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**Phenomenology of Death: The Religious Dimension in the Ethical Thought of**

**Emmanuel Levinas**

**By**

**Changhyun Kim**

Claremont Graduate University

2021

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## **Approval of the Dissertation Committee**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Changhyun Kim as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion with a concentration in Philosophy of Religion and Theology.

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## Abstract

Phenomenology of Death: The Religious Dimension in the Ethical Thought of Emmanuel Levinas

By

Changhyun Kim

Claremont Graduate University: 2021

This dissertation explores Levinas's phenomenology of death in order to unveil the *religious* dimension in his *ethical* thought through examining the *political* moment of the third party. I argue that death is neither a pure phenomenon transparently intelligible in the noema-noesis structure of intentionality nor a mere non-phenomenon totally irrelevant to the phenomenological investigation. Rather, death is a *para*-phenomenon whose unfathomable feature calls into question Levinas's two important philosophical precedents: 1) Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, in a methodological sense, and 2) Heidegger's ontological interpretation of death, in a thematical sense. On the one hand, Levinas faces in the para-phenomenality of death the failure of phenomenology in the sense that phenomenology fails to capture a para-doxical feature of death in terms of a noetico-noematic correlation. On the other hand, Levinas ceaselessly contests Heidegger's ontological thematization, which neutralizes the para-phenomenality of death and thereby reduces the enigmatic mystery of death into the heroic mastery of death; in sum, the para-phenomenality of death is subsumed under the doxical architecture of ontology. By appealing to the para-doxical character of death, this dissertation claims that the architectonic structure of Heidegger's ontology dissimulates or covers up a more primordial and exigent signification of the death of the other than the ontological mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] of death. Therefore, Levinas's phenomenology of death justifies its *raison d'être* not in its adroit achievement to thematize death but rather in its failure to thematize and make sense of it since the ethical meaning of death emerges from the miscarriage of the doxical-ontological thematization of death.

In order to disclose the ethical signification of death that remains concealed, obscured, and suppressed in the “*Sein*-topped” architecture of ontology, Levinas endeavors to uncover what ontology has covered up—*i.e.*, the brutal nakedness of being [*être*] that is concretized in the ethical encounter with the other who commands: “Thou shalt not kill.” This primordial interdiction obsesses and overwhelms me [*moi*] more than the anxiety [*Angst*] for my death does, as if the death of the other would matter to me even more than my own. The ethical signification of death comes from the primordial call inscribed in the face of the other, which makes me vigilant, restless, and non-indifferent to the death of the other. However, the advent of the third party puts into question my exclusive, unconditional, or unquestioned responsibility for the other and orders what the other orders: “*Me voici*.” Nevertheless, the political interrogation of the third party never compromises the ethical structure but, on the contrary, makes it possible for ethics to remain *ethical* without relapsing into an impotent, silent, or angelic form of ethics, which entails violent, *apolitical*, and *anti-ethical rapprochements*. This dissertation insists that the radical peculiarity of Levinas’s phenomenology of death culminates in his para-doxical conception of religion, “*rapport sans rapport*,” in which the ethical *rapport* always remains as a question *par excellence* within the political context. To be religious does not require an ontological question of “to be or not to be,” of being or non-being; rather, it is otherwise than being, beyond essence, or beyond the *conatus essendi*, in which Levinas recognizes the primordial signification of death, such as substitution, sacrifice, or dying for others.

## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| List of Abbreviations .....   | ix  |
| Introduction.....   | 1   |
| Chapter One Husserl’s Phenomenological Methodology .....  | 15  |
| 1. Transcendental Subjectivity: <i>Rückfrage</i> into the Locus of <i>Sinngebung</i> .....                | 16  |
| 2. Transcendental Turn from Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity .....                                       | 28  |
| 3. Transcendental Subjectivity Re-confirmed.....  | 39  |
| 4. The Hither Side of the Husserlian Method .....   | 41  |
| Chapter Two Heidegger’s Ontological Thematization of Death .....  | 48  |
| 1. The <i>Seinsfrage</i> : Departure from Husserlian Phenomenology .....                                  | 50  |
| 2. Death Thematized .....   | 61  |
| 2-1. The Peculiar Modes of Dasein: Authenticity and Totality .....  | 61  |
| 2-2. Ontological Thematization of Death as the Possibility Proper.....                                    | 68  |
| 3. The Hither Side of Heidegger’s Thanatology .....   | 80  |
| Chapter Three Zero: The <i>An-archic Arche</i> of Levinas’s Phenomenology of Death.....                   | 87  |
| 1. <i>Kehre</i> Matters? .....  | 80  |
| 1-1. Ontological coverings: <i>Seyn</i> , <i>Ereignis</i> , <i>Unterschied</i> , and <i>Austrag</i> ..... | 93  |
| 1-2. <i>Es Gibt</i> as the Arche of Being .....   | 98  |
| 1-3. Heidegger’s Self-victimization of Metaphysics .....  | 107 |
| 2. <i>Il y a</i> : Anarchic Arche of <i>Es Gibt</i> .....   | 111 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 2-1. The Locus of Transcendence: <i>Être</i> or <i>Sein</i> .....                | 112 |
| 2-2. Escape from Being and Being Riveted to Being: Pleasure, Shame, Nausea ..... | 115 |
| 2-3. An-arche of <i>Il y a</i> Prior to Arche of <i>Es Gibt</i> .....            | 122 |
| 2-3-1. Imagination: Kant.....  | 127 |
| 2-3-2. Nothing: Heidegger .....  | 135 |
| 2-3-3. Negation: Hegel.....  | 140 |
| 2-4. Anarchic Experience of <i>Il y a</i> .....                                  | 142 |
| 3. Anarchy of <i>Il y a</i> and the Non-Modality of Death.....                   | 146 |
| 3-1. Shakespearean Meditation: Ontology or Hauntology?.....                      | 146 |
| 3-2. Horror of Being Not Dead Enough.....  | 152 |
| 3-3. “Tomorrow, Alas! Existence Will Have to Go on.” .....                       | 157 |
| Chapter Four Duo Prior to Solo: The Paradox of Phenomenology of Death.....       | 162 |
| 1. Hypostasis: The Advent of Solo out of Zero .....                              | 164 |
| 1-1. Hypostasis on the Hither Side of <i>Ekstasis</i> .....                      | 166 |
| 1-2. Position: <i>Ici et en ce moment même</i> .....                             | 169 |
| 1-3. The Enigma of Death beyond Ecstatic Temporality.....                        | 176 |
| 2. Being Fractured: Posterior Duo Prior to Anterior Solo .....                   | 192 |
| 2-1. The Cartesian Idea of the Infinite .....                                    | 193 |
| 2-2. The Anterior Posteriority of the Other.....                                 | 206 |
| 2-3. Religion as <i>rapport sans rapport</i> : The Holy Versus the Sacred.....   | 211 |
| 3. The First Word of the Other: “Thou Shalt Not Kill” .....                      | 217 |
| 3-1. Murder in the Economy of Death .....  | 219 |
| 3-2. Time against Death .....  | 226 |
| 3-3. The Failure of Phenomenology of Death.....                                  | 229 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chapter Five Trio and More from the Outset: Hyperbolic Phenomenology of Death .....  | 232 |
| 1. Derrida’s Deconstructive Gesture toward Levinas .....                             | 235 |
| 1-1. Transcendental Violence of Light.....   | 238 |
| 1-2. Ontological Violence of Being .....   | 245 |
| 1-3. <i>Être</i> (Responsible) on the Hither Side of <i>Sein</i> (Authentic) .....   | 249 |
| 2. How to Speak of the Unspeakable: The Political in the Ethical.....                | 258 |
| 2-1. To Whom to Give: “Here I Am,” “It’s Me Here,” and “ <i>Me voici</i> ” .....     | 261 |
| 2-2. Political Interrogation of the Third Party.....                                 | 266 |
| 3-3. Proper Name Proper to the Saying Proper.....                                    | 271 |
| 3. Ethical Hyperbole: Substitution, Sacrifice, and Dying for Others.....             | 277 |
| 3-1. Subjectivity of the <i>moi malgré soi</i> .....                                 | 280 |
| 3-2. Solicitude [ <i>Fürsorge</i> ]: Ontological Impossibility of Substitution ..... | 284 |
| 3-3. Substitution: Otherwise than Being beyond “To Be or Not to Be” .....            | 288 |
| Conclusion .....   | 302 |
| Bibliography .....   | 311 |

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### I. Works by Emmanuel Levinas

- AEAE      *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991.
- CPP      *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998.
- DD      *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986.
- DE      *De l'évasion*. Le Livre de Poche. Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1982.
- DEE      *De l'existence à l'existant*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1993.
- DF      *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Seán Hand. Biltmore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- DL      *Difficile liberté*. Le Livre de Poche. Paris: Albin Michel, 2010.
- DMT      *Dieu, la mort et le temps*. Le Livre de Poche. Paris: Grasset, 1993.
- DEH      *Discovering Existence with Husserl*. Edited and translated by Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1998.
- DEHH      *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Quatrième édition corrigée. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2006.
- E      *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Le Livre de Poche. Paris: Grasset, 1991.
- EeI      *Éthique et infini: Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*. Paris: France Culture, 1982.
- EI      *Ethics and Infinity: Conversation with Philippe Nemo*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.
- EE      *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001.

- EN *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other.* Translated by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- GDT *God, Death, and Time.* Translated by Bertina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- MHO “Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie.” In *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, 113 (1932): 395-431.
- GWCM *Of God Who Comes to Mind.* Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- OBBE *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008.
- OE *On Escape.* Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- TIPH *Théorie de l’intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl.* Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1963.
- TIHP *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology.* Translated by Andre Oriane. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1995.
- TA *Le temp et l’autre.* Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979.
- TO *Time and the Other and Additional Essays.* Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- TI *Totality and Infinity: Essay on Exteriority.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- TeI *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l’extériorité.* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1961.

## II. Works by Edmund Husserl

- CM *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology.* Translated by Dorion Cairns. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999.

- Ideas-I      *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology.* Translated by Daniel D. Dahlstrom. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014.
- Ideas-II     *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution.* Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.
- Ideas-III    *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Third Book.* Translated by Ted E. Klein and W. E. Pohl. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980.
- LI-I         *Logical Investigations, Volume I.* Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001.
- LI-II         *Logical Investigations, Volume II.* Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001.
- CES         *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy.* Translated by David Carr. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

### III. Works by Martin Heidegger

- BP            *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis).* Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989.
- BW            *Basic Writings.* Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- ID            *Identity and Difference.* Translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 2002.
- IM            *Introduction to Metaphysics.* Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- PA            *Pathmarks.* Edited by William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- SD            *Zur Sache des Denkens*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000.
- SZ            *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967.
- WE            *Wegmarken*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976.

#### **IV. Works by Jacques Derrida**

- AE            *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1997.
- AEE          *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- ED            *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967.
- FK            “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” translated by Samuel Weber. In *Acts of Religion*. Edited by Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- GD            *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- OG            *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Biltmore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- SM            *Specters of Marxism: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.
- WD            *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978

## Introduction

It is opinion [*doxa*] that suppresses questions.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation is much inspired by Paul Ricoeur's (1913-2005) ellipsis in his reading of Emmanuel Levinas's (1906-1995) later work, *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence* (1974): "To the memory of those [*êtres*] who were closest...."<sup>2</sup> What Ricoeur emphasizes here is a seemingly contradictory aspect of Levinas's notion of memory; that is, he hints at the problem of how Levinas could possibly write the dedication about any memory as a form of epigraph while rigorously rejecting a synchronization of "phenomenology of memory, history, and narration"<sup>3</sup> in which a transcendent alterity of the Other can be represented, assembled, remembered, and synchronized in the midst of the identification of the Same. As Levinas himself states, "The assembling of being [*être*] in the present—its synchronization by retention, memory and history, reminiscence—is representation; it does not integrate the responsibility for the separated being [*étant*]."<sup>4</sup> However, the focus of this dissertation lies in Ricoeur's ellipsis in reading Levinas's epigraph; in fact, Ricoeur's own ellipsis "... " reads in *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*, "among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other human, the same anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 374.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Autrement: Lecture d'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 14, 39 (henceforth my translation). This phrase is originally from the epigraph to Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). Ricoeur considers this work "Levinas's greatest book." Paul Ricoeur, "In Memoriam Emmanuel Levinas," *Philosophy Today*, 40:3 (1996), 331.

