82–101) does form a coherent chapter whose content corresponds
adequately to its title, "Truth and Justice." Its importance for an insight into Levinas's "method" can hardly be exaggerated. While discussing the classical practice and conception of philosophy, Levinas shows here the epistemological implications of the metaphysical transcendence that was ignored therein. If "truth" stands for a thought that moves within the parameters of the Same, "justice" summarizes here the adequate response to the revelation of the transcendent Other. The thesis defended by Levinas says that "truth" is not possible unless preceded and supported by "justice." The metaphysical relation is the first "condition of the possibility" of truth.

The argumentation contained in these pages is a good example of the approach most often practiced by Levinas. He starts with an analysis of the approach adopted in the traditional practice and theory of philosophy, indicates some fundamental assumptions that are neither obvious nor reflected upon by it, and shows a fundamental lack in traditional philosophy. Then he points to a fact that was overlooked or forgotten, and he explains why the classical approach was possible at all. This leads to an explanation of the relations between the forgotten or ignored fact (the relation of transcendence from One to the Other) and the ways of classical ontology, which should be converted and transformed by their subordination to transcendence.

True knowledge, as sought in Western philosophy, is the realization—on the level of theory—of the free will, whose autonomous and atheistic structure has been described before (in subsection 1 of part B). As psychism or interiority, this will is the spontaneous conquest of the world by a solitary ego. Its ideal is a complete comprehension of the universe, that is, the full possession of all things as shining forth in the evidence of self-justified concepts. Justification means in this context that the thinker, in the interiority of his understanding, reconstructs or "recreates" the world which he found before he started to think. The empirical a posteriori should be transformed into the a priori of a self-assured mind. Of course, the mind meets with the resistance of many limitations, but these might be overcome by participation in the spiritual life of the ultimate Substance, Spirit, Logos, or God. Or, if such theologies are not possible, the thinker will take refuge in resignation, without abandoning his central place and the project of his universal search, as happens in the contemporary philosophies of finitude.

The world of classical ontology shows two fundamental deficiencies. First, it is an equivocal world without valid indications of meaning and orientation. A universe of total silence,
without any speech, is a chaos of appearances without orientation. Nothing is certain or important in it. One cannot know where to begin and how to approach it because it has no beginning or "principle." In this sense, it is "anarchic," as Levinas says in Totality and Infinity. (Later on, he reserves the word "anarchy" for the constellation of transcendence.) It is a "world" in which everything is possible but also uncertain because no interpretation can even begin to develop. (One might also say that it is a chaos of too many interpretations: How could they escape from gratuity or arbitrariness?) Bewitchment, the ruses of Descartes's "evil genius," has an easy play in it. Its seductions can only be withstood if there is an absolute orientation and if the chaotic rumbling of appearances can be transformed into the givenness of given data, events, or things.19

The second deficiency of the ontological world lies in its not having a place for the "phenomenon" of moral guilt. All its limitations are experienced as provisional or as tragic features of human finiteness; it has immunized itself against the discovery of those resistances by which the human will is accused as unjust.

The emergence of the Other is at the same time that which changes mere appearances into givens and that which awakens the consciousness of the anarchic thinker to its shame. The Other offers me phenomena by talking about them or letting me talk about them to him/her; the Other turns my mind to the ethical dimension by refuting and accusing my ruthless spontaneity and thus gives me an orientation toward infinity. Donation and morality precede all objectification and meaningful reference; transcendence precedes and supports (a certain) ontology; justice precedes and conditions the knowledge of the truth.

The presence of the Other abolishes the atheism of the will's monopoly. As for the medieval knight whose fighting force is justified by making him a defender of powerless innocents, ego's freedom is "invested" by the demands implied in the Other's proximity. I am saved by the acceptance of the critique that comes from the Other's face.

19 Under the name "il y a," Levinas has described the senselessness of this chaos in EE extensively (93–105/57–64). In TI it does not play a main role, although it is essential to the understanding of its descriptions of Being, enjoyment, the elements, ethics, and creation (cf. 66, 115–17, 165/93, 140–42, 190–91). AE comes back to it (cf. 207–10/162–65), and in the preface of 1978 (11–14) to the second edition of EE, Levinas refers to it as a still-valid part of his early book.
“Creature” is Levinas’s name for a freedom that is not a *causa sui* but still is free either to continue its egoistic conquest of the universe or to submit its freedom to transcendence. Freedom is founded and preceded; it is not its own beginning. Its redemption lies in its association to others. If ego remained alone, it would not be capable of the distance needed for objective thought and representation. To be a being and to have a meaning is to be addressed by words, to be instructed or taught. The word of the Other is the origin of truth.

The last part of section 1, “Separation and the Absolute” (75–78/102–5), forms an inclusion with its first subsection and resumes the “principle” of transcendence once more. In the language of ontology, Levinas writes that the idea of (i.e., the relation to) the infinite is “the ultimate structure of Being” (75/102), but he also appeals to Plato’s insight that “the place of the Good” is “above all essence” as the most profound and definitive teaching of philosophy (and not of theology) (76/103). Once more, he opposes the separation demanded by the desire for the Good to the nostalgia for the absolute synthesis of classical philosophy. The infinite does not overwhelm or absorb but opens a space for free and adult independence. This is the structure not of participation, but of creation.

| Interiority and Economy |

As we said before, this section unfolds, through the phenomenological method of intentional analysis, the self-identification of the Same in the concrete form of a self-centered existence, which is at the same time independent as well as separated and capable of entering (of having-always-already-entered) into the relation with the Other. The section is thus dedicated to “the relations that come to the fore within the Same” (82/110). In a sense that will become clearer in the course of the following analyses, this section claims to be a correction of Heidegger’s description of *Dasein’s being-in-the-world*, and a careful comparison of both is an urgent and tempting task. However, in order to show as clearly as possible the core of Levinas’s intentions and analyses, without from the outset burdening this commentary by a discussion of the exactitude of his interpretations and polemics with regard to Heidegger’s works, I will concentrate on the positive and nonpolemical side
of this new description of ego's being-in-the-world. A warning with regard to Levinas's use of the terms Being (être) and being (étant, but also être) and to his way of asking the question of Being might, however, be helpful for a thorough understanding.

When Levinas, in Totality and Infinity, writes about being and/or ontology, he thinks in the first place of "the universe of beings" (das Seiende im Ganzen or das Ganze des Seienden) and its Being, that is, the "beingness" that encompasses a hierarchy of various modes of being, such as objectivity (Vorhandenheit), instrumentality and Zuhandenheit, animality, mondaneity, historicity, etc. With regard to the description of ego's world, the horizon within which Levinas achieves his analyses of the phenomena is thus "metaphysical" in the Heideggerian and the traditional sense of the word: his descriptions try to characterize the modes of being—the ousia or "essence"—of eating, habitation, labor, representation, and so on and their horizons. Levinas, however, neither shares the ontological presuppositions of traditional metaphysics nor those of Heidegger's early and later philosophy, and this difference, which is made explicit especially in sections 1 and 3, cannot be silenced totally in section 2. As "horizon," the relation between the Other and me codetermines implicitly the meaning of all the phenomena that compose ego's being in the world. Since the Other, exteriority, and the metaphysical relation are not thematized explicitly in this section, it presents us with a still rather abstract retrieval of the traditional egology, but from another, more radical perspective. The point of departure is not a transcendental or psychological consciousness or self-consciousness but rather the presence of the I to itself whereby it is someone who establishes him/herself as possessor and commander of a world. This self-presence is called "interiority," "psychism," or "inner life." Indeed, its structure and mode of being are the mode and structure of life as an autarchic Bei-sich-selbst-sein, a self-sufficiency and a self-deployment that do not care for other beings except insofar as they are needed for it. If we would take "life" to include the intersubjective relationship through which the Other obliges me, it would be composed at least of the structures described in sections 2 and 3 and summarized by section 1 and the conclusions in the last section. "Inner life" or "interiority" as monopolistic economy is an abstraction,
but it is a necessary moment of human existence, since it constitutes the egoity needed for "the interval of separation" (TI 82\(^3\)/110\(^2-3\)) and the primordial relation.\(^{20}\)

The first subsection of section 2, "Intentionality and the Social Relation" (81–82/109–10), characterizes the relations that play within the horizons of the Same by distinguishing them from the metaphysical relation relating the Same and the Other. Their categorial structures are not identical, since the relations of and within the Same are monistic, whereas the metaphysical relation is heteronomous. As a supplement to the first section, the first page of the second section traces once more the typical features of the metaphysical relation before the relations of the Same are described. The metaphysical relation is set off against Husserl's "principle of principles" and Heidegger's being-in-the-world. Whereas intentionality and being-in-the-world reduce transcendence to the immanence of an all-embracing unity, the metaphysical relation is a real transcendence. The relations of and within the Same, as unfolded in the following pages, are all immanent and are therefore called "analogous" to transcendence.\(^{21}\) They resemble the relations of the phenomenological intentionality and of Heidegger's being-in-the-world, although—as their description will show—in this respect, too, there are fundamental differences.

On the basic level of (human but still "elementary") life, the subject is present at itself—thus constituting a circle of vitality—by a peculiar relation that can neither be understood as the relation of a subject to one or more objects nor as the handling of tools or other beings that are ready-at-hand. This

20 The abstractness of section 2 is stated explicitly on 112\(^{34-39}\)/139\(^{14-17}\) and, very clearly, on 282/305: "To posit Being as Desire and as goodness is not to first isolate an I which would then tend toward a beyond. It is to affirm that to apprehend oneself from within—to produce oneself as I—is to apprehend oneself with the same gesture that already turns toward the exterior, to extra-vert and to manifest—to respond for what it apprehends—to express."

21 In partial contrast to the passages quoted in note 16 above, Levinas states here an analogy between transcendence and certain forms of intentionality (which he considers to be essentially immanent). Similarly he seems to permit the reader of TI 281–82/305 to understand the metaphysical relation as "primary analogatum" of all modes of Being: "The face to face is not a modality of coexistence . . . but is the primordial production of being to which all the possible collocations of the terms point (remontent)."
is described in the second subsection, "Living from ... (Enjoyment): The Notion of Accomplishment" (82–86/110–14). Ego is concerned and takes care of itself before it becomes conscious of itself. The primordial relation by which a human subject is constituted as a subject is its living "on" or "from"—and its enjoying—food, light, soil, water, sleep, work, and so on. It is not easy to translate the idiomatic French expression "nous vivons de bonne soupe, d'air . . .," but Levinas's description makes it clear that the concern of a solitary ego is a prereflective and preconscious turning back to itself that cannot be explained within the framework of theoretical self-consciousness. To live is a specific mode of commerce with things of the outside world, having to do with other beings that are not absolutely other because they can be swallowed, used, enjoyed, integrated in knowledge or practice. I am involved in an exchange with worldly things and elements that contribute to the realization of my possibilities. To live is to deploy and maintain relations with "other," exterior beings thanks to which I can persevere in my being. Some of these "exterior" things are necessary to my maintenance, others are only pleasant or nice, but of all of them I can say that I enjoy them or, on the contrary, that I suffer from them. Insofar as they all function within the horizon of my being and staying alive, what is their common structure? And what is the structure of such life? It is neither the structure of the representation of objects nor that of useful tools which function and signify as parts of an instrumental or referential network. Nor is life as such oriented to an end that would be different from its own continuation. It is first of all and essentially enjoyment, and its "intention" is happiness. Handling a hammer has a utilitarian purpose, but it may also—although by another "intention"—be experienced as pleasurable. Pleasure or enjoyment, however, do not refer to another goal or end outside them. Life lives for itself. It "exists" or "is" its own "content" in a transitive and reflexive sense of the words "is" and "exist." The original pattern of independence is this orientation toward the happiness of a pleasant life. A primary, self-centered, and sound hedonism is the spontaneous building up of a position that develops naturally into the egoism of unhindered autonomy.

The motivation of enjoyment must not be sought in some reasonable thought, such as the one that tells me: "If I do not eat, I'll die"; the tendency to pleasure and enjoyment is
completely spontaneous, it is the upsurge of life itself; but it is also true that the experience of enjoyment includes phenomenologically a moment of restoration (of our force, energy, vitality, mood, etc.). To live is to feel that one lives and that life strives at intensifying itself by enjoying its own vitality.

With regard to the food, the air, and the means *"on"* and "from" which we live, we experience them as being integrated into our enjoying ourselves. Their otherness—a nonabsolute but relative and integratable otherness—is "transmuted" in the Same of ego's economy. They are assimilated. In experiencing this sort of otherness, I experience, at the same time, the possibility and the desirability of their being transformed into parts or appendices of my own being. Enjoyment is always appropriation, assimilation, stilling of a need. Hunger is the paradigm: a privation that needs fulfillment. To live is a transitive way of existence, similar to the consumption of food on the basis of a need that promises a vital joy. In consumption, I experience not only my relation to the consumptive good but, at the same time, my relation to this relation. Not only do I enjoy food, but I enjoy my eating and feed myself with it; and not only do I enjoy my enjoyment, but I live (on/from) it; my life "is" and lives enjoyment.

The circularity of life's enjoying itself is typical for the pretheoretical and prepractical consciousness of a solitary ego taken on its most basic level. The difference with a representative or utilitarian attitude is clear. Fulfillment, not the maintenance of a bare and naked existence, is wanted. This circular, but neither specular nor speculative nor reflective, structure could be called the basic "concern" or "care" of human existence. This is not to say that this structure is limited to the basic needs of a corporeal existence. All other enjoyable things, such as work, music, study, making love, prayer, and so on can be experienced and "lived" as pleasure-giving and enjoyable beings. The circle of life is as wide as the totality of all human possibilities. Everything can enter into life as love of a "good," i.e., enjoyable life.

I will skip Levinas's discussions of Sartre (8428-30/11224-26), Aristotle (8434-8513/11230-1138), the Stoics (8522/11316), Heidegger (8525-28/11318-21), and Plato (8613-28/1144-14) and finish my summary of Levinas's description of life as enjoyment by rendering an important remark about its temporal structure. "Being" (beingness) is seen by Levinas as an anonymous duration
that does not have any beginnings or ends of itself. Acts do have beginnings or origins and ends or limits, but the dimension of life is more primitive than the level of acting. Enjoyment is, however, the experience of a time span in which the continuous flow of Being's time is arrested for a while. Every experience of happiness is the experience of an interval in which I feel myself as independent and sovereign with regard to the anonymous continuity from which it emerges. Instead of being taken away by the river of Heraclitus, I feel that my life is being gathered, recollected for a while.

In the third subsection, "Enjoyment and Independence" (86-88/114-15), Levinas shows that the enjoyment of life through consumption of "earthly" and celestial "nourishments" procures the human subject with its basic independence. Independence through dependence! Mastery on the basis of needs. A happy dependence. A human need is not a simple lack or mere privation, for it is experienced—and even enjoyed—as the possibility and promise of enjoyment. In the pleasure of satisfaction, the need, which was its painful condition, is remembered as a condition and source of plenitude. We are happy to have needs. To be alive is to be happy because of a fulfilling surplus of satisfaction, but it is also suffering because of lacking happiness. Enjoyment of life constitutes the independence and the very ipseity of the human subject—as long as we make abstraction from the intersubjective relation. It achieves the separation of an autonomous existence that feels at home in its world. Thus, needs and their fulfillment constitute me as the Same.