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur, *Autrement*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> OBBE, 140; AEAE, 179 (translation slightly modified).

Semitism.”<sup>5</sup> In his concise yet penetrating reading of Levinas entitled *Autrement: Lecture d’Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence d’Emmanuel Levinas* (1997), what Ricoeur keeps silent about is the problem of the millions of Holocaust victims. The fundamental question of this dissertation starts with this ellipsis—that is, the neglect of the death of *others*.

Rather than making up for the ellipsis, this dissertation will problematize it by taking the issue of death as a *question*. In opposition to the question of Being [*Seinsfrage*] in the Heideggerian sense of the term in which an ethical meaning of the death of the Other is subordinated to an ontological meaning of Dasein’s death, Levinas recognizes the enigma of death *qua* a “departure without return, a question without givens, a pure interrogation mark.”<sup>6</sup> It is the unknowable mystery of death that calls into question the mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] of death as the most authentic [*eigentlich*] possibility for Dasein and that discloses an exigency of an ethical meaning of death more primordial than an ontological meaning of death. For Levinas, the face of the other commands me, “Thou shalt not kill,” and calls for my responsibility for the death of the other: “*me voici*.” The ethical meaning of death emerges from my “non-indifference” to the death of the other beyond or on the hither side of the mineness of death. The interdiction “Thou shalt not kill” signifies that in my indifference to the other’s death, I become an accomplice in murdering the other. The central thesis of this dissertation is that Heidegger’s ontological thematization of death, which culminates in the mineness of Dasein’s authenticity in total isolation from the death of the other, cannot exhaust the signification of death. It is in this context that Levinas claims that “The meaning of death begins in the interhuman.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> OBBE, v; AEAE, v.

<sup>6</sup> GDT, 14; DMT, 23.

<sup>7</sup> GWCM, 163; DD, 246.

However, the interhuman relationship does not simply refer to a duo-relationship between the same and the other; there is always already the third party [*le tiers*] who is other than the other. The entry of the third party does not mean that the third person is numerically added to the relation between the first and the second person but that all the others other than the other—albeit *in absentia*—already gaze, call, and obsess me from the very beginning. Levinas thus states: “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other.”<sup>8</sup> The third party puts into question any exclusive relationship between the same and the other and introduces justice or “the political” into the ethical from the perspective of a third person; indeed, there occurs a shift from the ethical responsibility for the Other to the political justice for others and for the whole of humanity. As Adriaan T. Peperzak points out, if there is a “transition” with the entry of the third party “from transcendence to universality,”<sup>9</sup> *i.e.*, from the responsibility for the Other to justice for others in Levinas’s ethics, the advent of the third party makes the ethical relation more *problematic* since it cannot be said that the ethical relationship is fulfilled by my unilateral, unconditional, or unlimited responsibility for the other alone. Insofar as the ethical relation takes place within the political context, the death(s) of the others is already inscribed in the death of the other in terms of the third party and justice.

Now, death is no longer a matter of a rivalry between my death and the death of the other, between the ontological mineness of Dasein’s death and the infinite responsibility for the other’s death. Rather, at issue here is what is put in the ellipsis in Ricoeur’s *Autrement*, that is, the death of the others in terms of the third party, which underlies the problem of a great number of the victims in the Nazi concentration camps. As Ricoeur remains silent in his reading of Levinas, little

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<sup>8</sup> TI, 213; TeI, 188.

<sup>9</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 180. For a general introduction to Levinas’s transition from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise Than Being*, see Bettina Bergo, *Levinas between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty That Adorns the Earth* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 132-47. This work includes several remarks on this transition presented by Levinasian scholars; among these are Stephan Strasser, Fabio Ciaramelli, Etienne Feron, and Adriaan T. Peperzak.



attention has been given to the death of the others with regard to the third party by Levinasian scholarship. Levinas also rarely investigates or thematizes it beyond some confessional remarks or epigraphs as in *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*. In this regard, the lack of significant consideration on the death of the others is quite surprising because the ongoing status of the third party, which proclaims that the ethical relation always takes place within a political realm, entails a necessary moment in which one must rethink the ethico-political meaning of the death of the others in terms of the third party. Therefore, the ethico-political meaning of death deserves to receive more attention from the perspective of the third party that has largely been put in the ellipsis.

Based upon this *mise-en-scene* of the Levinasian scholarship, in which the death of the others has been left behind-the-scene, this dissertation brings the theme of death *qua* a question on the stage to set the scene for “phenomenology of death.” However, the purpose of this dissertation is not to answer the question of death but to radicalize it by means of the political moment of the third party, which brings forth “the latent birth of the *question* in responsibility”<sup>10</sup> and introduces a contradiction or dilemma into ethics. Nevertheless, this political dilemma does not undermine Levinas’s ethical project; on the contrary, the political interrogation of the third party makes ethics remain *ethical* without lapsing into an impotent, futile, or angelic form of abstract ethics. This dissertation will argue that, far from being reduced into or opposed to politics, ethics can be ethical in the political challenges since the political always puts any ethical answer into question, disquietude, and non-indifference, and thereby allows ethics to remain as a question *par excellence*.

It is at this point that the political signification encounters the religious dimension in Levinas’s ethical thought. In spite of the fact that Levinas himself never produces an articulation of the notion of “religion” in a systematic way but only sporadically mentions it throughout his

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<sup>10</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.

oeuvre, the crux of religion in Levinas's ethics can be epitomized as the paradoxical expression "*rappport sans rapport*."<sup>11</sup> This paradoxical *rappport* as religion is in no way any kind of a doxical, intimate, or *sacré rapprochement*, in which the same and the other is integrated into a mystical fusion, reconciliation, or participation. Rather, Levinas claims that religion is the *para*-doxical, absolute, or holy [*saint*] "bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality."<sup>12</sup> The political interrogation of the third party precludes ethics from reverting into a tranquil *rapprochement* in its self-satisfaction, contention, complacency, and *repose en paix*, totally indifferent to the commands, callings, sufferings, tears, bloods, and deaths of an infinite number of the third parties. This dissertation will phenomenologically re-describe Levinas's description of death in order to argue that the ethical relation within the political context is crystallized in this *para*-doxical conception of religion. The ultimate scene that this dissertation sets up is to prepare the way for uncovering the religious dimension of the ethical thought of Levinas through the consideration of phenomenology of death. In the conviction that the events of the Holocaust concerning the victims should be considered as ethical, political, and—among all—religious, this dissertation will investigate phenomenology of death to uncover the *religious* dimension in Levinas's *ethical* thought by means of examining the *political* moment of the third party.

The topic, "phenomenology of death," informs both a methodology and a theme of this dissertation. On the one hand, phenomenology as a philosophical method based upon the transcendental methodology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) shapes the evolution of Levinas's

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<sup>11</sup> TI, 40; TeI, 10. See also TI, 80, 295; TeI, 52-3, 271 and OBBE, 168; AEAE, 214. Alphonso Lingis translates "*rappport sans rapport*" as either "relation without relation" or "unrelating relation."

<sup>12</sup> TI, 40; TeI, 10.

ethical thought. On the other hand, Levinas develops his own consideration of death against the backdrop of the ontological thematization of death that Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) exemplarily presents in *Being and Time*. However, Levinas's engagement of both Husserl and Heidegger turns out to be the basis of his divergence from their thoughts—and the Western philosophical tradition in general—and thereby the basis of the launch of his own articulation of ethics as first philosophy. This dissertation claims that Levinas's phenomenology of death discloses that death is neither a mere phenomenon, which can be intelligible by transcendental phenomenology, nor a pure non-phenomenon, which remains meaningless or irrelevant to the phenomenological investigation; rather, it is a *para*-phenomenon that overflows, exceeds, and ruptures the binary alternative of a phenomenon or a non-phenomenon—all of which are reduced to the doxical thematization of death. The paradox of Levinas's own phenomenology consists in the fact that phenomenology should fail in order to be phenomenology itself. It is Levinas's para-doxical gesture to describe what cannot be described, to thematize what cannot be thematized, and to phenomenologize what cannot be phenomenologized. The failure of phenomenology culminates in the para-phenomenality of death since death as the para-phenomenon neither transparently appears to consciousness nor remains entirely outside of consciousness. Therefore, Levinas's phenomenology of death begins when phenomenology fails to make sense of death whose para-phenomenality is the ethical locus from which the para-doxical meaning of death emerges beyond or on the hither side of all doxical-ontological meanings of death.

It is worthwhile to note that Levinas's peculiar terminology “on the hither side of [*en deçà de*]” appears throughout this dissertation. This terminology describes not only Levinas's equivocal stance toward Husserl and Heidegger but also an equivocal relation between ethics and ontology. The term “hither” literally means “toward this place” and hence refers neither to any fictitious

utopia [*ou-topos*] since it conveys this *place* or *topos*, nor to an already explored, fixed, or conclusive *topos* because it is still on the way *toward* this place. In this context, “A on the hither side of B” does not mean that A simply goes beyond or leave B behind to find a utopia, which is in fact not any *topos* at all, but that A moves toward *this* place by interrupting, disrupting, or suspending any allegedly proper, veritable, or authentic place for B. It is an other of *topos* or otherwise than *topos* that has been there but remains clandestine, indefinite, and unknown within this *topos*. The topology of “hither” illustrates the ambiguity of Levinas’s relation to Husserl and Heidegger; it is a faithful and, simultaneously, unfaithful one. In other words, although Levinas departs from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger’s ontology, he never forgets his points of departure, which ceaselessly haunt throughout his elaboration of ethics. The radical peculiarity of Levinas’s ethical thought does not consist in his successful criticism of these great philosophers, but in the fact that he remains faithful to them by calling into question their proper places where their thoughts dwell. Levinas’s critical stance toward both Husserl and Heidegger reveals his own ethical stance toward them since it does not aim to entirely dismiss their *topoi* to leave them behind, but to expose *other* places within their authentic *topoi* that they fail to explore. By means of the elaboration of Levinas’s phenomenology of death, this dissertation will demonstrate that Levinas is keen to become methodologically more Husserlian than Husserl himself and thematically more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself, even when he pungently criticizes both.

Moreover, Levinas states in *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence* that the task of the work is to establish a primordial and irreducible locus of ethics “on the hither side of [*en deça de*] ontology.”<sup>13</sup> This hither side does not imply ethics’ impotent or angelic movement toward an

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<sup>13</sup> OBBE, 46; AEAE, 59 (translation modified and italics removed). Lingis translates alternately “*en deça de*” as “on the hither side of” or as “beyond.” This determination is quite understandable since Levinas also uses both “*en*

otherworldly utopia in order to totally leave behind *this* ontological place, as the early Derrida might understand in “Violence and Metaphysics.” Rather, it signifies ethics’ enduring and painful movement toward an *other* place unknown or unexplored [*lieu inconnu*] within *this* place of ontology, as Derrida’s later reading appreciates in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*.<sup>14</sup> This other *topos* never destroys any authentic or ontological place for the sake of taking its own proper place in place of ontology. Rather, as will be seen throughout the dissertation, it is a primordial *topos* that renders any ontological place possible by rupturing the rigid, suffocating, and architectonic *topos* of ontology. Consequently, the primordial signification of the hither side evinces the ethical significance of the peculiar way in which Levinas does phenomenology in his treatment of death against the background of Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian thematization of death.

The main body of this dissertation consists of five chapters. The preliminary observations of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (Chapter One) and Heidegger’s ontological thematization of death (Chapter Two) constitute an introductory part of this dissertation in terms of methodology and theme. Chapter One revisits Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, which paves the way for the “phenomenological method” of this dissertation. This chapter begins by scrutinizing why Husserl criticizes psychologism for its natural attitude and then how he formulates his own phenomenological method by means of the elaboration of his theories of transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity. This chapter will argue that Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology remains solipsistic and even imperialistic in the transcendental turn from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. In this solipsistic feature of the transcendental method,

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*deça de*” and “*au-delà*” in a similar context. When Levinas employs the term “*au-delà*,” and when Lingis translates “*en deça de*” as “beyond,” it is important to remember that these terms carry the connotation of the hither side.

<sup>14</sup> I will examine Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Levinas in Chapter Five.

Levinas recognizes the failure of phenomenology, which in turn provides him with methodological ingredients indispensable to nourishing phenomenology of death. At the edge of phenomenology, both the possibility and the impossibility of Husserlian phenomenology suggest the paradoxical peculiarity of Levinas's own phenomenology. That is to say, the paradox of phenomenology of death discloses not only that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is not Husserlian enough in its deliberation of the phenomenological method, but also that Levinas would want to be Husserlian more than Husserl himself even in his trenchant attack on Husserlian phenomenology itself.

Chapter Two examines the "thematical approach" to the topic of the dissertation: the theme of death. Drawing upon the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger seeks to discover the meaning of the authentic Being, which culminates in his ontological thematization of death. Unlike the Husserlian transcendental Ego, Dasein *qua* the exemplary being, who can raise the question about its own Being-there, anticipates its-no-longer-able-to-be-there, that is, its own death. Dasein understands its death not simply as a mere impossibility of its existence but rather as the very possibility of this impossibility. The ontological meaning of death consists in the fact that the most authentic possibility as death characterizes the solitary finitude of Dasein's authentic Being in its totality [*Ganzheit*]. This chapter will show that Heidegger's ontological thematization of death takes death to be a doxical or flat phenomenon that Dasein transparently understands as its most authentic possibility; accordingly, death as the possibility *par excellence* individualizes Dasein itself down to its own Being in isolation from the anonymous they [*das Man*]. It is Heidegger's exceptional achievement found in *Being and Time* that the meaning of death is fully clarified by the doxical architectonic structure of ontology. However, this is where Levinas's challenge against Heidegger comes in by asking whether the meaning of death as such can be exhausted by the doxical-

ontological thematization of death. For Levinas, the ontological-existential architecture never allows a para-phenomenality of death and thus fails to capture the ethical signification of death itself, which is more primordial and exigent than the ontological mineness of death. By appealing to the enigmatic character of death as a para-phenomenon, Levinas calls into question Heidegger's thanato-*logy*, which logicalizes, thematize, and neutralizes the enigmatic mystery of death into the heroic mastery of death, and thereby which dissimulates or covers up the para-doxical signification of death.

Chapter Three explores how Levinas begins to develop his own phenomenology of death by uncovering the most brutal and barest facet of *être*, existence without existents, or “there is [*il y a*]” which has been covered up by the ontological coverings and *Sein* in particular. The early Levinas formulates his notion of “*il y a*” against the background of Heidegger's concept of “there is/it gives [*es gibt*].” Although the initial allusion to the *es gibt* suggested in *Being and Time* (1927) much inspires Levinas's early elaboration of the *il y a*, this chapter will argue that the early Levinas in *Existence and Existents* (1947) and *Time and the Other* (1947) already anticipates, suspends, and disrupts Heidegger's mature idea of the *es gibt* fully articulated in *On Time and Being* (1962-64). It is as if the early Levinas would anticipate the later Heidegger, as if he would not accept the so-called *Kehre* in Heidegger's thought. Levinas's critique of the *es gibt* in favor of the *il y a* explicates not only that Heidegger remains consistent and constant in the thinking of *Sein* but also, on that account, the reason why the later Heidegger remains of little interest to Levinas himself. Levinas's polemic against Heidegger lies in his ongoing obsession with *Sein*, which hides, conceals, and dissimulates the brutal nakedness of *être* in general, that is, the anonymous *il y a*. Despite Levinas's little attention to the later Heidegger, this chapter brings the early Levinas face to face with the later Heidegger in order to expose the anonymous, enigmatic, and *an-archic il y a*

prior to *Sein* and even to the *es gibt*. This chapter will show that the irremissible persistence of the an-archic *il y a* characterizes the most primordial dimension of *être* in general where there is neither beginning [*Anfang*] nor end [*Ende*], neither *arche* nor *telos*. It is the horror of the *il y a* that there is no exit, evasion, or escape from *être* prior to or on the hither side of the anxiety for no-longer-able-to-be-there. The horror of *être* comes from the perpetual weight of existence with no exit, that is, the irremissible tragedy of not being dead enough. Therefore, the horror of *être* outlives the anxiety for *Sein*, as Levinas states “death is not as strong as *être*.”<sup>15</sup>

Chapter Four takes into consideration the hypostatic transition from the purely verbal *être* to a substantive *étant* which prepares the way for producing the ethical relationship between the same and the other. If the early Levinas in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* discovers the pure depth of *être* without any substantive *étant*, that is, the anarchic *il y a* prior to *Sein* and to *Es gibt* involved in the complicity of Being and beings, the mature Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* and other related texts delves further into the concrete dimension of *être* “produced as multiple and as split into same and other; this is its ultimate structure.”<sup>16</sup> Ontologically, in order to have any relation to the other, the subject must maintain its proper place where it finds its solitude in advance; thus, the ontological relations always assume an authentic place for the subject before encountering the other. By means of the anachronic or an-archic logic of “the posteriority of the anterior,”<sup>17</sup> however, Levinas provides a phenomenological account of subjectivity, which undermines the ontological presupposition of the solitude of the subject. That is to say, the anterior solitude of the subject is found only *after the fact* in its posterior relation to other than itself. The task of this chapter is to elucidate that the posterior and concrete relationship between the same

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<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I: Carnets de captivité et autres inédits* (Paris: Grasset, 2009), 174.

<sup>16</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

<sup>17</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.



and the other phenomenologically precedes the anterior solitude of the subject. Consequently, subjectivity consists in the exposure of the same to the other since the ultimate structure of being is concretized in the ethical, religious, and metaphysical relationship between the same and the other even before the ontological constitution of the subject.

Chapter Four will exhibit that the ontological coverings and *Sein* in particular have dissimulated the concrete and ultimate dimension of *être*, and thereby the anterior posteriority of the other is marginalized as something ontic or inauthentic. Inspired by the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas endeavors to strip off what has been accumulated in the pure depth of being to reveal the concrete structure of being produced as separate into same and other. The formal structure of a relation of the idea to its *ideatum*, which presupposes the absolute distance, separation, or holiness [*sainteté*] between the *relata*, takes its concrete form in the ethical encounter with the other who forbids me [*moi*] to murder: “Thou shalt not kill.” It is the very first word of the other that commands, accuses, overwhelms, and obsesses me on the hither side of my understanding, thematization, and comprehension. The primary purpose of this chapter is to clarify the ethical signification of this interdiction, which signifies the exigent call of the other that calls for my responsibility for the death of the other as if the death of the other would matter to me even more than my own. Prior to my death in which I am able to be *toward* the end of my existence in the ontological responsibility for my own, proper, or authentic Being, I still have time to be *against* my death in my response to the death of the other: “*me voici*.”

Chapter Five considers the ethical signification of “*me voici*” in the political context through scrutinizing Levinas’s later texts and especially *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*. The ethical relationship is not an intimate, congenial, or exclusive relationship between the same and the other but a traumatic, unsettling, and vulnerable one in which the third party is always

already involved. The appearance of the third party does not tolerate my exclusive and excessive responsibility for the other and commands what the other commands: “*me voici*.” The ethical response “*me voici*” is no longer performed in my unconditional, unlimited, and unquestioned responsibility for the other alone and thus should be articulated, thematized, and said [*dit*] in and through ontological language. It is the political moment or justice that engenders “the latent birth of the *question* in responsibility.”<sup>18</sup> The central task of this chapter is to investigate how the later Levinas articulates the convoluted question of “the political moment in the ethical” with regard to the interruption of the third party. This chapter will claim that far from undoing the ultimate structure of being concretized in the ethical relationship, the ticklish moment of the political interrogation renders ethics *ethical* without falling into a pure, impotent, silent, or angelic form of ethics, which entails violent, *apolitical*, and so *anti*-ethical relations.

Chapter Five begins by discussing Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Levinas in “Violence and Metaphysics,” where Derrida claims that the ethical discourse of the other should go through ontological language and the passage of Being in particular; otherwise, it would remain a silent or angelic language that does not deserve its name. The purpose of this chapter does not lie in verifying or censuring Derrida’s deconstruction of Levinas but in tracing his ethical gesture, which clarifies Levinas’s own question running through his later texts. In *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*, Levinas becomes more attentive to the problem of language by distinguishing between ethical language as the Saying [*le Dire*] and ontological one as the Said [*le Dit*]. Due to the interrogation of the third party, the unthematizable Saying of “*me voici*” must find its way into ontological language to be Said and thus undergo the circulation of the verb “to be” in the Said. The overarching challenge of this later work lies in the question of how to articulate the Said

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<sup>18</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.

inspired by the Saying, *i.e.*, “in other words or otherwise Said [*autrement dit*],” in terms of the third party. However, the advent of the third party does not lessen or compromise the ethical weight and exigency of responsibility for the other by distributing it to all the others; on the contrary, Levinas intensifies it to the point of substitution, sacrifice, or dying for others. In this hyperbolic phenomenology of death, the ontological question no longer matters since death is not a matter either of “to be or not to be”; rather, what is at stake is otherwise than being or beyond essence, which cannot be captured by the dialectic of Being and nothingness. On the hither side of the alternative of “to be or not to be,” beyond the dialectic of Being and nothingness, the ethical signification of death emerges from otherwise than being or beyond essence.