The fourth subsection, entitled "Need and Corporeity" (88-90/115-17), continues the analysis of the ambiguity characteristic for the human subject as having needs, that is, as being corporeal. Dependence on (nonabsolute but relative) otherness and independence from it are the two sides of a freedom that shows its mastery in possession, consumption, and exploitation but can also degenerate into a beastly slavery. Rooted in the world, the subject can also detach itself from it. The upright position of the body manifests its capability of handling the world and changing it through labor. Levinas uses here "the world" as a name for the totality of all the beings an ego encounters "before" it meets with the unique and absolute otherness of another human. Confronted with this "world" of

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22 Cf. Gide's Les nourritures terrestres.
consumptive and useful things and constellations, the corporeal subject experiences itself as an "I can"\(^{23}\) or, as Merleau-Ponty would say, as a "corps-sujet" for which the world spreads out. In this position, I am not just a part of nature but someone who has a distance enabling her to defend herself against the anonymous threats of the surrounding universe and to delay pains or unsatisfactory satisfaction. Such a delay and the distance that is a condition of it are possible only as a "having time": I have time for postponing the fulfillment of my needs, for instance, in order to cook my prey. But where does this time come from—and therewith my distance and detachment? The answer is that this is an anticipation: the emergence of the (absolute) Other provides me with it.

Although the title of the fifth subsection, "Affectivity as the Ipseity of the I" (90–92/117–20), seems to promise a further analysis of the affective elements of the enjoying subject, its text rather stresses its singularity. It gives a phenomenological answer to the old question of how we can determine the individuality of a this-now-here (tode ti) as such. The experience of a fulfilled need is the experience of isolation. Enjoyment makes solitary (you cannot feel my pleasures and pains) and confirms the enjoying subject in its identity with itself. Being at home with myself, I am separated from all others, a unique and original substance that does not let itself be absorbed by the continuity of the universe. The self-sufficiency or autarchy of a satisfied ego is its contraction and recoiling in itself—an interiorization but also an exaltation by which it lifts itself above "Being" (in a very flat sense of the word être). The experience of uniqueness, discretion, and originality, which constitutes the ipseity of an ego in enjoyment, cannot be reduced to the concept of individuality or singularity as it is understood by the philosophical tradition. The structure of a happy ego, identified by enjoyment from within, is not the structure of an individual instance that—together with other similar instances—falls under one species or genus. To be an ego is not to share a common nature or essence with other instances of the genus "human being," for it is, first of all and still without any rapport to similar beings, the center of the world, a demand for pleasure and a solitary power of exploitation to which all beings are submitted.

The phenomenological analysis has thus reached a point where its conclusions with regard to ontology become perceptible. In his intent to overcome ontology, Levinas points out (1) that the traditional conception of the individual and the scheme of genus-species-individual does not apply to the phenomena as described in this chapter and (2) that enjoyment, happiness, life, and the vital autarchy of the I cannot be explained in terms of Being alone, since the exaltation, i.e., the abundance, the surplus, and the heightening of enjoyment are "more" than Being. The polemical implications of this insight do not, however, touch Heidegger's conception of Being, since Heidegger would immediately agree that enjoyment is a particular mode of Being very different from studying an object or fighting against an enemy. The notion of Being attacked in this subsection is rather Sartrean or Wolffian; it has been emptied of all interesting qualifications, thus becoming a flat, worthless, or even completely indeterminate element of all beings. It is, however, very important that Levinas shows that the constitution of the ego on the level of its self-isolating enjoyment can be understood neither as a form of representation, nor as the handling of a tool or the contemplation of an object, nor as a longing for some telos, either. Its structure is original and unique, and perhaps Levinas is the first philosopher who gave a phenomenology of the living being—the animal or zooion—that we all, without exception and still uniquely and originally, are.

The phenomenology of enjoyment goes on in the second subsection of part B, but Levinas inserts first two subsections in which he reflects upon the methodological implications of his descriptions. The sixth subsection of part A, "The I of Enjoyment Is Neither Biological Nor Sociological" (92–94/120–21), seems somewhat out of place, since it is dedicated to an analysis of the metaphysical relation between me and the Other, which is needed for a real plurality of persons. It is, however, true that the separation of the independent ego, as shown in the above pages, is a condition for that relationship.

Part B (94–116/122–42) announces an analysis of "Enjoyment and Representation," but this topic is treated in its first subsection only, while subsections 2–5 give a further development of the phenomenology of life and enjoyment given in A.2–5. In the first subsection, "Representation and Constitution" (95–
100/122-27), Levinas gives a sharp analysis of Husserl’s conception of phenomenology and its key principle, “intentionality.” Its secret is the presence of representation. All intentions are either varieties of representation, or they are essentially supported by representing acts. In representation, the noema is an object that in principle fits adequately in a noesis. This implies that the constituting subject has its noema in perfect presence before itself and masters it in the form of a positing in front. This is a triumph of the Same: the gesture of a freedom without passivity, a presencing by which all a posteriori givenness becomes an a priori knowledge.

The contrast with the “intentions” that “constitute” the second subsection, “Enjoyment and Nourishment” (100-103/127-30), are obvious. The enjoying subject needs its dependence upon an exteriority that can be assumed but not constituted. It lives “from” and “on” its own passivity and is a conditional freedom, an acceptance and welcoming that enjoys its being dependent on a world by which it is preceded and sustained.

This section is one of Levinas’s many attempts to show that the traditional conception of knowledge, reality, human essence, and world are not the most fundamental and universal. Just as the metaphysical relation between the Other and me escapes from it, so also does the relation between the living I and the realities it enjoys. Of the latter, part A elucidated the subjective pole; the following sections of part B give more attention to that which procures us enjoyment.

The third subsection, “Element and Things, Implements” (103-8/130-34), shows the peculiarity of the enjoyable, no less different from things than from the ready-at-hand analyzed by Heidegger in the beginning of Sein und Zeit. To enjoy life is neither a vis-à-vis with regard to objects nor a participation—by handling tools or following signs—in a network of references; it is much more primitive, but all instrumentality and representation are rooted in it. To enjoy is to be immersed in an ambiance of elements, to breath the air, to bathe in water and sun, to be established on the earth. Elements are not things, because they are too indeterminate for that, too formless. Therefore, they cannot be possessed. Without limitations, without beginning or end, they come from nowhere; they emerge from an anonymous nothingness. They lack contours and qualification; rather than being substantial, they are pure qualities without supports. Since we bathe in them, they are
not really exterior, but they are not interior, either. Their indeterminateness precedes the difference between the finite and the infinite and makes them akin to the apeiron of Greek philosophy. Without face they have a certain depth.

A comparison of the enjoyment of the elemental with the structure of Zeughaftigkeit as analyzed by Heidegger (106–8/133–34) shows that the former does not imply the instrumental, utilitarian, and rational features of the latter and lacks all concern for a goal outside or beyond its own enjoyment. Enjoyment is completely careless, even about health or perseverance in existence. The egoism of hedonism is utterly frivolous. Sensibility is the name for that dimension of the human subject thanks to which it is able to have this pleasurable commerce with the elements (108–14/135–40). Against the traditional conception of the senses as the means through which we are able to know things, Levinas shows that the basic sensibility, in which all other intentions and relations are rooted, is an affective commerce with the elements, a naive and spontaneous feeling at home in a world that has not yet taken the form of an order of things, objects, instruments, and rational relationships. Feeling and affectivity, our bodies as carried by the earth and immersed in water, air, and light, do not constitute a sort of obscure or mutilated form of knowledge; they have a structure of their own that cannot be ignored or neglected, not even on the most sublime levels of religion and morality. The importance of Levinas's description of sensibility lies in its overcoming the old dualism of body and spirit. In enjoying the world, I am a body that feels itself as an affected and affective, corporeal and sensitive I, not as a disincarnate, invisible, or ethereal consciousness. My autonomy is a dependent independence, the satisfaction of my needs. The realm of the elements is an ambiguous one. Being a paradise when we enjoy it, it is also threatening, since nobody can possess it or guarantee its favors. Sensibility is an incurable unrest dependent on the contingencies of a future that remains uncertain. After moments of happiness, in which we feel no care, the menaces of the world come back. This experience is told in the mythologies of the elementary gods. They express "the mythical format of the element" (114–16/140–42). Against its threats, we can fight by trying to submit the world through labor. This is our answer to an uncertain future, as long as there still is an interval of time. Our insecurity may seduce us to a pagan worldview, but its myths will not open us to a real transcendence because our relation to the elemental does not open us to real otherness.
Part C, "I and Dependence" (116–25/143–51), resumes and refines some of the analyses summarized before, but its subtle and beautiful descriptions bring little positive news. In the first subsection, "Joy and Its Morrows" (116–18/143–44), the insecurity of our happiness is related to a dimension that is still more primitive than the elemental: the dimension of "there is" (il y a), which is the most indeterminate and qualified beingness, almost nothing, which we experience as an anonymous rumbling and rustling in the background of the world, inspiring horror and vertigo. Our intervals of happiness form discrete knots that interrupt the monotonous time flow of the "there-is." In the second subsection (118–20/144–47), Levinas insists on the fact that our love of life precedes—as a sort of paradise—all experiencing of pain and disgust. The native innocence of our enjoyment is demanded by the metaphysical relation, which, however, is an accusation of our egoism. Without the beginning in a paradise, without the individualism of a carpe diem, ego's adult independence, and therewith the separation of ego from the Other, would be impossible (cf. "Enjoyment and Separation," 120–25/147–51). This becomes still clearer in part D, "The Dwelling" (125–49/152–74).

The phenomenological "deduction" of the home in the first subsection, "Habitation" (125–27/152–54), is a further development of the distance, indicated before, by which the hedonistic subject is independent, thanks to its dependence with regard to the elemental world it enjoys. The insecurity and the threats that endanger the subject cannot be fought off unless there is a possibility of withdrawing from its involvement in nature, a rupture with the elemental realm by which the subject conquers a standpoint and a centerplace from which it can reach out into the world in order to possess and dominate it. This rupture, which is also a rupture with the mythical gods of nature, requires a retreat and a recollection: a house in which I withdraw and establish myself for a different sort of economy.

A house has some similarity with a tool, but, rather than a sort of thing or instrument or implement, it is the condition for all human action and reference. As a place where I can withdraw and recollect myself, it is characterized by intimacy. Being-at-home in this place means that one is at home in a familiar surrounding whose walls enclose an interiority, while the windows open up upon an exterior world into which one goes for conquering or labor. The intimacy and familiarity
proper to a home presuppose that it is already human, although—in this stage of our description—it is not yet necessary to introduce the metaphysical relation of one human to the absolute Other. It demands a certain "femininity" (subsection 2, "Habitation and the Feminine" [127–29/154–56]). Since Levinas warns his readers that "the empirical absence of the human being of 'feminine sex' in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there, as the very welcome of the dwelling" (131/158), we must understand that the "feminine" presence by which a building becomes a home is a metaphor for the discrete and silent presence of human beings for one another that creates a climate of intimacy indispensable for a dwelling that simultaneously protects and opens to the world of enjoyment, possession, and labor.24

The rupture with the elements and their gods (cf. subsection 3, "The Home and Possession" [129–31/156–58]) manifests itself most clearly in the complete secularization and humanization that is achieved when the subject seizes what it needs from the outside world. Whence the importance of the hand, analyzed carefully in this context (132–36/159–62 and 141–42/166–68). Levinas almost identifies here possession and labor (cf. subsection 4, "Possession and Labor" [131–36/158–62], and subsection 5, "Labor, the Body, Consciousness" [137–42/163–68]). Both are ways of grasping by which the grasped is transformed into a thing whose limits give it a form, having a use and belonging to a certain place. Thus, the realism of formless elements changes into an order of things: solid substances that can be identified, handled, and exchanged or transported as furniture dependent on human plans. The gods are dethroned by the human hand.

A laboring subject is a body that through its needs still depends on the contingencies of the world, but its distance permits it to delay dangers and death. It has time, a time of its own to procure for itself defenses and satisfaction; its labor manifests that it is a will. Body, hand, and will form the unique constellation by which the human subject is itself, separated from any other.

For several reasons, the last subsection of part D, "The Freedom of Representation and the Gift" (142–49/168–74), is particularly important. In it culminates the series of figures that constitute the economy of a solitary ego, but, at the same

24 See also DL 48–50.
time, it shows the necessity of surpassing that economy. More even than labor and possession, the representation of things shows the human possibility of treating the (relative) otherness of worldly beings as objective, presentable, and thematizable things. Representation, the source of all theory, looks at things and objectifies them by making them present. From the perspective of their having happened or emerged, it looks back upon them. Theory is essentially the remembrance of a past from its future. The stand of the representing subject manifests its freedom with regard to all exteriority. On the one hand, this stand is conditioned by the "intentions" formerly described (enjoyment, dwelling, seizure). On the other hand, it is uprooted and liberated from immersion in the world. But how is such a freedom possible?

This freedom presupposes an awakening that can only be given by the absolute otherness of the human Other. For how could I free myself from immersion into my needs and enjoyments? The uprooting presupposes that I have already heard the call or seen the face of a commanding Other. By revealing the violence of egoistic economy, the Other questions, criticizes, and refutes it. This provides the ego with the possibility of distancing itself from that economy. If I open myself up to the Other's claim, I and my home become hospitable; it is, however, also possible to persevere in the monopolization of the world and to choose the egoism of a Gyges.25

The objectifying language in which representation becomes a thematizing discourse dispossesses me of my monopoly and achieves the basic universalization by separating things from their being here and now involved in hedonistic egoism and making them into objects of a common speech and view.

In the last part of section 2, "The World of Phenomena and Expression" (149–58/175–83), Levinas unfolds the radical contrast between the universe of works, signs, symbols, and history on the one hand and what he in this book still calls "being as it is in itself"26 on the other hand. This part thus stands

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25 Cf. Plato, Politeia 359d–360d; and Herodot, Historiae 1:8–13; Levinas refers to it very often, e.g., in TI 3215,20/615,10; 6228,30/9010,12; 14430/170; 14814,16/17312,14; AE 185/145.

26 The Platonizing expression "être xéô th' av'tó" is found on many pages of TI but (almost?) always misspelled (e.g., 158/183). As a synonym, Levinas uses also the Kantian expression "chose en soi" (the thing in itself, e.g., 156/181).
between the world of egological representation with its objectifying language, which belongs to the economy of section 1, and the truth revealed in section 3. But it contains also a radical critique of the foundational claims of phenomenology.

The analysis of the work (œuvre) is the point of departure for the characterization of a universe that is composed of signs, texts, art products, and political works (such as, for instance, the founding of a state). The study of history focuses on these works in order to characterize their content and style and to reconstruct the constellations or "worlds" to which they belonged. By doing so, we get acquainted with anonymous worlds; with persons only to the extent to which they are exponents or functions of those constellations.

To know a person means that one pierces the masks formed by his or her texts, works, performances, gestures, and so on. These do not express who this or that person is, but they give only an impression of his or her appearance. Thus, Levinas opposes the expression to the work and the phenomenon of a person to his or her (true) being. To explain this difference, he very often quotes the phrase of Plato's *Phaedrus* opposing the written text to the speaking author, who can attend to his own discourse and "help" it personally, if necessary. Instead of a product that can neither look nor speak, it is a being *an sich* or "in itself" that looks and speaks to others (156\textsuperscript{3}/181\textsuperscript{2}). It is neither the textuality of literature or history nor the language of the structuralists or Heidegger's *Sprache*, which would "speak" before we use it, but, indeed, the face of someone who expresses him or herself in speech. Instead of calling this expression a phenomenon, Levinas reserves the words "revelation" and "epiphany" for it. When, in *Totality and Infinity*, he insists on the fact that the being of a person (or even his/her "being ἔαθ' ἐπίτο" [TI 158/183]) is not phenomenal in works but revealed in expression only, one could surmise that he, too, wants us to pass from phenomenology to ontology. However, since he reserves the title "ontology" for Heidegger's philosophy, and since—as we will see—the ultimate is not Being but the relation of the Same and the Other, Levinas moves in another direction. The ontological terms still used in *Totality and Infinity* will be replaced more and more by other words in order to avoid a falling back into the customary ways of understanding. In *Otherwise Than Being*, the opposition between phenomenon and expression will be replaced by the difference between the Said and the Saying, and

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27 *Phaedrus* 247b–277a and *TI* 45/73; 69–71/96–98.
Being will have joined the phenomenon as belonging to the same order of the impersonal.

The Face and Exteriority

After the abstract description of the isolated ego as the identification of the Same given in section 2, Levinas passes to an analysis of the Other as it presents itself concretely in the face of another human. Over against the "interiority" of egoistic psychism and its economy, the third section describes the dimension of "exteriority" opened up by otherness. The opposition between the interior and the exterior, as called forth in the titles of both sections, must not be heard as a rehearsal of the traditional opposition between the ego and its world or as between the subject and the objectivity with which it meets; for that opposition was part of the economy described in section 2. Through its needs and its enjoyment but also through representation and objectifying knowledge, the solitary ego is related to the "exteriority" of elements, equipment, things, and objects, but this "exteriority" cannot resist ego's encompassing capacity of appropriation and integration. The exteriority revealed by the face is that by which the alterity of the Other escapes from the dimension where interiority and exteriority, subject and object, mind and matter, traditionally are opposed and put into contradiction or mediated dialectically as moments of a differential whole.

The introductory part of section 3, "The Face and Sensibility" (161–67/187–93), is an epistemological analysis of the peculiar sort of "knowledge" by which we are aware of another's face. What sort of "experience" or "perception" or "thought"—in brief, what sort of "intention"—is presupposed and demanded for being able to receive the revelation of the face? In contrast with the gnoseological characteristics of sensibility and representation, as put forward in section 2, Levinas now specifies his question as a question about the difference between the Other's epiphany and the discovery of phenomena by the immediate sensibility of enjoyment and by perception, as thematized in the tradition of philosophy. Both perception and enjoyment are here taken together under the name "sensible experience" (expérience sensible). In a discussion of various epistemologists, Levinas tries to show that both sensibility and the peculiar awareness of the face differ—but in different
ways—from representational knowledge. The accent lies in this part still on sensible and representational knowledge; it can, thus, be read as a transition from section 2 to section 3.

According to the sensualistic theories of Condillac, for example, all knowledge is based on atomic "sensations" that—in some mechanical way—"compose" a formless "collection" of punctual states of mind that are purely qualitative and subjective. The classical refutation of sensualism by Husserlian phenomenology argues that it is impossible because it denies its necessary experiential basis. Indeed, we are always already confronted with things, substances, or objects and never with free-floating qualities alone. Qualities are always given in unity with things qualified by them.

Levinas's critique of this refutation starts by stating that it is given from the perspective of perception and representation. It is typical for this perspective that it sees sensibility as an inferior, handicapped, or primitive approximation of representation; however, sensibility is primarily not an unsuccessful attempt at acquiring knowledge but is rather affectivity and, more precisely, enjoyment. As such, it is the experience of pure qualitatively without substantial support, immersion in the elements, a form of sensation that precedes all distinctions between subject and object. To a certain degree, sensation should be rehabilitated as an a priori formal structure and a transcendental function sui generis. As enjoyment, it precedes the scission of consciousness in an I and a non-I, but it is not a content of consciousness, as both the sensualist philosophers and their critics would have it. Their error was that they identified the non-I with objectivity and did not see that it also encompasses that which is sensed by enjoying it and living from it. This error is connected with the traditional privilege given to vision and touch among the human senses. Eye and hand, optical and grasping gestures, dominate our contact with things. According to Western philosophy, all experience seems to be constituted by them. They are present—even verbally—in its ideas, concepts, conceptions, visions, comprehensions, perspectives, views, etc.

The structures of seeing and grasping are very similar. To begin with vision, its scheme is found in an eye seeing something (a thing or part of it) in the light that is needed for seeing at all. The light is not a thing but that which makes it possible that things appear. The light shows the thing within the surrounding or against the background of a
space, which should be a sort of void (at least insofar as other things in it are not focused on, i.e., insofar as they disappear behind their leaving the space to the thing that is seen). Thanks to the no-thing-ness of light and "space," we see things as manifesting themselves by setting themselves off against an openness. This openness (Being?) is not a pure nothing but rather the negation of all qualifiable beings. It can only be the impersonal limit-, contour-, and structurelessness of an apeiron or "there is" (il y a), the "silence of the infinite spaces" of which Pascal speaks, a treacherous semblance of nothingness, a hiding place of mythical powers without face, an indeterminate and opaque density without orientation or meaning, a senseless and therefore terrifying chaos. As a way of dealing with the elements in the function of human needs, enjoyment is the beginning of meaning; vision and grasping, too, reveal meaning, but they do not abolish—rather maintain—the quasi-nothingness that is the condition of all thingness.

Vision passes into seizure as representation passes into labor when they conquer a world of inhabitation, instruments, and objects, but they do not break or transcend the horizons of immanence. From their perspective, all beings are seizable and comprehensible as parts of a universal panorama. All meaning is, then, a function of the system in which they have their place. All things are approached laterally, as if by ruse; nothing is encountered face-to-face. Vision and handling form a refuge for any subject that, not satisfied by the fulfillment of its needs, has not discovered the possibility of being freed from its immanence by the Other's infinity. By representation and projection, the hand and the eye consummate the economy of egology. Light and "clearing" cannot provide this liberation because they remain "interior"; transcendence to the "outside" has another structure.

In two short passages, Levinas shows how a similar structure is also found in science and art. Especially the latter passage (176/192-93) is important because it contains an implicit criticism of all those theories which pretend that art—and not morality or religion—can liberate human freedom and overcome the crisis of Western egology.

Part B of section 3, "Face and Ethics" (168–95/194–219), could be considered the central part of the book. Although the introductory section 1 has already anticipated its topics, it is
here that the concretion of the Other in face and speech receives its main description. Levinas shows how the extraordinary relation opened by another's looking at me and speaking to me causes a discontinuity of the encompassing world and context that is common to us. The gathering of beings, universal and totalizing beingness, and the history of works are disrupted. Ego's autonomy is shocked and put into question; its ruthless spontaneity is converted into shame and conscience is awakened. The asymmetry instituted by the encounter has the structure of the idea of the infinite. The other's face (or speech) is not similar to a work or to language as structure or text or literary tradition; its infinite resistance to my powers is not a power—as if we were still in the dimension of Hobbes's war of equal wills—but an expression that forbids and commands me ethically. The first revelation of an astonishing otherness that cannot be reduced to a moment of my world is neither the splendor of the cosmos nor the task of my self-realization; it is the living interdiction of killing this vulnerable, defenseless, and naked other in front of me. This revelation gives me an orientation and bestows a meaning on my life (cf. the subsections 1 and 2, "The Face and the Infinite" and "Face and Ethics" [168–75/194–201]). In the third subsection, "Face and Reason" (176–79/201–4), Levinas draws some conclusions from his description for the "logic" of "first philosophy." The sincere and univocal character of the face, by which it is an expression and neither a phenomenon nor a symbol or a mask, precedes not only its possible hypocrisy but also all actions or words. The face differs, thus, essentially from any text or work or fact of culture. Therefore, it does not call for a hermeneutical approach but rather for a very different response. The "visage" differs even from vocal speech or the faculty of seeing: blind and mute persons can also "look" at me, "regard" me, and "speak" to me.

Instead of initiating a hermeneutical circle, the face claims the responsibility of the one to whom it "appears" or to whom it speaks. This is the first teaching, which precedes all possibility of remembrance and reminiscence. The equivocities

28 "Face" and "speech" (parole, langage, or discours) are here partes pro toto; the other can "present him/herself in person"—but in a way different from Husserl's "bodily presence"—by many parts or gestures: "In the face the being par excellence presents itself. And the whole body—a hand or a curve of the shoulder—can express as the face" (239–40/262).
of poetics and hermeneutics belong to a different dimension than the appeal to a straightforward responsibility aware of the (moral) impossibility of murder.

Levinas contrasts the prose of moral responsibility with the charms of the more dramatic incantations and intoxications of poetic and mystical enthusiasms. The face-to-face is a sincere and sober response more concerned with not doing violence than with aesthetic enjoyments. The instruction brought to me by the emergence of a face is neither a dogma nor a miracle but the initiation of a meaning.

In the fourth subsection, "Discourse Founds Meaning" (179–84/204–9), Levinas shows that speaking is radically different from "the language" conceived of as an impersonal system or heritage, of which some claim that "it speaks." Without the face, there would be neither a beginning in language nor any signification, for the language would not be voiced and addressed by someone to someone. The rather difficult discussion with Merleau-Ponty's theory of language included in this section (180–81/205–6) can be clarified by a comparison with Levinas's essay "Meaning and Sense" (CPP 75–108).

In the fifth subsection, "Language and Objectivity" (184–87/209–12), Levinas takes up certain themes of section 2 (especially D 6, 142–49/168–74) in showing that the emergence of the visage is a condition without which thematization and objectivity would not be possible. Alluding to the fifth of Husserl's Cartesian Meditations, on the connections between objectivity and intersubjectivity, against Kant's and Heidegger's philosophy of originary finiteness, and with Descartes, Levinas defends the primacy of the infinite and its concrete presentation in the other's face.

All theory thematizes (i.e., represents and objectifies), but objectification is essentially the designation of beings in a discourse addressed to other humans. Without another being there in front of me, I could not free myself from immersion in the elementary enjoyment of my surroundings. The other's presence, however, gives me the possibility of offering something to him or her. By offering to someone what I until then enjoyed alone, the elements change into things, they receive another orientation, leave my economy, and become gifts, symbols of welcoming, addressed and presented, possibly common and universal. Objects are born when I place things in the perspective of other persons. Detached from their hedonistic and egocentric function, those things receive an intersubjective meaning and existence. Donation is the necessary condition of distance and objectivity. The
absoluteness (or infinity) of the other cannot be constituted on the basis of an objectifying activity such as representation, thematization, or theory; the infinite is presupposed for it; objectification is a subordinate reality.

Subsection 6, entitled "Autrui et les Autres" ("The Other and the Others") (187–90/212–14), is the only part of Totality and Infinity where Levinas sketches the "principles" of something like a social philosophy and thus answers an objection familiar to all readers of his book. If autrui (this other who faces me or talks to me) reveals the infinite that commands my economy, what, then, about all the other others, what about human society and humankind as a whole? Does not Levinas's "moralism" of the face-to-face destroy the possibility of a social philosophy that is more than an analysis of "you and me"? What, then, is the place of politics? The traditional foundation of modern social philosophy starts from a perspective characterized by, at least, the following assumptions: there is a multiplicity of human beings; as individual instances of the genus "human being," they are fundamentally equal autonomous subjects having equal rights as far as their existence and necessary satisfaction are concerned. The main problem of social philosophy is the question of how a multitude of independent and equal individuals can form one more or less harmonious and peaceful whole.

Levinas's attempt to "deduce" the principles of a social and political philosophy from the asymmetric relationship that constitutes the intersubjectivity of the Other (you) and the Same (me) does not concentrate on the participation of human individuals in the life and the ethos of a people or nation; he focuses on the question of how the primordial relation of the other to me gives birth to my being related to all other possible others. This question remains here subordinated to the perspective that was indicated in the title of section 3 B, "The Face [i.e., Autrui] and Ethics" (168ff./194ff.): What does the Other in the form of autrui reveal, and how does he or she relate to me? Very succinctly stated, the answer does not contain the principles of a political constitution but rather shows how the dimensions of society and politics emerge from the asymmetric relation of intersubjectivity, which—as originary relationship—precedes all sorts of universality and community. The dedication of the Same to the Other "founds" the being-with-one-another (their Miteinander-sein) or the original We (and not the other way around); the relation of transcendence does not imprison you and me in the intimacy of
an exclusive love but opens me up to all others by obligating me to orient our common world to all the others' well-being. My responsibility for this other here and now who faces me is not confined to him or her; it does not have the clandestine and exclusive character of love and intimacy, but neither is it the application in this case of a general norm that would be valid for all the individual instances of the general class "human beings," whose equal rights would be due to their forming a community or having a common essence. My responsibility for you extends itself necessarily to all human others; it implies my responsibility for social justice and worldwide peace.

In the text of subsection 6, we can distinguish several arguments. The first argument states that the visage of the other ("you" who regard me) reveals not only the other's obliging height but also and ipso facto "the third," that is, any other human being. The demanding presence of the other's face is the presence of the third. "The third regards me in the eyes of the other." Autrui, this other, is in fact simultaneously the revelation of any possible other. "The Other" is also the name for everybody who is not I. Autrui is not my beloved or a special friend of mine, for everyone can approach and surprise me in a similar, contingent but infinitely obligating way. "The third" is equivalent to that which makes you ("my other") commanding for me: neither some virtue or special feature nor your belonging to a particular society, people, or family but only your being poor and naked, an exile and stranger without power or protection. The destituteness of the other's nudity, his/her being neither a particular person nor an indifferent instance of a general class of beings, is the secret of my discovering myself as demanded and dedicated without ever having chosen it. The claim by which you awaken me to my responsibility stems from your being a miserable other, not from any specific or particular feature. The other is at the same time unique—and thus incomparable—and nothing special—and therefore in a very special sense "universal." The demands revealed in your face, here and now, are the demands for universal and privatizing love. Insofar as any other other ("the third") is present "under the species" of your face, all others are equal. Universality and equality are "founded
upon” the original asymmetry; they are not the starting point, as if our acquaintance with a general class “human being” would be the starting point for ulterior specifications such as love, justice, friendship, concern, etc.; the other’s (your) coming to the fore reveals the unicity of all others.