## Chapter I

### Husserl's Phenomenological Methodology

Chapter One is dedicated to the preliminary consideration of the Husserlian methodology of phenomenology, which paves the way for the “phenomenological method” that Levinas develops in his articulation of ethics. Phenomenology as a philosophical method deeply rooted in the transcendental methodology of Husserl governs, though not exclusively, the evolution of Levinas’s ethical thought. As a philosopher of ethics, Levinas wants to remain a phenomenologist who seeks to ensure the alterity of the Other in order to unearth an ethical meaning that has been buried behind the remarkable accomplishments of phenomenology.<sup>19</sup> Throughout his scholarly works where he incessantly endeavors to distance himself from traditional metaphysics and to establish ethics as a “first philosophy,”<sup>20</sup> Levinas elaborates his own phenomenological method *via* fully engaging with Husserlian phenomenology. This chapter claims that Levinas’s critical engagement of Husserl’s phenomenology refers neither to indiscriminately following his phenomenological method nor to simply rejecting it; rather, it is Levinas’s ethical gesture to disclose a *hither* side of Husserlian phenomenology that Husserl himself fails to capture. By means of this hither side, which divulges the doxical foundation of Husserl’s intellectualism, Levinas formulates his own phenomenological method. In this chapter, I will first show why Husserl

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<sup>19</sup> In a conversation with Theodor de Boer at the University of Leyden in 1975, Levinas states, “I think that, in spite of everything, what I do is phenomenology even if there is no reduction, here, according to the rules required by Husserl; even if all of the Husserlian methodology is not respected.” GWCM, 87; DD, 139-40. In another interview with Raoul Mortley, Levinas also mentions that his “method is phenomenological,” which is a “research of the *mise en scène* of that which is the object.” Raoul Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation: Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 14; In this vein, Oona Eisenstadt points out that Levinas can be a phenomenologist due to his “trackings back...from all the varieties of what he calls *totality*,” and thus, though criticizing Husserlian phenomenology, “he retains from the phenomenological method its basic aim: to move back from structures of representation or form to what is behind them and gives rise to them.” Oona Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text: The Premodern Sources of Levinas's Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 5, 333 (note 6), respectively. Eisenstadt does not take up in detail in what sense Levinas “tracks back from” Husserl, which I will undertake in this dissertation.

<sup>20</sup> TI, 304; TeI, 281.

censures sheer psychologism for its natural attitude, and then how he develops his own phenomenological methodology through examining his theories of transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity. I will then clarify a doxical-intellectualistic facet of Husserl's phenomenology, which betrays a crucial possibility of the phenomenological method, and, simultaneously, the fatal limits of it. At the edge of Husserlian phenomenology, both the possibility and the impossibility of his phenomenological method constitute the radical kernel of Levinas's own phenomenology, which provides the methodological approach to "phenomenology of death" of this dissertation.

### **1. Transcendental Subjectivity: *Rückfrage* into the Locus of *Sinngebung***

Phenomenology literally means a logic or science of phenomena. In order to understand Husserl's phenomenology, it is necessary to examine exactly what he means by both "logic" and "phenomena." According to Husserl, logic is an *a priori* science that investigates the ideal, essential, or eidetic structures of phenomena prior to all kinds of empirical facts, and thus seeks to establish a solid foundation of scientific knowledge by "apodictic inner evidence."<sup>21</sup> By contrast, psychology is an *a posteriori* science that considers our mental states in terms of "induction"<sup>22</sup> and therefore leads to a kind of epistemological skepticism or relativism always dependent upon contingent conditions. As Levinas puts it, a psychological knowledge becomes a matter of a subjective "feeling of evidence" devoid of any "objective value" that can confer certainty on knowledge.<sup>23</sup> For Husserl, psychology cannot produce "the apodictically evident, and so

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<sup>21</sup> LI-I, 47.

<sup>22</sup> LI-I, 47. If logical laws are reduced to psychological laws, they necessarily depend on the thinking subject who holds them; thus, the possibility of certain knowledge becomes relative to psychological, subjective, and so contingent conditions or states of the very subject. In this context, Edith Wyschogrod argues that what Husserl rejects is not the fact that logic goes back to subjectivity, but that "the *content* of logic is subjective"; in other words, subjectivity is not the content of consciousness, but that which itself thinks "some objective unity." Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 33.

<sup>23</sup> TIHP, 15; TIPH, 36-7.

metempirical and absolutely exact laws which form the core of all logic.”<sup>24</sup> Psychologism attempts to reduce logic to psychology and thereby misses the *a priori* ideality and apodicticity that can provide the certain condition of knowledge or the foundation of logic. To identify the “phenomenological founding of logic,”<sup>25</sup> Husserl’s phenomenology begins with the departure from psychologism, which is not only the central task of his early work—the *Prolegomena to Logical Investigations*—but also underlies his entire philosophical work.

In the first volume of *Logical Investigations* (1900), Husserl proposes the principal slogan of phenomenology: “We will go back to the ‘things themselves’ [*Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zurückgehen*].”<sup>26</sup> When Husserl speaks of the return to the things themselves, he does not mean the return to the things in themselves (noumena), behind phenomena in the Kantian sense of the term, but the return to the “phenomena” that present themselves to consciousness. Levinas states that the underlying task of phenomenology is not to elevate “phenomena into things in themselves,” but to bring them to the “horizon of their appearing, that of their phenomenality.”<sup>27</sup> Phenomena are not indifferently given in themselves regardless of our cognitive activities but appear to our consciousness as the objects of intuition, while our intuition as the theoretical act of consciousness makes them appear to us and makes sense of them. Levinas points out that the groundbreaking achievement of *Logical Investigations* is the “affirmation of what appears to us”; thus, the true return to things themselves is the “return to the acts in which the intuitive presence of things is unveiled.”<sup>28</sup> Insofar as any object has a phenomenological sense or meaning [*Sinn* or *sens*] in our

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<sup>24</sup> LI-I, 48. Levinas states that for Husserl, “the psychology of thought understood as a science of psychical or mental [*psychiques*] facts cannot serve as a foundation of logic.” DEH, 50; DEHH, 18. Husserl’s own critique of psychologism is mainly discussed in the first part of *Logical Investigations*, “Prolegomena to Pure Logic.” LI-I, 9-161.

<sup>25</sup> LI-I, 175. Husserl also expresses it as “a philosophical laying down of the foundations of pure logic” (237) or “the phenomenological foundations of pure logic” (LI-II, 257).

<sup>26</sup> LI-I, 168 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>27</sup> GWCM, 87; DD, 140.

<sup>28</sup> DEH, 95; DEHH, 161 (italics removed).

conscious life, both an object and consciousness are intentional or aim at each other. The basic principle of phenomenology, therefore, begins with departing from a daily belief, based on the “natural attitude,”<sup>29</sup> in the existence of a mind-independent object, to turn attention to the givenness or appearance of the object to consciousness.

The key concept of “intentionality”<sup>30</sup> in phenomenology exhibits the fundamental characteristics of the intentional structure; simply put, consciousness is always consciousness *of* an object while an object is already the object *for* consciousness. However, this does not mean that the intentional object is really contained within the intentional act. While the intentional object does not shape an immanent part of consciousness that apprehends it, the intentional act is not an immanent part of the object that presents itself to consciousness. The 1907 lectures, published as *The Idea of Phenomenology*, introduce the term “transcendence,” which continues to play a crucial role in Husserl’s mature works, to clarify the intentional relationship between the act of consciousness and its object. On the one hand, consciousness transcends itself toward something other than itself, that is, its own intended object; on the other hand, the object presents itself in

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<sup>29</sup> For Husserl’s critical discussion on the natural attitude, see Ideas-I, §§27-30; Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nachnikian (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1990), 13-21. For Levinas’s consideration of Husserl’s view on the natural attitude, see TIHP, 121-31; TIPH, 175-89.

<sup>30</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak points out: “Husserl’s renewal of philosophy through phenomenology can be summarized in the word ‘intentionality’.” Adriaan T. Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 14. According to Husserl himself, intentionality is “the most universal essential characteristic of psychic being”; he immediately adds, “Psychic life is the life of consciousness; consciousness is consciousness of something.” Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925*, trans. John Scanlon (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 34. For a general account of the concept of intentionality, see Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-16. For a detailed analysis of Husserl’s concept of intentionality, see Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13-22; Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1994), 91-108. Husserl borrows the term “intentionality” from Brentano but develops it in a transcendental way. Whereas Brentano conceives of intentionality as a property of consciousness, Husserl does not think that an exterior object enters into the relation with consciousness, and then the relation is established within consciousness. In this context, Levinas states that “[t]he relation of intentionality is nothing like the relations between real objects.” DEH, 59. Rather, it is the intentional relation between the subject and its object that constitutes “the genuinely primary phenomenon in which we can find what are called ‘subject’ and ‘object’,” TIHP, 41; TIPH, 71. See also Dermot Moran, “Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl’s and Brentano’s Accounts of Intentionality,” *Inquiry* 43/1, (2000), 39–66.

such a way that consciousness intends it. As Levinas puts it, “Intentionality is, for Husserl, an act of the genuine transcendence and the very prototype of any transcendence.”<sup>31</sup>

In *Ideas I* (1913), Husserl explains this intentional structure of consciousness by employing more technical terms: “noesis” as the subjective pole and “noema” as the objective pole.<sup>32</sup> While the noema is the meaning-given in the conscious act, the noesis is the meaning-giving element in this act. All phenomenological meaning then takes place in the correlation between the intentional act (noesis) and its correlated object (noema); the intentional act cognizes its own intentional object rather than the actual object *out there*. As Levinas points out, hence, intentionality is essentially an “*act of bestowing a meaning (the Sinngebung)*.”<sup>33</sup> Phenomenologically speaking, there is no difference between the intentional object and the actual object since both appear to consciousness as the same, not as two different objects. In consciousness, the object of the intention “*is and means*” what is intended, that is, the intentional object as a noema of a noesis; thus, Husserl argues that “it is a serious error to draw a real distinction”<sup>34</sup> between the two. Husserl pays little attention to any objectivistic interpretations of an ontological property or status of an object because the problem of “whether or not the object really exists apart from our conscious life” is irrelevant to the

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<sup>31</sup> TIHP, 40; TIPH, 69 (italics removed and translation modified).

<sup>32</sup> In *Ideas I*, Husserl for the first time formulates the intentional structure of noema-noesis. See *Idea-I*, 172-93.

<sup>33</sup> DEH, 59; DEHH, 32. Due to intentionality as the act of the *Sinngebung* on the basis of the correlation between noema and noesis, Husserlian phenomenology overcomes the traditional dualism, largely based on the natural attitude, between subject and object or between realism and idealism. Levinas thus sees intentionality as “what makes up the very subjectivity of the subject,” TIHP, 41; TIPH, 70.

<sup>34</sup> LI-II, 127, 126, respectively. Heidegger explicates this intentional structure as follows: “It is not the case that a perception first becomes intentional by having something psychical enter into relation with the psyche, and that it would no longer be intentional if this reality did not exist. It is rather the case that perception, correct or deceptive, is in itself intentional...As perception, it is *intrinsically intentional*, regardless of whether the perceived is in reality on hand or not.” However, he goes on to add a “completely new structure” to the intentional structure. “The way and manner of how this chair is perceived is to be distinguished from the structure of how it is represented. The expression *the perceived as such* now refers [not to the perceived entity in itself but] *to this entity in the way and manner of its being-perceived*.” Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 31, 40, respectively. This new structure is further discussed in *Being and Time* by means of the existential analytic of Dasein that I will deal with in the next chapter.



phenomenological task. Instead, he attempts to *describe* a priori, ideal, and eidetic structures and laws of phenomena in order to exhibit how all the phenomenological meanings are constituted in and for consciousness. Consequently, Husserl defines phenomenology, in a purest sense, “*not as a science of matter of facts* [Tatsachenwissenschaft], *but instead as a science of essences* [Wesenswissenschaft] (as an “*eidetic science*,”<sup>35</sup> that is, “theory of the essences of ‘pure phenomena,’ the phenomena of a ‘pure consciousness’ or of a ‘pure ego’.”<sup>36</sup>

In order to focus on the intentional structure of our conscious experience, according to Husserl, it is necessary to suspend our acceptance of the natural attitude that would simply presuppose the existence of the world and all things in it independent of our consciousness. It is the *epoché* that not only suspends or brackets off all kinds of dogmatism of the natural attitude, but also offers the condition for various forms of “reduction,” such as phenomenological, eidetic, transcendental, and primordial reductions. The reduction here refers to a leading back from a naïve consciousness based upon the natural attitude, which takes an object as an autonomous thing out there in the mundane, empirical, or real world, to a transcendental consciousness based upon the phenomenological attitude, which constitutes the object as its own correlate. This reduction, which can “‘purify’ the psychological phenomena of what lends them reality...in the real ‘world’,” thereby allow the ego to experience an object in the transcendental realm where the correlation between the transcendental consciousness and its intended object takes place. According to Husserl, what the ego experiences are “irrealities [*Irrealitäten*],” which refer to “all transcendently purified experiences.”<sup>37</sup> The ego does not simply experience any object out there in the real, mundane, or empirical world, but what presents itself in the cognitive process. It is the lived experience

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<sup>35</sup> Ideas-I, 5.