From the fact that the third is revealed “in” and “through” the face of the other, it follows that I am related to many others who urge me with equal absoluteness to dedicate myself to them. This destroys the monopoly of one other’s demands: I must divide my time and energy in order to respond to more than one revelation of the infinite. I must compare those who are incomparable, treat unique others as instances of one universal essence. Here lies the origin of a form of justice that demands and presupposes the structures of logical and ontological universality: in order to do justice to all others—and not to neglect any one of them—we must originate a political, economical, judicial, and social system that balances and guarantees at least the minimum of the absolute demands expressed by the other’s presence.

Would it not have been possible to deduce this conclusion directly from the fact that the phenomenological analysis of the visage, necessarily and ipso facto, is an analysis of the essence of the visage and therewith an analysis of all possible visages? Such an argument would have stressed that there are many others besides the other who, here and now, is facing me. Probably Levinas avoids this argument because of its assumption that the universal concept of all human others—a sort of general class of human beings, in which I am the only missing instance—is contemporary with, or even anterior to, the encounter of the other’s uniqueness, here and now. However, he uses this argument, at least implicitly, when he himself assumes that the other’s face reveals not only this unique other but a third and a fourth and an nth other, all equal to the first one insofar as they are all equally unique, naked, and devoid of particular properties. For how could one discover that the other whose absoluteness puts an infinite claim on me simultaneously hides and reveals a multiplicity of equal others if the existence of other faces and their essential
equality to the first face was not discovered before or at the same time? Still, Levinas can maintain that the revelation of the third as "universal" other is a subordinate moment within the revelation of you, here and now, as the "primary" unique other if it is true that the latter "contains" the first. This presupposes, however, as he will repeat several times in *Otherwise Than Being*, that the third is "not an empirical fact," (but, rather, an essential structure of "the other"). Although we probably cannot maintain that the encounter with the first other (you) precedes all acquaintance with the universality of the other's demanding unicity, the advantage of Levinas's procedure lies in his showing the unique character of the asymmetric relation between the other and me, which is neither blurred by its multiplication nor reduced to being an indifferent instance of some preceding general concept such as "human otherness." A second argument is given in the statement that the other who faces me (you) is the servant of another (the third: "he" or "her") who is the other for "my other." Whereas the first argument—by a (trans)phenomenology of the face—started from the fact that the nudity of the face did not exclude but, on the contrary, included all other faces, it is not easy to find a phenomenological basis for this second argument. The argument runs thus: *Aetrui* ("you" or the other whom I encounter) is not alone insofar as he/she already serves another (the third), whom I have not encountered. You, who oblige me, are another ego, that—just as I am—is under an infinite obligation because you are faced by another other.

This argument presupposes that I see you at the same time in two "functions": (1) you are an absolute

29 Cf. *AE* 201, 204/158, 160.

30 The argument that starts from the fact that there are other Others besides you, the unique Other here and now, is made explicit by Levinas in *AE* 200ff./157ff.

31 Similarly, we read in "Paix et proximité" (Les cahiers de la nuit surveillée, no. 3: Emmanuel Levinas (Paris: Verdier, 1984)), 345: "Le tiers est autre que le prochain, mais aussi un prochain de l'autre et non pas son semblable. Qu'ai-je à faire? Qu'ont-ils déjà fait l'un à l'autre? Lequel passe avant l'autre dans ma responsabilité? Que sont-ils donc, l'autre et le tiers, l'un par rapport à l'autre? Naissance de la question" ("The third is other than the neighbor but also a neighbor of the other"
claim with regard to me; this is why you are other and
neither a repetition of my ego nor another instance of
a universal concept such as "subjectivity," "conscious-
ness," "reason," "will," or "ego" and (2) you are, just
as I am, a subject that has been surprised by an other
who reveals to you the infinite by making you infi-
nitely responsible for this other. In the first function,
you are absolutely different from me; in the second
function, however, you are completely equal to me—
not identical—because we are both constituted as
unique egos by the infinite claim of a unique other,
yet equal. The characterization of you (my other) as an
ego who is equally responsible for your other(s) is not
contained in Levinas's description of the other. If this
were the case, the asymmetry of you and me would at
least be interwoven with the fundamental equality of
our being ethical subjects of an endless obligation.

Levinas indeed states this equality and adds to it
our being associated in the infinite task of serving the
other(s), but he wants to make sure that this associa-
tion is posterior and not—like Heidegger's Mitsein\textsuperscript{32}—
anticipatory to your and my being oriented and obliged by
the (your and my) other. You (the other who is already
serving another other) associate me with your task and
you join me in my task. (Indeed, it does not make
any difference which other I must serve, since the
revelation of the infinite lies in the nakedness of the
other as such and not in any particular feature.) And
thus the first form of being-with-one-another is based
on your and my being-for-the-other. Against Heideg-
ger's claim that concern for another \textit{(Fürsorge)} would
be a particular form of Miteinandersein, Levinas main-
tains that the infinite concern of the Same for the
Other is the infinite origin of all forms of being-with,
togetherness and society. However, here, as in the first

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. TI 39/67-68 for Heidegger's conception of intersubjectivity as
beginning in a "coexistence" or \textit{we} preceding the relation of the other
and I.
argument, it seems inevitable to assume beforehand that both you, "my other," and I are different as well as similar; since both of us are egos, we are "the same." For how could we otherwise state that the other ("you"), just as I am, already is demanded by another other (the third—him or her). But if this assumption is valid, why should we not then begin by stating that all others are—just as I myself am—identical with me insofar as they, too, are egos subjected to the other’s claims? In fact, Levinas implies this statement in every sentence that describes or analyzes the features of "the" ego, "the" Other, "the" unique, "the" Same, and so on. The universality proper to the language of logic and ontology cannot be detached from the encounter of you and me as long as we treat it as a topic or theme for a theoretical text.

If everybody is infinitely responsible for everybody else, it might seem that the much stressed asymmetry between the Other and the Same disappears—unless we stress that I (this unique I who speaks or writes here and now) am more responsible and, therefore, more guilty than all others. This would bring us close to the sentence that Levinas so often quotes from Dostoyevski’s Brothers Karamazov: "We all are responsible for everything and everyone in the face of everybody, and I more than the others." However, the meaning of "more" in this sentence is not immediately clear, and it does not suffice for a rejection of all symmetry because, if it is true, it is valid for all possible egos, who, therefore, must confess that they are more obliged than all other egos.

As soon as I know that you, my other, are claimed in the same way by any Other, the detour by a third seems to become unnecessary: the reason why I say that you are responsible is either identical with the reason why I become aware of my own responsibility (in fact, this is the case when I write a text for you—and all other readers—about the responsibilities of any ego); or I must describe the relation between "my other" (you) and "the other’s (your) other" as a relation that, in this respect, is identical to my being related

33 Cf., for instance, Ethique et Infini, 95.
to you. Therewith, I would show that "the other" (you) is obliged by any other, from which it follows that all others are reciprocally obliged. In the name of its essential asymmetry, Levinas constantly denies the reciprocity of the metaphysical relation, but this rejection seems to rest on an illegitimate identification of the category reciprocity with another category that could be called "double asymmetry": when A is infinitely obliged by B, B can still be infinitely obliged by A. This reciprocity does not necessarily entail that A is allowed to claim as much from B as the existence of B claims from A (nor that B may claim from A the same sacrifices the existence of A demands from B). Reciprocally the existence of A and of B as others demand much more from the ego (of B or A) to which they reveal themselves than that which these egos are allowed to claim for themselves. 34 I can, and sometimes must, sacrifice my life for some other, but I can never claim that another should sacrifice his or her life for me, for this would be a sort of murder. Notwithstanding the difficulties that emerge from the second argument, its advantages are that it expresses clearly (1) that the infinite obligation by which ego is related to the other is a relation of universal justice and not of exclusivity and (2) that the basis of human sociability is found in a multiplicity of unique others who cannot be reduced to indifferent instances of a general concept "human being" or "Other."

The third argument given in the text of subsection 6 can be seen as a further analysis of the second one. It is contained in the statement "autrui me commande de commander" ("the other commands me to command"). You, who are the demanding presence of the other, you command me to be your servant, but since

34 Levinas states a certain form of reciprocity in writing the following lines: "And if the other can invest me and invest my freedom, of itself arbitrary, this is in the last analysis because I myself can feel myself to be the other of the other (me sentir comme l'Autre de l'Autre). But this comes about only across very complex structures" (TI 56/84). However, this reciprocity should not be thought as a "separation of Me" that would be "the reciprocal of the Other's transcendence with regard to me" (TI 24/52). In any case, reciprocity (e.g., in the form of Buber's I-Thou) is not original (TI 40/68).
you yourself are a servant, you order me to assist you in your serving the third. Thus your commanding me specifies only your associating me to yourself, which was stated in the second argument. However, since I am a free, autonomous ego and not a slave, I, too, am in command. Against Sartre and certain neo-Hegelians, Levinas wants to make sure that to be dedicated as a servant does not have anything to do with alienation or slavery. His apology for the other’s highness does not invert the roles of master and slave but shows that to live and die for the other accomplishes the ultimate meaning of a free and responsible mastery of oneself (188/213). Levinas does not explain here what or whom the other orders me to command, but in all probability we may complete his phrase by relating the latter “command” to the development of the judicial, political, economic, and technological institutions that are demanded for a world of general justice.

The peculiar structure of this third argument, too, is motivated by the attempt to avoid starting from the thesis that the other and I are equal insofar as we are equally responsible for all other human beings. By putting the other (you) and me under the same obligation, this thesis would, indeed, seem to destroy the asymmetry of the originary relation. It would rather look like a Kantian thesis about the universal imperative by which everybody is ordered to respect everyone else,

35 Cf. “Le Moi et la Totalité” (“Ego and Totality”) (Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale 59 [1954]: 370–71/CPP 43): “But if this recognition were a submission to him, the submission would take all its worth away from my recognition; recognition by submission would annul my dignity, through which recognition has validity.”

36 In “Ego and Totality,” however, the fact of the other commanding me to command is explained in the following way. Since my respect for the other is not possible, unless I am in command of myself and capable of producing a work by my own capacities, the command by which the other commands me cannot involve humiliation but must simultaneously command a work from me and command me to command him/her, who commands me (CPP 43, French edition, 371). Here Levinas himself formulates the reciprocity, which I called a “double asymmetry” before. The essay presents this “reference from one command to the other command” as constituting the union that is expressed in our use of the pronoun “we.” The we is, thus, not the plural of I but—so we may complete his sentence (CPP 43)—the solidarity constituted by our mutual respect, command, and productivity.
with this difference, however, that Kant's notion of respect for the humanity (die Menschheit) in all human beings, I myself included, would be replaced by a being-for whose "noema" would not be the human essence, reason, or any other universal value but rather the unique other that a unique ego in a contingent timespace "here and now" would encounter. The asymmetry of the encounter could be saved even if we would start from the assumption that everybody, as "an ego," "experiences" another as imposing an infinite responsibility. However, if the universal experience of asymmetry is true, it seems to lead to the contradictory conclusion that all people are simultaneously "higher" than all people. Must we avoid this contradiction by declaring the "experience" of asymmetry to be a subjective appearance, or can we maintain the truth of this asymmetry as the secret of morality by showing that the immediacy of the relation to the other cannot be expressed in the language of a general overview of all people involved, i.e., the language of universality and ontology? Levinas contends that the order of universal justice and reciprocity, as symbolized by the equality of the primary other and the third, is a consequence of the primordial relationship of transcendence and that the language of universal classes and individual instances, as it is used in traditional philosophy, is a secondary one: the language of theory. Theory, logic, philosophy, and all thematization are preceded by a more originary language to which the language of philosophical universality owes its capacity of being spoken to other speakers. The speaking of speakers, through which they address themselves to one another, presupposes, however, another, more originary universality: not the universality of genera and species but, as we will see further on, that of a sort of kinship: the community of human beings is constituted as a "fraternity" (cf. section 4, 227ff./254ff.).

The "deduction" of the third and the obligation of universal justice from the metaphysical relation of the Same and the Other has left us with a series of difficult questions that all are related to the "logic" of Levinas's enterprise and its relation to Western "ontologic." In a way, one can say that Levinas, by showing
a transition from the originary relation to general justice and theory, wants to indicate the relative function, value, and truth of Western ontology and its logic. At the same time, however, he stresses the fact that concern for "the third," i.e., dedication to the cause of universal justice, is the core of the prophetic message that entered Western civilization not primarily by the way of Greek philosophy but rather through the biblical message. The prophets—neither the kings of Israel nor the emperors of the heathens—were the protagonists of a justice that extends itself to the whole of humankind. The nakedness of the other symbolizes also the other's being unprotected, exiled, and dissociated as a stranger who still must be served as the presence of the infinite. The third, i.e., all others, is present in my being related to you. All others prevent our relation from closing itself up into exclusive love or friendship. Insofar as one respects the presence of the third and remains open to the dimension of a humanity of universal justice and peace—insofar as one's practice remains open to a future of prophetic eschatology—one continues to give a prophetic message of world peace and a special sort of universality.

Although this analysis of the few pages (187–90/212–14) dedicated in Totality and Infinity to the passage from intersubjective transcendence to social universality is already rather extensive, the importance of the question—which may function as a test case for the strength of Levinas's position—might justify that I make a few observations about the answers given in some former and later publications. The only philosophical essay in which Levinas, before the publication of Totality and Infinity, had given a more extensive analysis of society as such is "Le Moi et la Totalité" ("Ego and Totality," CPP 25–46). It had been preceded by the short but dense article "Liberté et Commandement" ("Freedom and Command," CPP 15–24), which also treated certain aspects of social life but focused primarily on the question of to what extent an individual will can resist tyrannical violence. Often referring to Plato's Republic, this article builds up an argument for the necessity of politics, the state, and
positive laws as the necessary conditions for the possibility of individual freedom, which, in its turn, conditions morality. However, rather than being an investigation into social institutions, the article is a meditation on the interpersonal relations involved in violence and resistance to violence.

"Ego and [Social] Totality," too, begins with the question of how we can overcome the moment of violence that seems to be inherent in every human individual's freedom. Freedom is here understood in the sense that is developed in section 2 of *Totality and Infinity*, namely as the spontaneity of an independent life. To live means to behave as the center of a universe that is defined in terms of needs and satisfactions; in living on account of (or "from") the surrounding totality of beings, one confounds one's own individuality and particularities with that totality. Life is the practice of the Same as the active determination of all otherness, without being determined by any other. It is a cynical behavior reducing all otherness to being elements of the vital substance.

Seen as an activity within the self-realization of an isolated human life, thinking is a way of situating oneself within a totality of elements, beings, and relations, while maintaining a distance toward it. The illusory innocence of this spontaneity is, however, demystified by the emergence of the other, who miraculously awakens the vital consciousness to the guilt of its ruthless egocentrism. This awakening—primordial shame—is the first possibility of an interpersonal relationship.37

The relation to which the other calls me is not the closed "society" of love. God is not to be found in romantic love (amour) or in friendship but in the law of justice, that is, in the nonintimate relationship to the other, who is called here—in opposition to the second person of the beloved Thou—"the third." I would neglect the third and do injustice to him or her if I

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37 Levinas often uses the words "social" and "society" to indicate the dual relationship between *autrui* (who demands the dedication of "my whole soul, heart, all my forces") and me. It might be helpful to distinguish systematically between social (or collective) and intersubjective (or interpersonal) relationships.
were to abandon myself to the dual privacy of love. In order to do justice to the third, i.e., to all people, the institutions of a political body are necessary warrants. The third is, indeed, not helped by good intentions or remorse and shame alone; what counts is deeds of concern, objective goodness, and fair distribution of material goods: a work of economical justice.

It is important to notice that Levinas's intention in writing this text is the same as the one expressed in subsection 6 of part B interpreted above: social justice is necessary and essential; it cannot be justified by a dual relationship alone and thus not by the originary relation between ego and other because this would develop into an exclusive association excluding all others from its infinite demands. However, the expression "the third" has a different meaning in these texts: whereas Totality and Infinity presents the "second" as the first and original other (who, as such, is not a beloved or friend but a naked other without other qualification than his/her otherness), "Ego and Totality" identifies "the third" with the other and the "second" with the beloved person who is too intimate to deserve the name of "other."

The insight that universal justice is "better than" love does not entail the triumph of impersonality! The relation to the other as not beloved but respected third is a relation of goodness with regard to the singularity of this unique one who needs and claims my dedication. The domain of social justice, i.e., the institutional totality that is demanded, is not a purely anonymous realm ruled by universal laws. If that were the case, the individuality of its members would be destroyed. The social totality demanded by the claims of justice is composed of relations relating concrete egos who maintain their unicity while forming a community. How is this possible?

A community of free individuals is one whole, but its unity is not that of a general concept. It implies the possibility and the reality of one's will being the "cause" of another's willing what the first one wants this other to do. The fact of one's will having power over another is, however, the core of violence or injustice. The social totality we are looking for is, thus, a
community in which injustice is possible and necessary. This strange conclusion must be understood in the following way. Every form of society is based on a certain injustice: the injustice of an identification by which people's wills are equated with the works that are produced by their activities. Someone's expression is, however, different from his or her work (œuvre). Face and speech express the other, but works are not expressions, although, as phenomena with an original style, they show certain characteristics of their producer. They rather betray—at least in part—the will from which they stem. A work can be separated from its author and become part of a history from which the author is absent. As a moment of an anonymous history, the work has a meaning of its own, different from the meaning intended and effectuated through it by its author. The meaning of a work is a function of the social order and its historical economy. From the perspective of society and history, human individuals count as authors of works; in a philosophy that does not permit another—e.g., the moral—perspective, they cannot refuse to be identified with their products. Thanks to their works, individuals can enter into relations with colleagues or other citizens, but they can also be forced, corrupted, or seduced through the manipulation of their works by others. A society that is based solely on the production of work in the broadest sense of the term is defenseless against the power of money, blackmail, violence, and injustice. The secret of all philosophy that considers society and history to be the supreme perspective is war and exploitation.

The only possibility of protecting the human will against violence and corruption lies in a society that would be capable of suppressing all opportunities of betrayal. But is this not a utopian desire? World history seems to prove that people and events are united by the powers of violence and injustice. Any social universe seems defenseless against the interplay of conflicting interests and liberties. As based on the products of human activities, the judgment of history is an unjust outcome, and if the social totality is constituted by violence and corruption, there seems to be no hope for a just society unless justice can be brought
into it from the outside. This is possible only if society and world history do not constitute the dimension of the ultimate. The power of nonviolence and justice lies in the dimension of speech and the face-to-face, the dimension of straightforward intersubjectivity and fundamental ethics, which opens the closed totality of anonymous productivity and historicity. However, the irruption of the ethical into the anonymous is not possible unless those who are facing and speaking to one another also participate in the interplay of the political and economical network to which human productivity gives birth. Ethics, economy, politics, and history cannot be separated. Although the ethical dimension transcends the dimension of world history, it must politicize itself in order to develop into a concrete and universal justice.

Thus, in this article, too, Levinas has shown that a society without ethics necessarily will be unjust, but, more clearly than elsewhere, he shows that the "totality" (i.e., the society as a collectivity whose social structures hide the unique and personal character of the face-to-face relations among its members) is also a necessary condition and integral element of the justice demanded in the face-to-face. Morality judges history, and not the other way around. But ethics is not serious if it does not concretize itself in judicial and political institutions. All forms of justice are, however, preceded by the ethical inspiration that is found in the immediate response of unique individuals to unique others who express themselves through eyes and words.

In *Otherwise Than Being* (200–207/157–62), Levinas gives a new analysis of the constellation *I-the other-the third*. He takes up the analysis of *Totality and Infinity* and develops it further within the broader question of how the relation of transcendence (which is thematized in *Otherwise Than Being* under the name of the Saying) and the inevitable dimension of thematizing, universalizing, and objectifying discourse (the Said) are connected and interwoven, as is shown in all our communication (*TI* 195ff./153ff.). The enigma on which Levinas concentrates here is the necessary union of the infinite responsibility for the other (*autrui* or the
prochain—i.e., the nearest one or the "neighbor") with the theoretical and practical (moral and political) forms of universalization, as, for instance, developed in the judicial system or in ontology.

The thesis defended in these pages states that the transition from transcendence to universality (or from the Saying to the Said) is necessitated by the emergence of the third. If I were only related to one other human, our intimacy would not be bothered by any question about universality; neither general justice nor philosophy would pose any problem for me because I would be taken entirely by my responsibility for you. It is the third—and this is not a contingent empirical appearance but rather a structural component of my proximity to you—who introduces the necessity of universalization, objectification, totality, and even calculus, into the relation of transcendence that constitutes me as a subject.

Thus, in contrast with Hegel's deduction of reason, universality, and self-consciousness from the encounter of two consciousnesses, Levinas claims that without a third person there would not even be consciousness (in the emphatic sense of a panoramic and totalizing openness). But would not the Saying always imply a Said, and would this not necessarily include at least some "objective" elements about which the sayer would state or promise or say something? Is not the "something" (the ti) of Aristotle's legein ti kata tinos (saying something about something) inherent to all Saying, at least in its affirmative function? By stating that "consciousness is born as presence of the third," Levinas wants to show that the face-to-face and the dimension of politics and philosophy are, indeed, interwoven and inseparably intermingled but also distinct and incommensurably different.

His starting point is here again a threefold characterization of the third: "The third is (a) other than the neighbor (le prochain), but also (b) another neighbor, but also (c) a neighbor of the Other (l'Autre)" (200/...
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157). If, in agreement with the bulk of Otherwise Than Being, we substitute le prochain for l'Autre (or Autrui), we can state the following equivalences between the pages we are examining here and the subsection of Totality and Infinity on Autrui et les Autres explained above: (b) the third as another other or prochain for me corresponds to the third as presented in the first argument of that subsection; (c) the third as prochain of "my" other corresponds to the third as analyzed in the second argument; (a) the third as other than (or different from) the (i.e., "my") prochain is not thematized explicitly in Totality and Infinity, but the difference is presupposed in all the arguments. Indeed, the third comes to the fore as a virtual (and thus anonymous) face behind or "in" your face, and he/she has to be discovered as "also an other" (autrui or "nearest one"). Since the possibilities and difficulties of (b.1) the third as other other and (c.2) the third as my other's other have been exposed above, we can limit our further analysis to (a) the structure of the third being as the other (or neighbor) of "my" other (or neighbor). For me (the subject of a relation to the infinite in the other and of a relation to the one who is the infinite for this other), the emergence of a third means that my infinite responsibility for the other makes it impossible to concentrate on the needs and desires of the third, although this virtual and as yet still anonymous other is already calling for a "same sort of" responsibility. I cannot be infinitely responsible for the third because I am infinitely responsible for the other. Since I am responsible for the other—and, thus, for his/her life—I am also responsible for his being related to his other, who for me is the (or all) third, but I cannot identify myself with the other's infinite responsibility for his/her other unless I let my care and attention for so many others be divided and, thus, limited by their multiplicity.

The simultaneity of many others distances me from the infinity of my responsibility. The contradiction caused by an infinite claim that is multiplied can only be overcome by the opening up of a dimension in which all others are served, respected, and treated justly: the dimension of universal justice. The infinite "principle" of transcendence (or—as Levinas
calls it in *Otherwise Than Being*—of proximity) necessitates its own universalization and therewith a certain limitation. This is the “origin” of justice as the concern for a universally just order. This justice demands comparison (of unique and incomparable others), coexistence (of those whose “truth” can only “appear” in a face-to-face), gathering, equality (of the differentes), administration, politics (which necessarily includes totalization), and so on. As a dimension of universality and totalization, this is also the dimension of ontology or philosophy in its classical form. And since this philosophy can be characterized as the quest for the origin (in the form of archè, causa, or principium), the relation of transcendence and infinity, as necessarily passing over into universal justice, can be called “the origin of the origin” (204/160).

The importance of Levinas’s new attempt to connect justice, politics, ontology, universality, and totality with transcendence and the infinite lies in the fact that they are thereby rooted in, and preceded by, a “more originary,” “pre-” or—as Levinas prefers to say—“an-archic” infinity (or “origin” or “non-origin” or “an-archy”), and not in an (onto-)logic of the universal (or the total). The finitude of politics and philosophy—and, in general, of human history, culture, ethos, and concrete existence—is shown by relating them to the epiphany of the other, which is the concrete form taken by the infinite. They receive their meaning from their Beyond, which shows itself now as “more interior” or “more essential” than their essence. General justice is impossible if it does not originate “anarchically,” in the responsibility of the unique one-for-the-(unique) other, but this responsibility includes the universality of politics and ontology. This unbreakable bond “between the order of being and of proximity” by which “the face is both the neighbor and the face of [all] faces” (204/160), clarifies the first argument of *Totality and Infinity*, according to which it was “in” the other’s face that the third and all other faces presented themselves. Because of the third as “the incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity” (201/158),
A very important consequence of the development exposed in *Otherwise Than Being* is that the universalization of the otherness by which every other other (who is also an other of the other) reveals his/her claim to justice encompasses also my life; "my lot," too, "is important" (205/161). "I, too, am an Other (A utrui) for the Others" not because of a primordial equality of all human individuals who share one common essence but thanks to the "pre-original" structure of transcendence, i.e., "thanks to God" (grâce à Dieu). As members of a society that is founded on transcendence, we are related by a relation of *reciprocity*: "the reciprocal relationship binds me to the other man in the trace of transcendence." This community is called here "fraternity."  

Levinas stresses that justice, together with the whole constellation of universal rules and totalizing gestures (in politics and theory), is "in no way a degradation" or "degeneration" of the infinite responsibility for the Other; he even denies that it is a "limitation of the anarchic responsibility" (203/159). But he concedes, on the other hand, that the apparition of the third tempers the hyperbolic intensity of transcendence and brings it under the measure of a well-balanced justice (204–5/160–61).

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39 AE 201–2/158. Cf. also the succinct summary in *TII* 229–30/252: "An order common to the interlocutors is established by the positive act of the one giving the world, his possession, to the other, or by the positive act of the one justifying himself in his freedom before the other, that is, by apology... It is the primordial phenomenon of reason, in its insurmountable bipolarity."
In his 1985 essay "The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other," Levinas discusses the modern ethos of universal human rights, which functions as the standard and measure of all law and rights, in order to show that it presupposes a prejuridical and prepolitical peace. Since the multiplicity of human individuals causes a perpetual conflict over their rights unless an effective administration of justice prevents or conquers a general war by imposing many compromises, the peace that is thus established remains uncertain and risky: it depends on the benevolence of the political powers in place. This situation shows clearly that the effective realization of justice presupposes a prepolitical or "extraterritorial" goodness different from the general justice whose essential limitation, this time, is stressed. Before the alternation of political war and peace and at the roots of a just society lies the fraternity of those who are responding to one another's incomparable uniqueness by being hostages for the other. The essay thus gives a new version of the thesis forwarded in the preface of Totality and Infinity: peace and justice, i.e., good politics, are not possible except on the basis of the ethics of a prophetic Shalom.

After subsection 6 on the foundation of a social philosophy, on which I have chosen to comment in some detail, Levinas reformulates in the seventh subsection of part B, "Asymmetry of the Interpersonal" (190–91/215–16), the results of his descriptions given in the preceding subsections. As coming from beyond "the world" (or as not being a part or moment of the economy of an isolated ego), the other is not a "phenomenon." Indeed, the concept of "phenomenon" has been defined by Husserl and Heidegger within the horizons of "the (life-)world," and it is in solidarity with all the assumptions of a philosophy confined to "the world" as ultimate horizon. Even the category "being"—as understood within the context of Western ontology—does not fit here: I, who am responsible for the other, am less than "a being," thus I am structurally determined by the other's infinite claim and judgment, according to which I am always in default; but at the same time, I am more than "a being" because, as infinitely

responsible, I am free and thus master of the resources without which my responsible autonomy would not be possible. Correlatively, the other is both more and less than a being by the simultaneity of the height and the nakedness revealed in the face.

One of the difficulties with which any reader of *Totality and Infinity* has to cope lies in its ambiguous use of the word "being." Very often it expresses the true and "real" reality toward which any "first philosophy" is oriented. The other can then be called a being *par excellence* or *kath' hauto*. In other places, however, "being" and "ontology" serve to characterize the egological and totalitarian nature of Western philosophy, which should be surpassed by something "higher" and "other" than, or beyond, being. As Levinas himself recognizes in "Signature," in *Totality and Infinity* he still speaks the language of ontology, but there are also pages in which he has begun to overcome it with a terminology and conceptuality more adequate to the "Otherwise than Being," which is the central purpose of his later book. Levinas's critique of the category "phenomenon" as contained in subsection 7 shows that he has started to surpass not only ontology but also the phenomenological method, to which he owes most of his own approach. However, since his overcoming of phenomenology is wholly based on the practice of intentional analyses in a style akin to that of Husserl and Heidegger, we might call his philosophy "transphenomenological" rather than "anti phenomenological." 

The last subsection of part B, "Will and Reason" (191–95/216–19), starts as a refutation of idealism in the name of the thesis that "the essence of discourse is ethical." It (1) attacks the Kantian identification of (practical) reason and will; but (2) it continues also the analyses of section 3 on the essence of theory in light of the visage; (3) it shows how "reason," understood as a synonym for responsibility and responsible thought, must be distinguished from the will as the capacity of freely assuming or refusing responsibility; and (4) it shows that ethics differs radically from politics, therewith continuing the meditation of subsection 6 on a just society. In brief, Levinas continues to unfold the meaning of reason, will, ethics, politics, thinking, communication, and so on, as renewed by the revelation of the face.