<sup>36</sup> LI-II, 343.

<sup>37</sup> Ideas-I, 6.

[*Erlebnis*] that the phenomenological ego undergoes under the phenomenological reduction. The primary task of the *Ideas I* is to investigate “the most general structure of this pure consciousness” in terms of the phenomenological reduction that renders “the transcendently purified consciousness and its essential correlates visible and accessible to us.”<sup>38</sup> In *Ideas I*, Husserl calls the outcome of the phenomenological reduction the pure ego—it is a “phenomenological residuum,”<sup>39</sup> to which “no reduction can do anything.”<sup>40</sup>

Hence, instead of living naively in experience and theoretically investigating what is experienced (transcendent nature), we carry out the ‘phenomenological reduction’... What is sought is, accordingly, what remains as the ‘phenomenological residue,’ what remains, despite the fact that we have ‘suspended’ the entire world with all the things, animate beings, human beings, ourselves included. We have actually lost nothing, but acquired the complete, absolute being that, correctly understood, contains every instance of worldly transcendence in itself, ‘constituting’ them in itself.<sup>41</sup>

After the phenomenological reduction through which the existence of the mundane-empirical world is parenthesized, the ego remains a pure, absolute, and transcendental *residuum* in the flow of every possible and actual change of experience in terms of time and space, as the Kantian formula indicates: “The *I think* must *be able* to accompany all my representations.”<sup>42</sup> In spite of the fact that objects in the world are, of course, *transcendent* to consciousness, their transcendences

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<sup>38</sup> *Ideas-I*, 7. At this moment, phenomenology as an eidetic science, whose object of the investigation remains timeless, deals with the essential structures of the pure consciousness without any historical consideration. In his later writings, however, Husserl develops “genetic” phenomenology that concerns temporality and historicity.

<sup>39</sup> *Ideas-I*, 56-58, 105-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ideas-I*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> *Ideas-I*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 131, B 406. According to Kant, there is a necessary—not contingent or optional—connection between the “I think” and all my representations; that is, every representation always belongs to the I who thinks of it. Moreover, the manifold of representations must be such a way that it can be thought only in relation to a single identical subject as the “I think.” Every judgment or proposition necessarily presupposes the “I think” explicitly or implicitly; otherwise, any judgment or proposition is not possible at all. All consciousness refers back to the “I think” as the ultimate reference of my representations. Therefore, the I think is the “vehicle of all concepts and judgments whatever” (A341/B399). The proposition, for example, “It’s cold out there,” already indicates implicitly that “I think it’s cold out there.” See also *Ideas-I*, 105.

are *constituted* as correlates of the transcendental *residuum* by way of suspending the entire world. In the performance of the reduction, “Everything transcendent, insofar as it is given in a way that conforms to consciousness,” Husserl states, “is an object of phenomenological investigation”; he immediately adds, “all of that is correlative to absolute consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> In this context, the pure ego is the phenomenological locus to be conceived as “transcendence in immanence,”<sup>44</sup> in which an old dichotomy of a subject-object relation is suspended, and then a transcendent world comes to be constituted in the pure ego’s immanence. To the pure ego, the world no longer appears as a raw, neutral, or natural world as the natural attitude envisages, but as its own correlated world as the phenomenological attitude conceives. The shift from the natural to the phenomenological attitude enacted by the phenomenological reduction is first required in the phenomenological or logical investigations.

In *Cartesian Meditations* (1931),<sup>45</sup> the strategy of the phenomenological reduction becomes more radical when the ego takes itself as its own *cogitatum* in its “transcendental reflection.”<sup>46</sup> The ego here is no longer an exceptional *residuum* as the pure ego that looks at its

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<sup>43</sup> Ideas-I, 137. Husserl also says: “by the phenomenological reduction that disengages the existence of nature, we gain the field of the pure stream of consciousness,” Edmund Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology: From the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1910-1911*, trans. Ingo Farin and James G. Hart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 75. Levinas states that phenomenology itself begins with the phenomenological reduction, which entails “*the purification of concrete life from any naturalistic interpretation of its existence*,” TIHP, 93; TIPH, 140. See also DEH, 70-5; DEHH, 48-57.

<sup>44</sup> Ideas-I, 105. Dermont Moran argues that, by means of using the phenomenological reduction, phenomenology “proceeds in immanence and uncovers...how transcendence happens, as it were, how a transcendent world comes to be constituted in immanence.” Dermont Moran, “Dasein as Transcendence in Heidegger and the Critique of Husserl,” in *Heidegger in the Twenty-First Century*, eds., Tziouanis Georgakis and Paul J. Ennis (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 35.

<sup>45</sup> *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* is based on Husserl’s lectures delivered at the Sorbonne in 1929. It was first translated into French by Emmanuel Levinas and Gabrielle Peiffer and published under the title *Méditations cartésiennes: Introduction à la phénoménologie*. It is then published in German in 1950 as the first volume of *Husserliana*, along with the *Pariser Vorträge*, and translated into English in 1960 by Dorion Cairns who also refers to the “Transcript C” which Husserl designated for him.

<sup>46</sup> CM, 33. Husserl here states: “The transcendental heading, *ego cogito*, must therefore be broadened by adding one more member. Each *ego*...bears in itself, in this manner peculiar to the *meant*, its particular *cogitatum*.” In *The Paris Lectures*, Husserl makes a similar remark: “The expression *ego cogito* must be expanded by one term. Every *cogito* contains a meaning: its *cogitatum*.” Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, trans. Peter Koestenbaum (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 12. David Carr expresses the overall scheme of Husserl’s phenomenological

correlated world, but the all-embracing *cogitatum* as the transcendental Ego that looks at *itself* looking at what it sees. In its reflection, the ego becomes its own *cogitatum* whose transcendental experience consists in “looking at and describing the particular transcendently reduced ego.”<sup>47</sup> There is a unity within the “dual topic, *cogito — cogitatum*,” through which a phenomenological description is possible in terms of the two correlative sides: “noematic” and its counterpart, “noetic description.”<sup>48</sup> In this two-fold correlative moment of the ego and *cogitatum*, Jean-Luc Marion notices that the phenomenological reduction entails “schizophrenia within the *I*,” in which the ego is exiled from itself and then “includes within itself its necessary other, the *cogitatum*.”<sup>49</sup>

However, the ego’s schizophrenia is not an incurable illness in “unhappy consciousness” but can be readily—more precisely, already from the outset—cured in terms of the Hegelian dialectical movement. In other words, the ego does not simply remain a pure ego in its naïve naturalness or abstraction but posits its other as the *cogitatum* by means of the reduction, and finally returns to itself as the transcendental Ego in its reflection. The reflective movement of the

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investigation as “*ego-cogito-cogitatum-qua-cogitatum*.” David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 88.

<sup>47</sup> CM, 34. In *The Paris Lectures*, Husserl writes: “The transcendental spectator places himself above himself, watches himself, and sees himself also as the previously world immersed ego. In other words, he discovers that he, as a human being, exists within himself as a *cogitatum*, and, through the corresponding *cogitationes*, he discovers the transcendental life and being which make up the totality of the world.” Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 15. For Husserl, the Cartesian *ego cogito* is not transcendental enough since it still belongs to the world. While Husserl acknowledges Descartes’s groundbreaking—the so-called “modern”—discovery of the ego who works out a radical doubt in order to ensure a certain knowledge in terms of a clear and distinct perception, he does not accept this ego when Descartes states: “At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks [*Nihil nunc admitto nisi quod necessario sit verum; sum igitur praecise tantum res cogitans*]. René Descartes, *The Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. A Latin-English Edition. ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 36-37. According to Husserl, insofar as the Cartesian ego remains a *res cogitans* as a part of the world, it cannot take the world—including itself—as its own *cogitatum* within the transcendental sphere; it is only a thinking thing or substance within the world as a “piece of the world.” CM, 26. Therefore, the Cartesian *ego cogito* fails to ensure the level of certainty within itself. This is why Descartes requires the existence of the perfect, non-deceptive God who guarantees the certainty in what is clearly and distinctly perceived.

<sup>48</sup> CM, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 99, 98, respectively. This schizophrenia reminds us of Husserl’s earlier consideration of the split-consciousness as noema and noesis, which already assumes its recuperation by means of a correlation or adequation between the two.

phenomenological reduction already presupposes the “happy”<sup>50</sup> moment of consciousness. Husserl characterizes the happy status of the transcendental Ego as follows: “It is a synthesis that, as a unitary consciousness embracing these separated processes, gives rise to the consciousness of identity, and thereby makes any knowing of identity possible.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, in arguing that the phenomenological reduction alters the natural ego into the “splitting of the Ego [*Ichspaltung*]”<sup>52</sup> who might provisionally suffer from its ineluctable schizophrenia, Husserl already assumes the “ego’s marvelous being-for-itself,” whose conscious life consists in the “form of reflective intentional relatedness to itself.”<sup>53</sup> In the course of the back-and-forth play between ego and *cogitatum*, the ego’s reflection on itself is self-consciousness, which explains Husserl’s “first universal scheme”<sup>54</sup>: the *ego cogito cogitatum* that does no longer suffer from its schizophrenia.

As seen so far, according to Husserl, there are three stages of the ego as follows: 1) the natural ego “as naturally immersed in the world” on the basis of the natural attitude, 2) the pure ego as the *ego cogito* based on the phenomenological attitude, and 3) the transcendental Ego as the *ego cogito cogitatum* in its transcendental reflection.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, one might doubt whether

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<sup>50</sup> CM, 42. Given that the unhappy consciousness results from the development of self-consciousness which underlies the entire work of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Jean Hyppolite points out that the happy consciousness is either “a naïve consciousness,” which is not yet aware of its unhappiness and “its misfortune,” or a mature consciousness that overcomes “its duality” by sublating its all the unhappy moments of separation or division into a higher unity. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 190. It seems to me that, according to the logic of the Hegelian dialectic, the happy consciousness already presupposes its unhappiness as its essential moment. If there were a final or eventual moment of happy consciousness, there would be no longer any dialectical movement, Life, and Spirit. When it comes to the moment of “Reason,” Hegel himself states, “But from this happy state of having realized its essential character and of living in it, self-consciousness, which at first is Spirit only *immediately* and in *principle*, has withdrawn, or else has not yet realized it...Reason *must* withdraw from this happy state.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 214. Although the problem of whether Hegel conceives of a conclusive and so happy consciousness in the “Absolute Knowledge” is controversial, for Hegel, the Husserlian Ego would still remain abstract and *unhappy* since the unhappy consciousness, which is the source of or impetus for the spiritual progress, constantly finds its place in the happy consciousness in order to overcome its *ongoing* immediacy and abstraction.

<sup>51</sup> CM, 42.

<sup>52</sup> CM, 35. See also Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> CM, 43.

<sup>54</sup> CM, 50.