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Idealism, as exemplified by Plato and Heidegger, sees the human subject as a moment of an anonymous order composed of mutual relationships ruled by universal laws of reason. The will is defined as "practical reason," i.e., as the ability to be affected by rational universality, whereas a good will is a will whose motivations and actions are entirely determined by that universality. From this follows the identification of ethics (as acting according to universally valid laws) with politics (as acting for the general good of a realm of ends). The multiplicity of wills is in this framework explained by sensibility: although human beings are rational, they are also animalia, striving for vital happiness. The unicity of their individuality is reduced to the indifference of many cases of a genus. Their essence appears thus as composed of rational will (or willing reason) and irrational, obscure, egoistic animality. Since this conception cannot understand communication except as a participation of different individuals in the anonymous universality of common ideas, discourse has no meaning in it. Subjectivity is not, however, constituted by the sole sensible aspect of the will, for subjects are also separated by the uniqueness of their nonexchangeable responsibility. The will names a responsible subject that cannot refute the responsibility by which his/her unicity is constituted; one can, however, refuse to assume it. If human individuals were no more than indifferent cases of universal reason, the infinite could not reveal its surpassing the universality of genera and species. Only the uniqueness of desire and responsibility—and not a defense of arbitrary choices—can reveal a surplus over being, as expressed in Plato's "Good." It is the Good that constitutes the subject as responsible and, thereby, as willing and rational.

Part C, "The Ethical Relation and Time" (195–225/220–47), is a turning point within Totality and Infinity. Prepared by the subsection on the will (B.8) summarized above, it shows which consequences the discoveries of parts A and B concerning the "metaphysical" (or "ethical") relationship have for politics and history, and especially for the questions of war and peace announced in the preface.

The pluralism revealed by the metaphysical relation is based on asymmetric relations of separate and free subjects whose existence is constituted—at least partially—by that relationship. As free and finite subjects, they can maintain the originary peace demanded by that relation, but they are also able to destroy it by violence and warfare. The multiplicity and finitude of their
freedom cannot be explained within the context of the traditional conception of freedom as a diminished \textit{causa sui} whose finitude would be caused by material and social limitations only. According to modern social theory, the human constituents of a society would limit each other's freedom, and this limitation would be the first form of violence. However, limitation is not necessarily a kind of violence, and the concept of limitation implies the concept of totality. Violence, but also commerce, presupposes existences that refuse to be part of a totality; to the extent to which they are free, they transcend all sorts of community. As a relationship between subjects who confide in themselves, war shows their separate independence; but insofar as they thereby take a supreme risk, they manifest also their utter dependence. Violence supposes that one can grasp someone who could escape or withdraw. The interwovenness of independence and dependence constitutes human freedom as a finite freedom. As simultaneously exposed and offered to others and separated or independent from them, a human body has the liberty of parrying attacks or of rusing against an enemy or, to be brief, of postponing death. The postponement of death, and not its anticipation, is the secret of human freedom. And therewith the concept of \textit{time} is introduced. Finite liberty is to still have time—a move against the inexorable violence of death—the "not yet" of death. Violence or war is, then, to urge death upon someone who still exists and tries to delay death. Such a being is a body that possesses a distance, interiority, and consciousness. The "will" is a name for being mortal but not yet dead. Temporality (mortality \textit{and} postponement of death through time) precedes and constitutes human freedom. Nothing is definitive; there is still time. The delaying of death is possible only because of the Other, who—by constituting my responsibility—gives me time. The Other ("the metaphysical") distends the tensions of my present by delivering me from the immediate violence of mortality; by opening the dimension of time, the infinite makes me free.\footnote{It is noticeable that this subsection contains also a clear formulation of the paradox that will be one of the main questions in \textit{AE}: "The very utterance by which I state it [i.e., the incommensurability of trans-cendence and the 'truth' of a total reflection] and whose claim to truth, postulating a total reflection, refutes the unsurpassable character of the face to face relation, nonetheless confirms it by the very fact of stating this truth—of telling it to the Other" (196/221).}

In the second subsection, "Commerce, the Historical Relation, and the Face" (201-8/226-32), Levinas continues his analysis of
the will by opposing it to the works (including also the deeds and texts), of which he already had given an analysis in *Totality and Infinity* (150–51/175–77) and in the essay "Freedom and Command" (see above, 159–60). As the embodied unity of independence and dependence, the will is simultaneously the possibilities (the "I can") of Merleau-Ponty's "corps propre" and a biological structure that is delivered to manipulation and corruption. On the one hand, the will is free self-enjoyment; on the other hand, it is always on the verge of being used, abused, corrupted. Through its works, the will becomes part of a history of products, monuments, texts, literature. If fulfills a function and makes a name, the name of a destiny. By its functioning, it loses, however, its uniqueness. If the hermeneutical approach is the ultimate, it does the same as more practical ways of reduction, such as manipulation, corruption, or enslavement: they kill the transcendence of the will. Violence is the reduction of the will to work, a narrowing of the metaphysical to functions, monuments, and texts. History is the story of how persons performed in dramas, but it does not expose the time of unique wills that never wholly coincide with their products. As showing how oeuvres composed traditions and a heritage, history is essentially a necrology. Is there not another history, another time, and another judgment possible in which the unicity of the will is actually respected? Is there not a jurisdiction beyond the will's betrayal by its work?

Having shown that the will, as a free body, is a vulnerable consciousness between the immunity of independent initiative and the weaknesses of its exposition to the forces of nature and seduction, Levinas elaborates in a third subsection, "The Will and Death" (208–13/232–36), on its mortality as a typically human mode of temporality. As a postponement of the last event, the will is met by the inexorability of its disappearance. We are afraid of death because it puts an end to any further delay. The annihilation whereby death threatens a human life cannot be explained in terms of the categorical pair being versus nothingness, as if they formed the ultimate horizon of the world. For death is neither a being nor nothing; rather, we experience its threat as that of a murder coming from some sort of enemy. It comes from a dimension beyond life and world: from the dimension of invisibility and otherness over which we do not have any power. Therefore, death is not our last or ultimate possibility, and we are not able to accept, to anticipate, or to welcome it. Our fear originates in the will as still having (some) time by
delaying the ultimate and absolute impossibility of all possibilities, but the inexorability of death refutes any view on human being according to which it is primarily an "I can," a possibility of possibilities. The invisibility of death does not lie in the nothingness with which it confronts us but in its not permitting us to grasp it, fight with it, and protect ourselves against it. Death always comes too early and as a nonwelcomed murderer. Since we cannot conceive of it as a possibility of our own, we cannot want it.

And yet, this enemy can receive a meaning precisely because it is not a moment of the world or any other totality composed of beings and their negations. The absolute passivity revealed in our ultimate impossibility belongs to a life that is directed to a meaning beyond its own destruction. This meaning cannot be found in a life "after death" of some immortal soul, since this idea itself sticks to the ultimacy of the categories being and nothingness as constituting world and time. To live for a time beyond one's own life is to live for the other(s), and this is made possible by mortality; the necessity of losing one's life belongs to the structure of being-for-other(s). Thus, the egoism of a fearful life can be converted into the obedience of having time for others; the absolute violence from which nobody can escape can become the source of indestructible goodness. To lose one's life for the other(s) is to be meaningful in living for a time after one's own life. If death—and suffering—were a purely individual event, it would be meaningless; its having a place within the horizon of the metaphysical (i.e., intersubjective) relation saves it from absurdity.

"The supreme ordeal of freedom" (or "of the will") "is not death, but suffering" (216/239). For whereas death terminates the ambiguity of humanity's finite freedom, suffering is the extreme experience of the discordance discovered in mortality as human temporality. This is shown in subsection 4, "Time and the Will: Patience" (213–17/236–40). Since time is the ability of free consciousness (or "the will") to postpone death, it is also the possibility of keeping a distance from all fixations that would identify the will with a certain instant or present. As long as there is time, nothing is definitive; the will can always take or change its position with regard to what the subject has done, thought, become until now. It has a distance toward the presence thanks to the many possibilities for a future that are still open. The future is not a prolongation of the present but rather the possibility of having a distance from it.
Suffering reduces this distance and the difference between present and future—as well as between fact and possibility or between fixation and freedom—to a minimum. In it we are backed up and glued to what we are, without possibility of fleeing it; a feared future has caught us, annulled our capacity of withdrawal, almost taken away our distance, and submitted our consciousness to utter passivity, without permitting it to die. A heroic will is a will that “stands” this “impossible” situation without giving in. It conquers by patience, i.e., by a disengagement within its forced engagement, thus still saving an ultimate mastery in the midst of almost total passivity. Patience is the experience of the limit of our will. Suffering, much more so than death, reveals the ambivalence of finite freedom and self-consciousness. But suffering, too, receives its meaning from “the order of discourse,” that is, from its being endured for the Other. Even hate, as expressed, for instance, in torture or persecution, is better than complete isolation because it frees us from the egoistic absurdity of suffering for nobody, and without such a deliverance desire and goodness remain empty words.

The last subsection of section 3, “The Truth of the Will” (217–25/240–47), gathers the analyses formerly given into a central question that receives here a first, still partial answer, while it will dominate the last section of the book that leads “beyond the visage.” It is the question of whether a philosophy of history in the traditional style of modern (especially neo-Hegelian) philosophy can solve the problems that arise from the tensions between politics and morality, and, if not, how this can be effected. Here, toward the end of his book, Levinas will clarify what he means when, in the preface, he calls his enterprise “a defense of subjectivity” as “founded in the idea of the infinite” and writes: “We oppose to the objectivation of war a subjectivity born from the eschatological vision. The idea of the infinite delivers the subjectivity from the judgment of history to declare it ready for judgment at every moment and—as we will show—called to participate in this judgment, impossible without it” (xiv/25).

Subjectivity, in the form of a separated “inner life” or “interiority,” has been shown in sections 1 and 2 to be indispensable for the revelation of the infinite in its otherness. This necessity expresses itself in the fact that all speech and discourse is an address directed to others, as well as an apology:

Conversation (discourse), from the very fact that it maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical
separation asserted in transcendence which prevents the reconstitution of totality, cannot renounce the egoism of its existence; but the very fact of being in a conversation consists in recognizing that the Other has a right over this egoism, and hence in justifying oneself. Apology, in which the I at the same time asserts itself and inclines before the transcendent, belongs to the essence of conversation. Goodness . . . will not undo this apologetic moment.\textsuperscript{44}

As necessarily apologetic, a human subject demands justice, not so much happiness—although this, too, pertains to the free position of an ego—but rather recognition of its unicity as a responsible subject dedicated to others. The ego demands its recognition by a judgment that does not neglect or destroy its truth. Since its truth lies in its relations to the infinite, the true judgment must “situate” ego's unicity “with regard to the Infinite” (218/240).

The true judgment confirms the apology but cannot coincide with a subjectivistic and narcissistic cry of protest; it must come from the Other(s) and recognize responsibility and goodness as they are. The “judgment of (world) history,” which has become famous since Schiller’s and Hegel’s identification of the Weltgericht with Weltgeschichte, does not do justice to the unicity of responsible subjects because it is based on the works and the institutions left behind by those who realized but simultaneously betrayed their freedom therein. By identifying them with their political or cultural productions, history denies the truth of their unique responsibility with regard to marginal figures, such as the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan. These are wholly neglected by world history because their works are too common to be interesting. And what about the millions and millions of people slaughtered and forgotten after being used for the building of empires and monuments? If the universality of reason and the importance of political or cultural heroism were the sole standard of recognition, the "small" goodness of most people, the infinitude of the Other, and the ultimate meaning of subjectivity would not count at all. The “great” history of “the world” is a cruel tyranny; universal reason obliterates the election of irreplaceable representatives of the Good.

Without denying that the dimensions of politics and technology—and their specific temporality—are necessary for the

\textsuperscript{44} TT 10/14. Cf. 91/118: “The I is an apology: whatever be the transfigurations this egoism will receive from speech, it is for the happiness constitutive of its very egoism that the I who speaks pleads.” Cf. also TT 34/62–63.
realization of authentic justice, Levinas states that the preoriginal and preuniversal or "an-archical" responsibility of apologetic subjects necessarily implies another time and history than those which are celebrated by modern philosophy: a time and history which reveal the truth of the metaphysical relation between unique subjects and the infinite constituting them as responsible beyond all works. If such a history of the infinite is possible, its judgment reveals the invisible. As an eschatological judgment, it is pronounced by prophets, not by kings or scholars; as such, it may be called a "judgment of God."

Where and how does such a history of the invisible Good reveal its truth if it can neither be found in a "life after death" nor in the egoistic protestations of a bitter ego? The true judgment is revealed in the eyes of the other, who sees me and speaks to me, although I cannot reduce the other's epiphany to an image, a concept, a work, or a text. The other's eyes and voice express—silently and discreetly—the true judgment by making me discover my unlimited and incessantly growing responsibility and, thereby, revealing the meaning of my suffering and death. The goodness demanded by this judgment and its accusation of my guilt call me forth to a justice without end beyond the universal justice of a well-ordered world. The more I am just, the more I am guilty, for the nonchosen responsibility that constitutes me does not diminish but grows by its fulfillment. By revealing my debt, the judgment of the infinite confirms my apologetic position, not in the form of a consolation but as an ongoing transformation of the egoistic fear of my death into a fear of causing the other's death. My apology receives a different meaning by being cited before the tribunal of the Good beyond "justice." Ego's "inner life" is declared unique and indispensable by urging it to a moral creativity that does not despise or neglect the political and technical conditions of universal justice but surpasses them by a limitless dedication to the "unimportant" marginals. Such a dedication cannot remain conscience. As a condition of its possibility, it presupposes a specific temporality and a particular form of fecundity, which the last section of Totality and Infinity must clarify.

I Beyond the Face

Although the encounter with the infinite in the face of the other does not permit a "higher" or "more absolute" horizon of which it would be a moment only, the aporia to which the contradiction
between the cruelty of world history and the demand for a fair judgment leads cannot be resolved without appealing to another time and "history" beyond the actuality of this or that encounter. In this sense, Levinas can speak of a dimension "beyond" (au delà) the face. The main purpose of section 4 is the disclosure of this dimension as the condition of an ultimate justice beyond intimacy and political institutionality. The apology by which the subject tries to justify itself before the other cannot "stand" the cruelty of reason's history without submitting itself to it unless it reaches beyond its own death through a special sort of fecundity. Around this thesis, the whole of section 4 has been composed. It contains, however, much more than the necessary argumentation for that thesis. The extensive description of erotic love with which the section begins is, by itself, a splendid piece of phenomenology, but its relation to the main thesis consists in one thread only, namely in the erotic experience of an indeterminate future. Simultaneously, it is part of a meditation about the kinship and the difference between the erotic form of intersubjectivity and the metaphysical relationship between the One and the Other; and, thirdly, it offers certain elements for a philosophy of the family and its being "an-archically" prior to the realm of politics.