<sup>55</sup> CM, 35.

the Husserlian formula of the *ego cogito cogitatum* falls into a circular movement of an infinite regress, which requires an infinite number of propositions to support the first proposition insofar as the ego takes itself as its own *cogitatum*. In this infinite circle of the conscious structure, the ego *qua* the pure ego schematically becomes the transcendental ego that sees what the pure ego sees, and then the trans-transcendental ego that sees what the transcendental ego sees what the pure ego sees, *ad infinitum*. However, Husserl seems to conceive of the transcendental Ego as the all-encompassing and *final* disinterested spectator who looks at what is seen in its own phenomenological eyes, which can see the world as the harmonious and unified unfolding of a stream of consciousness; thus, the conclusive self-constitution of the transcendental Ego is the “universal theme of the description.”<sup>56</sup> The transcendental Ego becomes the sole theme to describe in the phenomenological investigation, which works out “the all-embracing task of uncovering [the Ego].”<sup>57</sup> This is what he calls a “monad”<sup>58</sup> borrowed from Leibniz. In the phenomenological thematization, there is nothing left *exterior* or *transcendent*, without any *residuum*, to this monadic Ego which is the ultimately constitutive source of all objective knowledge. On the one hand, if there were something exterior to the Ego, it would be meaningless [*sinnlos*] in a phenomenological sense. On the other hand, if there were something transcendent to the Ego in a naturalist sense, the phenomenological reduction would not be sufficiently performed. After the proper exercise of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl continues to say:

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<sup>56</sup> CM, 38.

<sup>57</sup> CM, 38. In this context, this transcendental Ego, like the Cartesian ego, is apodictic since the locus of the certainty is no other than the Ego itself. Levinas writes: “This whole consideration is extremely close to the theory of Cartesian doubt. It is a matter of going back to the *cogito* which remains as the sole certainty, on the basis of which the world might then appropriately reconstituted with certainty,” DEH, 73; DEHH, 53 (translation modified).

<sup>58</sup> After defining monad as “the full concreteness of the Ego,” Husserl states: “the problem of *explicating this monadic ego phenomenologically* (the problem of his constitution for himself) must include *all constitutional problems without exception*. Consequently, the phenomenology of this *self-constitution* coincides with *phenomenology as a whole*.” CM, 67-68.

[O]ne recognizes that all that exists for the pure Ego becomes constituted in him himself; furthermore, that every kind of being—including every kind characterized as, in any sense, “transcendent”—has its own particular constitution. Transcendence in every form is an immanent character of being, constituted within the Ego. Every conceivable sense, every conceivable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being.<sup>59</sup>

This crucial passage explicates not only how a vulgar, naturalist, or dualistic conception of transcendence and immanence is overcome by the phenomenological concept of “transcendence (constituted) in immanence”<sup>60</sup> as the *Ideas I* already indicates, but also in what sense transcendence is re-constituted in the realm of transcendental subjectivity as “immanent transcendence.”<sup>61</sup> For Husserl, thus, transcendence is not something beyond, above, or outside the transcendental Ego, but re-constituted in the lived experience of the Ego as transcendental subjectivity, which is the constitutive ground of the phenomenological being and sense. By means of the phenomenological reduction, transcendence gains its transcendental validity in the domain of immanence. In this regard, Husserlian phenomenology based on the constitution of the transcendental Ego culminates in transcendental subjectivity, by which all transcendental grounding of knowledge can be secured. Hence, phenomenology itself is nothing but a “self-explication [*Selbstausslegung*]”<sup>62</sup> of the transcendental Ego that is the sole, ultimate, and final locus of a meaning-bestowal [*Sinngebung*]. Husserl’s phenomenological method is fundamentally based on a “regressive question [*Rückfrage*]” to return to the source of knowledge or “the path back to what is ultimate in all knowledge”<sup>63</sup>; therefore, it is the way back to the constitution of transcendental subjectivity.

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<sup>59</sup> CM, 83-4 (translation modified).

<sup>60</sup> *Ideas-I*, 105.

<sup>61</sup> CM, 103.

<sup>62</sup> CM, 84. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 113.

<sup>63</sup> *Ideas-I*, 151. In the Third Book of *Ideas*, Husserl metaphorically describes phenomenology in terms of the *Rückfrage*, which means “the science of ‘origins,’ of the ‘mothers’ of all cognition; and it is the maternal-ground of all philosophical method: to this ground and to the work in it, everything leads back.” *Ideas-III*, 69.

For Levinas, however, this transcendental structure of the ego relies on the self-enclosed, tautological, and so *vicious* circle of “transcendental subjectivism,” since the ego posits, finds, re-poses, and re-finds itself, *ad infinitum*. In doing so, it becomes the transcendental Ego whose subjective life consists in being itself in the course of “losing itself and finding itself again so as to *possess itself* by showing itself, proposing itself as a theme, exposing itself in truth.”<sup>64</sup> The Ego—either the pure ego in *Ideas* or the transcendental Ego in *Cartesian Meditations*—firmly maintains its own transcendental and unified identity through phenomenological reduction or reflection, which makes it possible for the Ego to filter off all naturalist, contingent, or empirical assumptions and prejudices, and thereby ensures the transcendental process of its self-identification. Husserl thus depicts a “law of essence of the pure Ego” in such a way that “[t]he one pure ego is constituted as a unity in relation to this unity of stream [that is, a unity of endless immanent time]; this means that it can find itself as identical in its course.”<sup>65</sup> In its self-possession and self-identification, the transcendental Ego makes the world intentionally cognizable and meaningful [*sinnvoll*] in and for itself alone by way of appropriating everything that appears to itself in the work of *Sinngebung*. For Levinas, the transcendental work of *Sinngebung* signifies that the *transcendent* alterity of the Other is utterly suffocated in the solipsistic sovereignty of the *transcendental* Same. Levinas’s critical stance on Husserlian methodology springs from its transcendental, idealistic, and solipsistic position at the heart of phenomenology, which claims the primacy of transcendental subjectivity at the expense of the transcendent alterity of the Other.

As seen so far, Husserl’s phenomenology would inevitably lead to a “transcendental solipsism”<sup>66</sup> since all the phenomenological meaning and validity originate from the constitutive

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<sup>64</sup> OBBE, 99; AEAE, 125.

<sup>65</sup> *Ideas-II*, 119 (translation modified).

<sup>66</sup> CM, 30, *et passim*. Already in 1910, Husserl points out that the solipsistic problem becomes apparent when one ignores “the radical principle of the phenomenological reduction” and then confuses “the psychological and the



accomplishments of subjectivity. However, Ricoeur argues that transcendental solipsism is not an “impasse” that Husserlian phenomenology eventually reaches but a “strait through which philosophy must pass.”<sup>67</sup> Being well aware of this solipsistic problem embedded in his theory of transcendental subjectivity, Husserl claims that transcendental subjectivity is not a final word for his phenomenology; it is only a “subordinate stage philosophically.”<sup>68</sup> In order to overcome his solipsistic position, Husserl delves further into the issues of intersubjectivity in *Cartesian Meditations* and other later texts. Consequently, the later Husserl argues that “*The full and proper sense of phenomenological transcendental ‘idealism’ becomes understandable* to us for the first time,”<sup>69</sup> only when the theory of intersubjectivity is carefully taken into account. Before moving on to examine Husserl’s later texts, it is necessary to consider—albeit briefly—his relatively early works that touch upon the issue of the experiences of others in terms of the notion of empathy [*Einfühlung*], which offers an overarching clue to the mature theory of intersubjectivity elaborated in his later works.

## 2. Transcendental Turn from Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity

In the opening chapter of *Idea I*, Husserl makes a distinction between one’s own experiences in terms of perception [*Wahrnehmung*] and presentation [*Gegenwärtigung*] on the one hand, and those of others in terms of apperception [*Apperzeption*] and appresentation [*Appräsentation*] (or presentification [*Vergegenwärtigung*]) on the other hand: “we have experience, in the originary sense, of ourselves and the states of our consciousness in so-called

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psychologistic immanence with the genuine phenomenological immanence.” Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 92.

<sup>68</sup> CM, 30.

<sup>69</sup> CM, 150.

inner or self-perception, but we do not have it of others and their experiences in ‘empathy’.”<sup>70</sup> Whereas I can have a direct or “original” experience of myself, I can only have a “derived” or “mediated” experience of others by means of empathy.<sup>71</sup> On the one hand, others are not directly presented to me as I am presented to myself; rather, they are *appresented* in terms of an analogy with my own experience. On the other hand, I can neither directly perceive others in my inner perception, nor “attain” their experiences in terms of my inner life. Instead, I can *apperceive* them as other subjects in empathy. Therefore, empathy is an “act belonging to the largest group of presentifications [*Vergegenwärtigungen*]”<sup>72</sup>—it is an empathic correlation of appresentation on the noematic side of consciousness and apperception on the noetic side. There is no possible way to lead directly from my experience to those of others; otherwise, their experiences are no longer

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<sup>70</sup> Ideas-I, 9-10. In the conclusion of his reading of *Ideas I*, Ricoeur remarks that the concept of empathy permits Husserl to consider “a plurality and a community of subjects within the framework of the reduction of nature.” Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 33. Husserl himself states: “Every ego is a ‘monad.’ However, the monads have windows. Yet they do not have any windows or doors in the sense that no other subject can *actually* enter them. Rather, through these windows (these windows are acts of empathy) another subject can as easily be experienced as one’s own former experiences are accessible through remembering [*Wiedererinnerung*].” Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil 1921-1928*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 260 (my translation). While Leibnizian monads are windowless, Husserlian monads can contain windows that can act as empathy, through which they communicate outside themselves and thus constitute a harmonious, higher, and open community of monads. In this context, Leibniz’s monadology, unlike that of Husserl, requires God who initially founds the pre-established harmony enshrined in the monadic community. Ricoeur states: “But in Leibniz all perspectives are integrated into a higher point of view, that of God, by an operation of over-viewing [*survol*] which allows passing from the monad to the monadology. No such view from above is permitted in Husserl. It is always from the side, and not from above.” Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 133. See also Dan Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity: A Response to the Linguistic-Pragmatic Critique*, trans. Elizabeth A. Behnke (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001), 79-80, 102-3.

<sup>71</sup> Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 282, 303.

<sup>72</sup> Husserl, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 83. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, as far as the experience of the other is concerned, Husserl attempts to elaborate “the analogy between the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ in the sense that “The Other person is first apprehended as an object of perception which then, through empathy, becomes a ‘Thou’.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 251. Ricoeur succinctly puts it: “each subject is ‘presented’ to itself and to each all others are ‘presentiated’ [*Vergegenwärtigung*],” Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 33. It would be too analytic—though not erroneous—to make a clear distinction not only between perception and apperception on the side of noesis but also between presentation and appresentation (or presentification) on the side of noema since Husserl himself tends to synonymously use the terms appresentation, apperception, and presentification. Furthermore, even in the case of a material object, it does not present itself in its entirety but only through the endless series of profiles or adumbrations [*Abschattungen*] in an implicit or explicit manner; for example, the obverse of a coin is explicitly presented in perception while the reverse is implicitly appresented in apperception. Apperception is an act of consciousness to fill up something that cannot be directly perceived in order to grasp it as the coin rather than something other; basically, apperception is a kind of a *make-up* consciousness, which presupposes a direct perception. It can be said, therefore, that apperception and appresentation are founded on perception and presentation.

their own, but my own.<sup>73</sup> My indirect apperception of the appresentation of others in empathy indicates that I, others, and the world belong together at the level of intersubjectivity, as Husserl already states in passing in the last chapter of *Ideas I*: “The intersubjective world is the correlate of intersubjective experience, *i.e.*, the experience ‘mediated by empathy’.”<sup>74</sup>

In his later writings, especially in the Fifth Meditation of *Cartesian Meditations* and *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl elaborates a theory of “transcendental intersubjectivity,” through which he tries to overcome a solipsistic position of transcendental subjectivity.<sup>75</sup> In *The Paris Lectures*, Husserl remarks that the problem of the other ego is the “only truly unsettling thought”<sup>76</sup> in the formulation of transcendental phenomenology. Ricoeur describes this problem as “one of the great difficulties of Husserlian phenomenology” by misleadingly arguing that “The constitution of the Other plays the same role in Husserl that the existence of God does in Descartes,”<sup>77</sup> and by rightly asking “How will the genuine objectivity of the world common to all of us be constituted?”<sup>78</sup> Since the ego here, for the first time, confronts

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<sup>73</sup> The later Husserl says: “if what belongs to the other’s own essence were directly accessible, it would merely be a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same.” CM, 109.