The introductory pages (229–31/251–53) restate the leading question from the perspective of ego's apology: How can I escape from the tyranny of rational but impersonal (world) history and be judged "in truth"? The answer, given in part C, "Fecundity" (244–47/267–69), is prepared by two parts on love and eros, the first of which (A, "The Ambiguity of Love," 232–33/254–55) stresses the equivocal character of love as a sort of synthesis, or—as Levinas prefers to say—as something "between" the transcendence of the face and immanent enjoyment, between the desire for the Other and the need for concupiscent self-satisfaction. As choosing someone for whom one is predestined, without choice, love is a sort of incest with the other as a "sister soul": simultaneously less than discourse and "more." In loving, one enjoys the beloved in reaching beyond her toward a future that is "not yet," an "obscure light" beyond the beloved's face. This desire of "a future never future enough," in contrast to, and in union with, the needy and consumptive part of love, is the moment with which Levinas's phenomenology of love relates to his phenomenology of fecundity and the question asked in the introductory pages of this section.

The long description of love in part B, "Phenomenology of Eros" (233–44/256–66), can hardly be summarized in a few lines.
As part of the final section, its main importance lies in the observation that erotic life tends to a future that is not yet, a peculiar sort of future differing radically from any projection of possible works or deeds. This "not yet" emerges in love because it intends neither objects, things, or possibilities nor the face of the other as such. Since love differs essentially from simple enjoyment, the other's face and language must be present in it. To love someone is to enjoy the other's enjoyment, but it is the enjoyment of someone who speaks (although in the act of loving she might be silent or laugh or play). The appearance of the beloved differs from the face: she is frail, vulnerable, tender, but simultaneously indecently exhibited and exorbitantly material: the equivocal union of pure eyes and lascivious nudity, a voluptuous body with a naked face. The tender is the carnal, different from both the physiological body and the expressive body of the other as other. Neither is it Merleau-Ponty's *corps propre* as the incarnation of "I can." Since the beloved is someone having a face, the exhibition of its nudity is always a sort of profanation: to love is to be concerned for the vulnerability of the beloved but also to participate in the profanation of her secret, a secret that is brought to light without abolishing its nocturnal clandestinity. The secret is exposed as secret but is not disclosed. The beloved cannot be grasped: by caressing, the lover searches and forages without end for some mystery that cannot be captured. At the same time, erotic love is always a profanation and, somehow, a violation of never-lost virginity. The searching and tending of love and its abandonment to the nonsignifying density of passion and com-passion point to a not-yet that cannot be willed, projected, or achieved. Love's impatience does not anticipate but abandons itself and lets itself blindly be drawn toward an emergence beyond any act or possibility. Love is searching for "the infinitely future." In loving the other's love—in the intimacy of a voluptuous union without fusion—a future beyond all possible decisions announces itself: a transubstantiation of the lovers' momentary identification into a child.

For the right interpretation of Levinas's phenomenology of eros as it is given in *Totality and Infinity*, two questions must be answered: (1) Is it meant as a "neutral" description or, perhaps, as the description of the typically masculine perspective? and (2) Does this description limit itself to eros as intimately connected with determinate physiological conditions? The first question might be answered by Levinas's explicitly stated equivalence of the one who is loved (*l'aimé* in the *masculine* or...
neuter form!) with "the feminine" (le feminin): "To love is to fear for another, to come to assistance of his/her frailty (faiblesse). In this frailty, as in the dawn, rises the Loved (l'Aimé), who is Beloved (Aimée). As epiphany of the Loved (l'Aimé), the feminine is not added to an object or a Thou antecedently given or encountered in the neuter (the sole gender formal logic knows). The epiphany of the Beloved (l'Aimée) is but one with his/her regime of tenderness" (233/257). The loved one is essentially frail, tender, carnal, ambiguously naked and nude, and, thus, "feminine," whether he or she is a man or a woman. Still, one might maintain that Levinas's description of love, the beloved, and the lover are typically masculine. This would certainly not offend an author who does not swear by the neutrality of "formal logic." As for the femininity of the house, which was thematized in Levinas's phenomenology of dwelling in section 2 (cf. 127–29/154–56 and 157–58 above), there, too, "the feminine" was used in a metaphorical sense (which, of course, does not yet answer the question of whether it is a good metaphor, and why or why not).

An answer to the second question is indicated in the last line of section 3. Levinas states there that fecundity and paternity, as thematized in section 4, do not coincide with their biological concretizations; they "can be sustained by biological life," but they can also "be lived beyond that life" (225/247). If this means that, for instance, education, or writing, or fighting for human rights are equally forms of paternity, the whole metaphorics of fecundity seems to be detached from its biological connotations. Must we, then, also detach the "eros" from erotic love in its narrow meaning and understand "father," the "feminine," "beloved," and "son(s)" as examples or illustrations of a history that is not essentially connected with procreation or the family? In any case, we should bear in mind that the fecundity introduced here in the name of a true judgment beyond world history cannot coincide with the history of heroic deeds or social institutions: it must save the apology of moral subjects who have a future beyond their own life thanks to others in whom they can recognize a new emergence of their own moral subjectivity.

In part C, "Fecundity" (244–47/267–69), a new temporality, the time of "transubstantiation," is analyzed. The future of the "not yet" experienced in the erotic union reveals itself as a child. Since a child cannot be projected or anticipated as a possibility that should be realized, the relation between father and child (again another "sort" of Other!) cannot be understood as the
fulfillment of a possibility or the achievement of a work. The father is identical with, and radically different from, his child: the desired one is the father’s future but is neither projected nor anticipated. In discontinuous time, the child is the father, for whom it is, at the same time, a stranger. Due to fecundity, as a relation to a particular future, one can be saved from endless repetition and senescence by new youths. The fixations of old age and death are refuted by a time whose discontinuity conquers the boredom of aging by the birth of others who are “mine” without being a possession. In his child, the father is another beyond the fulfillment of possibilities, the achievement of an “I can,” or the actuality of a destiny. Desire is not arrested in a child, for the father desires his child as a renewal of his own desire by another (and yet the same) desire for another (and the same) future of responsibility. Fecundity is, thus, the engendering of goodness by goodness in a time of the infinite without end. Because of this “infinite time,” human subjects transcend death, not by dissolution or extasis into an ocean of Being but through the discontinuity of transcendence to others who achieve a transsubstantiation of their generators.

Possibly alluding to Plato’s interpretation of philosophical education as “procreation in beauty,” 45 Levinas gives an example of a nonbiological form of fecundity when he writes that “philosophy itself constitutes a moment of this temporal accomplishment, [as] a discourse always addressing itself to another” (247/269). The teacher transcends his own life and death by being changed into his student, reader, or successor, who, after him, speaks in a new way to others. As a specific relation to the future, fecundity shows that there are levels and modes of Being having another structure than the continuous time-space of a totality. In testifying to the irreducibility of a fecund pluralism, the time of transcendence—the temporality of desire and the Good—refutes any hen kai pan and the pantheism that goes with it.

Part D, “The Subjectivity in Eros” (247–51/270–73), repeats and develops what the former sections already have shown and stresses how the erotic initiation (which is not an initiative) liberates the aging subject from its self-identification vis-à-vis the other. The child is the other in which the father, who is the origin, has his own new beginning. “I am an other,” who is a new I. Discontinuous time is the possibility of recommencing in infinitum.

45 Cf. Symposium 206b ff.
The four pages of part E, "Transcendence and Filiality" (251-54/274-77), give the somewhat revised text of the paper "Pluralism and Transcendence," which Levinas presented at the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy (Amsterdam 1948). Starting from the question of how transcendence is possible, Levinas states that the logic of Western philosophy does not permit us to conceive of a substantial transcendence by which the I transcends itself without losing its own identity. Since that logic is based on the presupposition that the bond between Being and the One is indestructible, plurality is always subsumed by a final synthesis. Being is, then, conceived as monadic and monistic; and since transcendence, from this perspective, must be seen as a relation between a multiplicity of monads, it is considered a second-hand and superficial reality. In a discussion of Brunschvicg, who represents classical rationalism, and of Heidegger, the great renewer of philosophy, Levinas argues that the paradigmatic function given to modes of being such as consciousness, knowledge, becoming, temporal continuity, power, and possibility do not enable us to conceive of transcendence as an originary principle of ontology; and he forwards the thesis that the erotic or sexual relationship, understood as fecundity, makes this possible. Against Freud's libidinal interpretation of sexuality, he indicates some elements of the phenomenology developed in Totality and Infinity and concludes that fecundity is the transcendence between me and the son, who is and is not I.

The ontological framework in which Levinas treats here another question than the one announced in the introduction of section 4 and the thesis, formulated on 253/276, that transcendence is primarily found in eroticism and fecundity—a thesis which seems to contradict the core of Totality and Infinity—give us a glimpse of the thought process achieved between Levinas's lectures of 1947 on Time and the Other, closer to his 1948 paper, and the later work in which the responsibility for the destitute and unfamiliar stranger is sharply distinguished from erotic love and familiar relationships.

In "The Other and the Others" (III.B.6), analyzed extensively above (166-75), Levinas had already affirmed that society, as the organization of human solidarity and universal equality, presupposes a specific community of humankind in the form of universal fraternity (189-90/213-14), but how and why this is the case was

not shown. In part F, "Filiality and Fraternity" (255–57/278–80), we read an attempt to "deduce" the fraternity of all humans as a condition not only of any well-ordered society but also of the realization of successful goodness in the face-to-face. That the fecundity from which this fraternity is "deduced" cannot be understood in a purely biological sense is stated explicitly on several occasions. Neither can fraternal universality be understood within the frame of species and genera because that would contradict the unicity and the alterity essential for human parenthood.

Since the father is and is not his son, who, as other, lives and desires independently, although he also resumes the past represented by his parents, the son's freedom is neither absolute nor made but a created freedom. As a son prolonging his father's life, he also revolts against it. The history of fathers and sons is, thus, a drama in many acts: the time of fecund discontinuity is open to surprising turns and authentic renewals. Every son is, as other of the father, unique. This unicity, again, cannot be understood in biological terms, for it presupposes an election by the father. His desire invests the son with a responsibility that is at the same time new and similar to the father's responsibility. Election constitutes the son's ipseity, through which the father receives another future than that of his own repetitious senescence. Freed from its biological limitations, paternity is "being capable of another fate than its own" or a "way of being other while being oneself" (258/282), while fraternity is "the very relation with the face in which, at the same time, my election and equality, that is, the mastery exercised over me by the other, are accomplished" (256/279).

Seen as a gathering of unique sons, the human race is a family composed of "brothers," that is, of responsible but created freedoms turned to one another's face. Their coming from "(the) fathers" constitutes their unity, quite different from the generic unity of a universal essence instantiated by many individuals. The explanation of humankind as fraternity implies a reinterpretation of the metaphysical relation that is the central topic of

47 "If biology furnishes us the prototypes of all these relations, this proves, to be sure, that biology does not represent a purely contingent order of being, unrelated to its essential production. But these relations free themselves from their biological limitation" (256–57/279). On 189–90/213–14 the transbiological meaning of fraternity is implied in the thesis that all humans are "brothers."
Totality and Infinity: neither isolated individuals related to others by dual relationships nor members only of social totalities, we form an originary—or preoriginary—community of unique "brothers." Although it is clear that the concept of such a fraternity presupposes transcendence and the face, some sentences suggest that the latter are also conditioned by the former, for instance, when Levinas writes: "The human I is posited in fraternity: that all men are brothers is not added to man as a moral conquest, but constitutes his ipseity. Because my position as an I is effectuated already in fraternity, the face can present itself to me as a face" (257/279–80).

When Levinas, in the last lines of part F, states that "the erotic and the family" open the dimension of a future in which desire and the Good can triumph, he does not clarify to what extent the categories of the erotic and the family are taken in a restricted sense or rather are meant as metaphors for moral or religious communities, spiritual families, traditions, and practices. "Sisters" are not mentioned, and "maternity" is mentioned only once, with hardly any explanation (255/278). The "paternal Eros" (256/279) reminds us of Plato's transformation of love into a passion for good education.\footnote{Symposium 206b ff.}

In stressing several aspects of Levinas's text that cannot be understood in a biological or strictly familial sense, I do not want to suggest that biology, sexuality, procreation, and family life are unimportant elements in the history of responsibility and goodness, which Levinas opposes to the cruelty of world history; rather, I would like to stress that the end of Totality and Infinity presents us with new tasks for philosophy. If the family (or the "family") is not an organic part of the state or the city but rather a prepolitical and "prehistoric" dimension with a time of its own, we must ask exactly how the biologically conditioned family, several sorts of spiritual families, and especially the filiations of which the history of morality is composed relate to one another and to the history of politics, culture, civilization, and positive religion.

The closing pages of section 4 give an answer to the question that emerged at the end of section 3 by showing that the time of fecundity—the infinite but discontinuous time of others' taking over the responsibility of desire—makes a true judgment about good and evil possible. Such a time differs radically from the continuous temporality that is typical for consciousness and
memory, for several possibilities of fulfillment, and for the production of works. Memory unfolds the past in the present, and the fulfillment of possibilities extends the present to the future, but the distance implied in such deployments is not enough for real newness or radical change; they only unfold the moments of a fate or destiny that develops itself inexorably. Since the other—"my brother"—refuses to become part of a whole, he escapes also from the temporal totalization that would reduce him to a mere element or means. The other is the origin of a discontinuous time in which no event is definitive. The "infinition" of fecundity surpasses all possibilities of past and present by its openness to other destinies. Beyond his own death, a "father" receives new chances in the existence of his "sons." They give him—in the strongest sense of the word—a new beginning, thanks to an interval of time separating his and their life. Beyond death there is a continuity on the basis of discontinuity. The infinition of fecund temporality is the time of real death and resurrection: the past can still change its meaning, and the future is a new chance for desiring and being good.

A clear example of such a transformation is found in the possibility of pardon: a bad deed or event that cannot be denied can be purified and inverted. The past is not abolished, but it might receive a new meaning. If pardoned, a deed can become part of a "history" that is better than a series of innocent events. Thus, the infinition of this temporality permits revisions of the judgments pronounced by world history: the justifications and condemnations of which the history of works is composed are overcome by judgments that testify to the ultimate standard—the standard of the Good itself. 49

The infinition of time does not, however, guarantee the victory of the Good over all injustices in judging and practice. Our dream of a completely just and peaceful eternity expresses our desire for a completion beyond the infinite time of risky goodness and possible crimes. The eschatological peace announced in the preface demands still another time: instead of the ongoing discontinuity of innumerable recommencements, such a peace postulates a "sealed" or completed time, an eternity of "messianic" peace.

How must we understand our desire for such an eternity? How can we—within philosophy—give an interpretation to the

49 Cf. also 207–8/231; Levinas insists on the exteriority of pardon, judgment, and justice.
prophecies about a messianic time from which the possibility of evil will have been excluded? Is that eternity another name for the extreme vigilance of any conscience that is as pure and as universally responsible as that of the "Messiah"—a conscience not bound by any specific time or context and thus timeless or "eternal"—or must we think of yet another temporality beyond the time of filiality? The phrase with which Levinas postpones an answer to this question ("this problem exceeds the bounds of this book") could mean that an answer demands new analyses, but it might also indicate the extra-philosophical character of the prophetic messianism commented upon by the Talmud and by Levinas himself in various "Talmudic lectures."

Before considering the conclusions with which Totality and Infinity closes, we might look back on its course as designed by the succession of its sections, parts, and subsections. Although it is characteristic for this book that it spirals constantly around a whole constellation of new concepts and perspectives, I have tried to detect also a linear progression in it, thereby partially reducing its originality and its difference from more traditional texts of philosophy. Continuing this procedure, which has some didactic advantages, I would like to stress here what may be considered to be the (or one?) main line that gives unity to the analyses of Totality and Infinity.

If we consider the first section to be a long introduction that summarizes the whole, we can divide the book in roughly two halves. The first encompasses then sections 2 and 3 A and B, whereas the second half runs from 3 C (prepared by 3 B.6–8) until the end of section 4. Subsection 3 B.6. is a sort of turning point, while 3 B.7–8 prepare 3 C. In the first half of Totality and Infinity, Levinas analyses the three moments of the metaphysical relation: ego’s economy (2), the other (3), and their asymmetric relation (passim, but especially in 2 D.5–6 and E and 3). The second half develops from this "principle" the key concepts of a "first philosophy" radically different from Western ontology. After a short treatment of the transition from the intersubjective relation between ego and the other to the society of humankind in 3.6, a critique of the will (3 B.7ff.) reintroduces ego’s finite

freedom. Whereas, in section 2, it had been analyzed as the enjoyment of a dependent independence, it is now thematized as the responsible confrontation with its own body, its works, the world, exterior constraints, death, suffering, and history in light of the other's and the others' faces. Since ego's desire and responsibility are the only presence of the Good, they must be recognized somehow if there is any hope that the Good indeed will win. Ego's nonegoistic apology cannot be silenced ultimately. However, because world history, as the history of works, does not recognize the truth of the will and its expressions, a "beyond" of history must be sought—a time of the Good, a "history" in which justice is done to morality and justice itself, a "judgment" recognizing the absolute transcendence of responsibility. This time beyond history is found in a time beyond suffering, and death is to be fecund in "sons" who continue the "tradition" of responsibility and justice by new (and, thus, discontinuous) commencements. Since all human beings are elected as such unique "sons," the time of fecundity (the "tradition of the Good," we might say) is the dimension of humankind as a prepolitical and an-archic fraternity. In this dimension, only a peace beyond the alternation of political wars and peaces is possible. In this time, humanity can still become good.

Conclusions

The character of the conclusions is not so different from that of the introductory section 1. They can be read as a review of the main topics and theses forwarded and analyzed in the preceding pages: ego's freedom, the Other's exteriority and the infinite, transcendence, language, work and expression, subjectivity, the family and the state, and so on. A striking feature of these last pages is, however, their outright ontological character. Although some of the passages, like many of the preceding pages, express the necessity of a thought beyond ontology,51 "Being," "truth," "the truth of Being," and the "logic" of Being play key roles, and Levinas's metaphysics seems to present itself as a new form of ontology. (Since the overcoming of ontology, which is already underway in Totality and Infinity, becomes one of the most important aspects of Levinas's works, I have tried to avoid the language of ontology as much as possible. However, the text of

51 See, for instance 26730, 26837-30, 2694/29131, 29225-29, 2933-4.
*Totality and Infinity* itself still uses two different languages, and this is one of the reasons for its difficulty.)

A second feature of the conclusions lies in their focus on the concept of *exteriority*. While the preface concentrated on the question of true peace, and the introductory section 1 dealt with transcendence (desire, otherness, infinite), the conclusions seem to intend primarily a justification of the subtitle of *Totality and Infinity*: an essay on *exteriority*.52 The way this is done could be characterized as a plea for another ontology rather than as a defense of a thought *beyond* ontology. In light of the first subsections of section 1, we could even interpret these conclusions as the sketch of a new on-to-logic: an ontologic of the absolute relation between the Same and the Other (or between finite interiority and infinite exteriority), which should replace the Western ontologic of monistic universality.

This approach is, for instance, rather obvious in the very beginning of the first conclusion, "From the Like to the Same" (265/289–90), where Levinas summarizes his book in the thesis that the "social relation" (another name for the "metaphysical relation" or "transcendence") is "the logical frame of Being" (in which "Being" [*l'être*] encompasses the universe of beings as well as the beingness of all beings). In preparation for the following "conclusions," which focus upon exteriority, this first conclusion contrasts the formal logic of the traditional ontology—said to be a logic of genera, species, and individual indiscernibles—with the logic of *interiority* and self-identification-from-within, which section 2 has shown to be constitutive for the Same, i.e., for the I as relating to the Other in the face-to-face, and therefore also for the *exteriority* of the Other, whose otherness implies a separation from the independent Same.

The overtly ontological title of the second conclusion, "Being Is Exteriority" (266–67/290–91), is repeated twice in the text and paraphrased by the sentence: "The very exercise of its being [i.e., its mode of transitive being] consists in exteriority, and no thought could better obey being [notice the Heideggerian expression!] than by allowing itself to be dominated by this exteriority" (266/290). Levinas resumes here the ontological significance of the face as the revelation of an exteriority that essentially is authority and superiority and, thus, reveals the "truth of being": Being surprises us not only as exterior but as

52 Cf. 279/303: "The present work has sought to describe metaphysical exteriority."
a "curvature of the space" under the influence of the divine. Toward the end of this conclusion on the essential superiority of Being, however, Levinas calls this truth of Being a "surplus of truth over Being and its idea," a surplus—revealed in the curvature of space—that "is, perhaps, the very presence of God." Notwithstanding Levinas's opposing, in this section again, Heidegger's ontology, he still seems to adopt the basic assumptions of any ontology, although he already tries to break out—in a way akin to the Platonic one—by trying the thought of a "surplus over Being," which, however, is not yet clearly distinguished from "Being as exteriority."

Levinas's third conclusion, entitled "The Finitude and the Infinite" (268–69/292), calls that "surplus" "the surplus of the Good over Being" and insists once more on the separation and independence of the finite subject vis-à-vis the infinite. Against the tradition of a philosophy that sees the finite as a negation or as a diminished or limited form of the infinite—and its monistic nostalgia for a return to the all-encompassing origin—Levinas affirms the radical exteriority of the created (not emanated) liberty, whose desire is not nostalgic, since it transcends all satisfaction.

The fourth conclusion, "Creation" (269–70/293–94), continues the characterization of the relation between the finite and the infinite through the consideration of an enigmatic concept that emerged several times in the course of Totality and Infinity without being analyzed extensively: the concept of creation. Now, however, Levinas turns against ontology because of its inability to understand the independence and separation of finite freedom from the infinity of God. The "principle" (270/294), which is "the prime intelligible" (270/293), namely the other human (Autrui), has revealed that the autonomous atheistic ego owes its freedom to a preceding (preoriginary or preautonomous) heteronomy. Before the possibility of Sinngebung or any other initiative—that is, in an absolute passivity without preexisting substantiality or materiality—I have already been constituted a responsible, transcendent, desiring subject, independent, free. This strange structure cannot be understood within the horizons of the logic of totality, which goes together with ontology. Levinas still seems to have a reservation: "If the notions of totality and being cover one another, the notion of the transcendent places us beyond the categories of Being." But the remainder of his conclusion shows that the "if" is rhetorical; according to Levinas, ontology necessarily blurs the separation between God and the finite by seeing the latter as originally contained in
the infinite Being from which all finite beings emanate. Instead of such a synthesis (in which God—as "highest being" or summit—becomes as finite as the rest), the concept of a creation 
ex nihilo
expresses the absolute exteriority and "atheistic" independence of a finite responsibility.53

Having shown how central exteriority is in (1) the constitution of ego's interiority, (2) the Other's height, and (3-4) the transcendence of the finite to the infinite, Levinas returns to the concreteness of exteriority in the encounter with the Other. In contrast to the fourth conclusion, the fifth, "Exteriority and Language" (270-73/294-97), continues to use the ontological language of the first three conclusions. Against the totalizing philosophies from Plato to Heidegger—Heidegger's thought of Being is here characterized most clearly as a philosophy of totality—Levinas defends "an ontology that is not equivalent to panoramic existence and its disclosure" (270/294). The primordiality of vision and its paradigmatic function for intelligibility conditions the panoramic perspective in which the exterior is experienced as adequate to the interiority of ideas. Husserl's theory of Selbstgegenheit and the intentional correlation of the noesis and the noema is only a modern version of that tradition. The face-to-face of language as address and invocation expresses the unconquerable exteriority of all discourse and the superiority of the other's speech, which thereby is an instruction (enseignement). A different ontology than the traditional one should show that the Being of beings (l'exister même de l'être or l'être de l'étant, 270-71/294) is the scattering of a panoramic totality into a multitude of beings who are "personally present in their speech" (273/296). This form of presence, self-presentation through the expression of the face, is once more put forward in the sixth conclusion, "Expression and Image" (273-74/297-98), and, as the true signification and key to morality, is opposed to the meaning of intuition, imaging, and poièsis constitutive for politics, culture, and history.

The title of the seventh conclusion, "Against the Philosophy of the Neuter" (274-75/298-99), indicates the polemical character of this section. The impersonality of Hegel's reason and of

Heidegger's Being has suppressed the truth of the face-to-face and therewith the possibility of language, morality, and philosophy as the search for human wisdom. Instead, the collective We of politics, the neutralization of the personal in art, and an aesthetic conception of nature have conquered our culture. But obedience to these figures of the Anonymous sacrifices, as do all forms of idolatry, the very essence of the human, which is always personal and unique.

Levinas reminds the reader that the main purpose of section 2 was to show that the human subject in no way can be reduced to any structure, situation, or constellation of elements or nature. Since the interpretation of Being as impersonal suppresses its being also the Being of personal, unique, free, moral, and transcendent beings, it restricts Being to an infrahuman—and certainly not a superhuman—mode of Being. The ontological primacy of the Neuter is, thus, equivalent with the celebration of the faceless as the paradigm of all Being. This is what Levinas calls "materialism," and in this sense he criticizes Heidegger's concentration on the Fourfold as a "shameless materialism" (un materialisme honteux) because it is dominated by a logos that does not come from anybody and thus can neither be speech, nor language, nor face or call.

The eighth, ninth, and eleventh conclusions, "Subjectivity" (275–76/299–300), "The Maintainance of Subjectivity, The Reality of the Inner Life and the Reality of the State, The Meaning of Subjectivity" (276–78/300–301), and "Freedom Invested" (278–81/302–4), focus on the consequences of the thesis that "Being is exteriority" (the second conclusion) for human subjectivity. These three conclusions can be read as Levinas's retrieval of egology in the frame of his nonegological metaphysics. The eighth conclusion summarizes the analyses of section 2, which were already resumed in the first conclusion, but it stresses how ego's "atheistic" interiority by an individuation from within (and not by participation, emanation, or division) enables the subject to listen to the other and to receive him/her as a guest. The ninth conclusion gives a brief account of the pages that I have called the second part of Totality and Infinity: as the sole source of goodness toward the other and of justice to all, ego's unicity is demanded for their victory. Ego's apology is not a clandestine subjectivism in confrontation with the powers of the state but rather the source of a moral future that delivers the subject from fate and facticity. The infinite time of fecundity transcends the dimension of politics by permitting the subject to be another desiring I.
By its very title, "Beyond Being," the tenth conclusion (278/301-2) announces that Levinas ultimately chooses to abandon the frame of any ontology. Aristotle's analogy of Being concentrates on the solid thing as exposed to an objectifying eye; Kant's interpretation of the object sees perduration as its essential structure; for Spinoza, Being is equivalent to universalizing thought. If Being must, indeed, be characterized as objective and perduring thingness, the exteriority of the other's face proves that Being cannot be the first and ultimate. To exist [to be?] as transcendence to the exterior is to surpass existence and death in the service of the Good. Starting from being, the subject transcends its own being. Being surpasses its own perduration. Under the title "Freedom Invested" (278-81/302-4), but without using the word "investiture," the eleventh conclusion summarizes the consequences of Being's exteriority for the notion of freedom. Against the modern philosophies of freedom exemplified in Heidegger and Sartre, Levinas firmly states that human freedom cannot justify itself. Its finitude is not due to its inability to choose or found itself—and this limitation is not tragic at all!—but rather to its being founded and justified through an exteriority that cannot be grasped by vision, knowledge, or any other form of appropriation. If the relation to the face constitutes the ultimate exteriority of Being, then morality or goodness is—in the ontological language used again in this conclusion—"the truth of Being." "To be in truth" is, then, "to encounter the Other without allergy, that is in justice" (280/303). The justification of freedom—which otherwise would be arbitrary, violent, and shameless—comes from "morality" or "the ethical." If logos is interpreted as reason, no ontology can have the ultimate answer, for reason's universality is not exterior enough to justify freedom. A metaphysical transcendence is necessary, and this is not found in vision or knowledge but only in respect for that which is. "Truth as respect of being, that is the meaning of metaphysical truth"; it may be called "morality," and Levinas can thus write: "In morality alone it [freedom] is put into question. Morality thus presides over the work of truth" (280/304). In this sense of "morality" as the ultimate truth of metaphysics (or "true ontology"), we may conclude: "Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy" (281/304).

The last conclusion, "Being as Goodness—the I—Pluralism—Peace" (281-84/304-7), gives one of the possible syntheses of Totality and Infinity by starting again from "metaphysics as desire" and finishing with the biological fecundity of the family as the model for a "general fecundity" that escapes from the
heroic but monotonous realm of unjust politics. The ontological structures of metaphysics are stressed. Being (or "the production of Being") is primarily the metaphysical movement of transcendence, desire engendering desire, Being for the Other, goodness beyond happiness. In a sentence that could be developed into a new sort of analogia entis, the face-to-face is called the "original production of Being towards which all the possible collocations of the terms [such as coexistence, Mitsein, knowledge, or participation] refer" (remontent, 281–82/303). The ego is absolutely needed for the goodness of this transcendence; subjectivity is, thus, not dead at all but necessarily present as free and conscious (independent and enjoying) hospitality. Transcendence implies pluralism but excludes the ultimacy of a panoramic perspective. The plurality of Being as going from me to the Other does not permit the superior truth of a higher perspective unengaged in the infinite demands of the Good. The eschatological peace announced in the preface is not possible within the horizons of the historic war and peace game but only in the discontinuous time of the family and human fraternity.