<sup>74</sup> *Ideas-I*, 303.

<sup>75</sup> However, this does not mean that only the later Husserl treats the problems of intersubjectivity. The publication of the three volumes of *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* shows that Husserl has already been interested in the experiences of others since 1905. See Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 154. Part of the first volume entitled *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil: 1905-1920* is translated by Ingo Farin and James G. Hart under the title *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. In fact, the later Husserl dedicates himself to developing the theory of intersubjectivity in a systematic and detailed manner. This dissertation will thus chiefly pay attention to his later published writings with references to some significant secondary sources that deal with Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts and untranslated works.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 34 (translation modified). In original: “*das einzige wirklich beunruhigende Bedenken.*” See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge. Husserliana I*, ed. Stephan Strasser (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 34. In a conversation between Alfred Schutz and Eugen Fink, among some others, they agree that the problems of transcendental intersubjectivity in the realm of the constitution of the transcendental Ego are not resolved but only increased even when Husserl’s later texts are taken into consideration. Alfred Schutz, “Discussion by Eugen Fink and Response by the Author to Fink and Other Critics,” in *Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. Ilse Schutz, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 84-91.

<sup>77</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 11. Husserl is never interested in whether the Other really exists, whereas Descartes’s interest is to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. The later Husserl investigates how the Other *phenomenologically* presents—more exactly, appresents—itself to the ego in the objective—not private—world.

<sup>78</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 114.

something other than itself for its *cogitatum*, the transcendental Ego as the *ego cogito cogitatum* comes to suffer from a more serious version of schizophrenia: “the objectivity of the world, insofar as it is the object of a plurality of subjects.”<sup>79</sup> As will be seen, the Fifth Meditation is fully dedicated to resolving a difficult dilemma between the constitutive primacy of transcendental Ego and the originality of the Other by means of elaborating the theory of intersubjectivity.

In the beginning of the Fifth Meditation, Husserl proposes a sort of a second reduction or what he calls “a peculiar kind of thematic epoché [*eine eigentümliche Art thematischer ἐποχή*]” or “peculiar primordial reduction [*eigentümliche primordiale Reduktion*]”<sup>80</sup> which aims to identify the primordial or original sphere of transcendental phenomenology of intersubjectivity. This primordial sphere is the “foundation or the motivational ground for empathy,”<sup>81</sup> which makes it possible to further develop the transcendental phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Provided that everything has been reduced to the transcendental realm through the *first* transcendental reduction performed by the transcendental Ego and possibly other egos, this transcendental realm is not simply valid for the Ego alone but also for all others, since there are other egos who also carry out the transcendental reduction. In order to “delimit the total nexus of intentionality...in which the Ego constitutes within itself a peculiar sphere,” Husserl here becomes more radical by means of performing the *second* reduction, which aims to “disregard all constitutional achievements of

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<sup>79</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 115.

<sup>80</sup> CM, 93, 142, respectively (translation modified). For an extended discussion on this new type of *epoché* in terms of Husserl’s concept of primordiality, see Dan Zahavi, “Horizontal Intentionality and Transcendental Intersubjectivity,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 59/2 (1997): 304-21; Nam-In Lee, “Static-Phenomenological and Genetic-Phenomenological Concept of Primordiality in Husserl’s Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*,” *Husserl Studies* 18 (2002): 165-83; Donn Welton, *The Other Husserl: The Horizons of Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 148-56.

<sup>81</sup> Lee, “Static-Phenomenological and Genetic-Phenomenological Concept of Primordiality in Husserl’s Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*,” 165. According to Zahavi, in order to make sense of the notion of intersubjectivity, it is important to first perform the primordial reduction that stresses “the necessity of operating within an irreducible subjectivity.” Zahavi, “Horizontal Intentionality and Transcendental Intersubjectivity,” 306.

intentionality relating immediately or mediately to other subjectivity.”<sup>82</sup> In the second reduction, the transcendental Ego exclusively preserves its transcendental status that grants itself “the transcendental right,”<sup>83</sup> by which the transcendental status and realm of all other egos are subsumed under the original sphere or sphere of ownness [*Einheitssphäre*] of this Ego.<sup>84</sup> The radicality of the second reduction consists in reducing all transcendental experiences, including those of other egos, to the primordial sphere of ownness. Therefore, the outcome of performing the second reduction displays the radical—ironically, far more solipsistic than in the case of the first reduction—fact that every transcendental experience is reduced to the primordial sphere where other egos appear to the transcendental Ego not as *other* in their own transcendental sphere, but as *altered* in the Ego’s primordial sphere.

In Husserl’s own phenomenological conviction, the most fundamental and perplexing question of the Fifth Meditation is not whether the other really exists, but how the other is appresented to the apperception of the Ego. In the performance of the transcendental and primordial reduction, a natural, psychic, or mundane I becomes the transcendental Ego who constitutes not only the objective world as a “universe of being that is other than [my]self,” but also the other, at the rudimentary level, as the mode of “alter ego.”<sup>85</sup> As seen above, I as the transcendental Ego does not directly have access to this alter ego: “The character of the existent ‘other’ has its basis in this kind of verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> CM, 93 (translation modified).

<sup>83</sup> Eugen Fink, *VI. Cartesianische Meditation: Teil 2 Ergänzungsband* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 213. Quotations are from Ronald Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology, 1928-1938* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>84</sup> The subtitle of §44 of *Cartesian Meditations* reads: “Reduction of Transcendental Experience of the Sphere of Ownness [*Einheitssphäre*].” Lee calls this sphere of ownness an “ideal or normative sphere,” to which the transcendental Ego appeals in order to “make the validity of empathy understandable.” Lee, “Static-Phenomenological and Genetic-Phenomenological Concept of Primordially in Husserl’s Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*,” 172.

<sup>85</sup> CM, 100.

<sup>86</sup> CM, 114. According to Derrida, it is a profound insight of the Fifth Meditation that motivates Levinas: “there is no pure intuition of the other as such.” The ego has “no originary access to the alter ego as such,” but only

The other can be neither merely accessible nor inaccessible, but only accessible in the mode of inaccessibility. It is because of this accessibility that the inaccessible other can come to appear to me as an alter ego; it is also because of this inaccessibility that the appresentation of the other cannot be fully presented as a presence, which is an object of my perception. In the mode of an inaccessible accessibility, the other is appresented as a “*modificatum*” that I do not perceive merely as “duplicate of myself”<sup>87</sup> but apperceive as an alter ego analogous to—rather than identical with—myself. In this regard, I as the ego and the other ego are given in an “original pairing [*Paarung*],” which Husserl designates not as an identification but as an “association.”<sup>88</sup> In the pairing association, “That which is primordially incompatible, in simultaneously coexistence, becomes compatible.”<sup>89</sup> Although there could be no fulfillment by perception and presentation, I apperceive the appresentation of the other in a higher or harmonious intentional constitution, which leads to an “open community of monads”<sup>90</sup> as transcendental intersubjectivity. However, this does not imply that there can be a plurality of worlds in accordance with monads. According to a “*system of a priori incompatibility*,” Husserl argues that there can be only a single universal community as a “closed ‘world of monads’”<sup>91</sup> since two worlds or more at once are incompatible with each other. It is the objective or monadic world that corresponds to transcendental intersubjectivity whose full concreteness is deeply rooted in the “lifeworld” for all monads, which Husserl investigates further in his next work.

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through “analogy or appresentation.” Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, eds. Richard Kearny and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), 71.

<sup>87</sup> CM, 117.

<sup>88</sup> CM, 112.

<sup>89</sup> CM, 119.

<sup>90</sup> CM, 130. For Husserl’s discussion on the concept of appresentation, see CM, § 50.

<sup>91</sup> CM, 141 (translation modified).

In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), Husserl interprets the crisis of sciences—especially modern European sciences—as “the loss of [their] meaning for life.”<sup>92</sup> It is no accident that Husserl concludes *Cartesian Meditations* with the Delphic motto that “‘Know thyself!’ has gained a new signification.”<sup>93</sup> Insofar as modern or positive sciences are lost in the world, they lose a subjectivity that investigates the very world; finally, they lose the subjectivity and the world altogether. According to Husserl, the modern sciences cannot address phenomenological questions concerning subjectivity because they ignore the *Rückfrage*, that is, the regressive inquiry into the “original bestowal of meaning [*Sinngebung*]”<sup>94</sup> that underlies all scientific inquiries. Instead, they simply attempt to attain a mere “objectivist” or naturalist account of the world independent of subjectivity. Insofar as the sciences separate a subject from its object and regard the world as the object given independently of the subject, they would remain caught in the natural attitude and unavoidably miss the ultimate source of *Sinngebung*. Husserl asserts that the crisis of the modern European sciences on the basis of the natural attitude comes from their oblivion of the “lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*]” on which they are founded.

Whereas objects are given in the world, the world itself is not merely given, but already *pre-given* as the “horizon [*Horizont*]” or “ground [*Boden*]”<sup>95</sup> where the objects can be given accordingly. This pre-given world is in no way a solipsistic one; rather, it is the “lifeworld” that all others and I experience at communal and historical levels. For the later Husserl, “I” *qua* the transcendental Ego is no longer a solipsistic “I” isolated from others and the world, but the “I”

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<sup>92</sup> CES, 5.

<sup>93</sup> CM, 157. Husserl also cites Augustine’s remarks: “Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner human. [*Noli foras ire in te redi, in interior homine habitat veritas*].” Aurelius Augustine, “Of True Religion,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 262 (translation modified).

<sup>94</sup> CES, 47.

<sup>95</sup> CES, 149, 154, respectively.

who finds myself in the lifeworld which provides the pre-theoretical background for my intentional acts. The lifeworld is a “universal field, fixed in advance”<sup>96</sup> where I am given to the Other in the same way as the Other is given to me; thus, I can be an alter ego for the Other, just as this Other can be it for me. In the lifeworld, according to Husserl, the ego experiences “the Other as phenomenologically a ‘modification’ of [itself]”<sup>97</sup> by means of an analogical apprehension. Thanks to this “analogical grasp” of the Other as an alter ego, Ricoeur states, “solipsism should be overcome without the sacrifice of egology.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the analysis of transcendental subjectivity leads to a discovery of transcendental intersubjectivity or “we-subjectivity,”<sup>99</sup> which probably overcomes the solipsism of transcendental subjectivity.

However, one might ask whether the transition from subjectivity to intersubjectivity suggests an inconsistency in the core of Husserlian phenomenology. How can Husserl’s emphasis on the singularity of the transcendental Ego be comparable with the transcendental structure of intersubjectivity?<sup>100</sup> On the one hand, Husserl’s account of intersubjectivity seems to presuppose the constitution of the transcendental Ego as the constitutive foundation of intersubjectivity in the sense that he continues to confirm the absolute primacy of the transcendental Ego; hence, he insists

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<sup>96</sup> CES, 138.

<sup>97</sup> CM, 115. Husserl states: “[the Other] experiences me forthwith as an Other for him, just as I experience him as *my* Other,” CM, 130.

<sup>98</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 124.

<sup>99</sup> CES, 109.

<sup>100</sup> This is the question that Alfred Schutz raises in his reading of the Fifth Meditation: “But it must be earnestly asked whether the transcendental Ego in Husserl’s concept is not essentially what Latin grammarians call a ‘*singular tantum*,’ that is, a term incapable of being put into the plural.” Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 167. In the Second Book of *Ideas*, Husserl clearly says: “As the one identical, numerically singular ego, it belongs to its stream of experiences, which is constituted as a unity in unending, immanent time. The one pure Ego is constituted as a unity with reference to this stream-unity; this means that it can find itself as identical in its course,” *Ideas-II*, 112. For Schutz, insofar as the ego remains transcendental in the Husserlian sense of the term, another ego cannot gain the transcendental status. Thus, the problem of intersubjectivity cannot be solved within the transcendental realm; instead, intersubjectivity should be given as a “datum [*Gegebenheit*] of the life-world.” He goes on to say that an “ontology of the life-world” can clarify, without analyzing a transcendental constitution, the essential features of intersubjectivity. Alfred Schutz, “The Problem of Intersubjectivity in Husserl,” in *Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*, 82.



on the necessity to justify “the absolute singularity of the ego and its central position in all constitution.”<sup>101</sup> This is why the second reduction is required to establish the sphere of ownness [*Einheitssphäre*], which is the most primordial and original sphere. According to Gadamer, this absolute singular ego is “the *Ur-Ich* and not ‘an I’” so that Husserl can recognize in his transcendental phenomenology “the true meaning of [generative] idealism for the first time.”<sup>102</sup> Gadamer goes on to argue that the primal I is the “source of all objectifications” even for whom “the basis of the pregiven world is superseded.”<sup>103</sup> As Husserl himself notes, all objective consideration of the life-world is no other than “the systematic and purely internal consideration of the subjectivity which externalizes [*äußernden*] itself in the exterior.”<sup>104</sup> In this context, Dermot Moran states that the lifeworld is no other than a “correlate pole” of the primal Ego, who sees the world not only as “the harmonious unfolding of a stream of subjective appearances,” but also as “the outcome of the process of constitution by the transcendental ego.”<sup>105</sup> Despite the shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity in Husserlian phenomenology, the primal Ego remains the supreme locus of the *Sinngebung* that amounts to the *primordial* and constitutive ground of the intersubjective structure wherein “the alter ego becomes evinced and verified in the realm of the transcendental ego.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> CES, 186.

<sup>102</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 249. In a similar vein, Fink attempts to settle down the difficult problem of the multiplicity of egos in the transcendental realm by arguing that there is a primal ego as the “ultimate ground” prior to any distinctions among egos; it is a “transcendental primal life which turns itself into a plurality.” However, he does not provide any detailed explanation about how the primal ego turns itself into the plural egos. Who or what is the primal ego that lacks any distinction or determination? Is not this ego, in the Hegelian sense of the term, a pure being that is nothing but nothingness? Fink immediately admits that “The substantive difficulties, however, would be then only increased.” Schutz, “Discussion by Eugen Fink and Response by the Author to Fink and Other Critics,” 86.

<sup>103</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 249. However, Schutz asserts that intersubjectivity presupposes the objective world whereas Eugen Fink insists on their co-originality. Schutz, “Discussion by Eugen Fink and Response by the Author to Fink and Other Critics,” 86-89.

<sup>104</sup> CES, 113.

<sup>105</sup> Dermot Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 198, 214, respectively.

<sup>106</sup> CM, 90.

On the other hand, Husserl endorses the constitutive role of intersubjectivity prior to the constitution of subjectivity when he says that “the intersubjectively identical lifeworld-for-all serves as an intentional ‘index’...through which all ego-subjects are oriented toward a common world.”<sup>107</sup> Zahavi also does not hesitate to appreciate the primacy of intersubjectivity in arguing that Husserl’s consideration of “*constituting* intersubjectivity” should not be subsumed under the shadow of his analysis of “*constituted* intersubjectivity.”<sup>108</sup> Against Schutz who considers intersubjectivity as a datum [*Gegebenheit*] for the sake of elaborating an ontology of the lifeworld which is evidently based on the natural attitude, Zahavi contends that the transcendental Ego remains transcendently *intersubjective* from the beginning.<sup>109</sup> In a similar vein, Fink insists that the transcendental constitution of intersubjectivity cannot be properly explained on the basis of the egological constitution of subjectivity since what remains after the performance of the reduction is not merely the transcendental Ego, but a “universe of monads co-existing in the present.”<sup>110</sup> It is the “co-existent transcendental intersubjectivity” that embraces “I, as transcendental ego, and the transcendental ‘others’ that are demonstrated and attested to in my experience of someone else.”<sup>111</sup> In this context, “the full unfolding of co-constituting *intersubjectivity*,” Fink states, “is *implied* in the transcendental ego.”<sup>112</sup> David Carr also indicates that Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity is not an investigation of how another individual ego is given to an individual ego, but “the ‘intersubjective phenomenology’ that takes transcendental intersubjectivity, instead of individual subjectivity, as the point of departure for a constitutive theory.”<sup>113</sup> Although the

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<sup>107</sup> CES, 172.

<sup>108</sup> Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 21-2.

<sup>109</sup> For Zahavi’s critique of Schutz, see Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 22-24.

<sup>110</sup> Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, trans. Ron Bruzian (Bloomington: Indianan University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>111</sup> Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 6-7.

<sup>112</sup> Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 103.

constitution of intersubjectivity does not annul subjectivity's constitutive role, "subjectivity is what it is," Husserl himself eventually asserts, "only within intersubjectivity."<sup>114</sup>

Insofar as the objectivity of the transcendent world is the accomplishment of the communal intersubjectivity, and as long as the meaning of a shared common world emerges from the achievement of the harmonious community of monads, transcendental subjectivity should be thoroughly intersubjective from the outset. Intersubjectivity is not a mere collection of subjectivities, in which the concrete experiences of the subjects are given indifferently and in which there is no inter-relationship among them. Rather, it is a co-subjectivity or "we-subjectivity" by which every subject not only presents itself as the co-subject in the life-world, but also shares, in some manner, a common or communal experience; thus, there is "an *aporetic* universal structure of intersubjectivity predelineated in every *ego* whatsoever."<sup>115</sup> Janet Donohoe explicates how Husserl incorporates "instinct," at this predelineated level of subjectivity, into his investigation of intersubjectivity; that is, the instinctive intersubjectivity already suggests an inherent or pre-constitutive "connectedness between the ego and the Other at a most primal level."<sup>116</sup> In the third volume of the Intersubjective Texts, Husserl contends that "transcendental subjectivity expands to intersubjectivity or rather, strictly speaking, it does not expand but merely understands itself better."<sup>117</sup> Consequently, whether the constitutive foundation is subjectivity or intersubjectivity,

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<sup>114</sup> CES, 172.

<sup>115</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 192. Quotations are from Dan Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 61. See also Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, 120-25. Carr makes a distinction between "different" egos and "alter" egos. While the "eidetic approach" deals with the former's "essence and difference" without considering their inter-relationship, the "concept of objectivity, introduced in the Fifth Meditation, places ego and alter ego in intentional relation." Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Janet Donohoe, *Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity: From Static to Genetic Phenomenology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 99. See also Lee, "Static-Phenomenological and Genetic-Phenomenological Concept of Primordially in Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation," 175.

<sup>117</sup> Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*, 17. Quotations are from Michael Lewis and Tanja Staehler, *Phenomenology: An Introduction* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 57.

the intersubjective turn or transition should not be understood as an inconsistency or contradiction, but, rather, a development or broadening of Husserl's conception of phenomenology. However, is it not the case that this consistency displays that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology of intersubjectivity remains, to a certain extent, caught in the solipsism of transcendental subjectivism? In the methodological evolution of Husserl's phenomenology, is there a genuine turn or shift, which liberates Husserl's phenomenological method from solipsism? What is at stake here is whether Husserl truly overcomes his solipsistic approach to phenomenological methodology by means of his theory of intersubjectivity.

### 3. Transcendental Subjectivity Re-confirmed

In Zahavi's insightful and informative study of Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, which rigorously examines Husserl's unpublished manuscripts, three untranslated volumes entitled *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* as well as his later works, he defends Husserl's ultimate insight that "transcendental intersubjective sociality is the basis in which all truth and all true being have their intentional source"<sup>118</sup> in order to save Husserl's transcendental phenomenology from solipsistic suspicions. In this intersubjective sociality, the Other *qua* the alter ego is no longer a mere *cogitatum* as the intended or constituted object [*Gegenstand*], but a *cogitatum cogitans* as the constituting subject [*Gegensubjekt*] or Thou.<sup>119</sup> However, this does not mean that the alter ego fully absolves itself from the intentional horizon of the transcendental Ego and then reveals itself as it is. Zahavi accepts that Husserl's phenomenological interest does not lie in "investigating the Other for its own sake" but only in

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<sup>118</sup> Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> In the *Ideas II*, Husserl remarks: "The persons who belong to the social association are given to each other as 'companions,' not as *opposed objects* [*Gegenstände*] but as *counter-subjects* [*Gegensubjekte*] who live 'with' one another, who converse and are related to one another, actually or potentially" (204).

“making objectivity, transcendence, and reality transcendently understandable.”<sup>120</sup> To make sense of the Other as a co-constituting ego phenomenologically, Husserl retains a transcendental status of the transcendental Ego in his theory of intersubjectivity. Every constituting ego in transcendental intersubjectivity is thus conducive to “mutually corresponding and harmonious constitutive system.”<sup>121</sup> Zahavi at last insists that the transcendental foundation of intersubjectivity makes it possible for Husserlian phenomenology to demonstrate the “untenability of a solipsistic position” even “prior to my concrete encounter with the Other.”<sup>122</sup> This is where Zahavi’s defense of Husserl confronts a Levinasian challenge as to whether transcendental intersubjectivity can truly overcome solipsism of transcendental subjectivity.

From the Levinasian perspective, Husserl’s solipsistic problem becomes even more violent or imperialistic in his consideration of intersubjectivity. The ego here is not simply solipsistic in its own reflection, but, rather, *totalitarian* not only because it requires other egos to be the transcendental Ego in the lifeworld as the co-horizon shared by all egos, but also because every ego becomes neutralized in the name of a higher, open, harmonious, and unified co-community. Is this ego not a mere member of the “anonymous they [*das Man*]” in Heidegger’s language? In this peaceful community, the Other’s command, “You shalt not kill,” resonates in vain like the “idle talk [*Gerede*],” which removes the sense of the responsibility from the Same. Husserl’s account for intersubjectivity does not concern itself with how the Other calls into question a peaceful, tranquil, and self-possessed identity of the Same. Rather, by means of the *Rückfrage* into the ultimate origin of the *Sinngebung*, its main concern is to clarify how the Other appears—whether

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<sup>120</sup> Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 19. See also David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, 88.

<sup>121</sup> CM, 38. See also Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity*, 102-3.

<sup>122</sup> Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology*, 120.

presents or appresents—to the transcendental—whether perceptual or apperceptual—horizon of the Same in its neutral, imperialistic, totalizing, and violent serenity.

Zahavi’s insightful interpretation of Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity ends up revealing why his endeavor to defend Husserl against the Levinasian attack can be hardly tenable. Zahavi’s argument shows, indeed, why Levinas has to depart from Husserlian phenomenology, as Zahavi himself concludes with regard to the theory of intersubjectivity that “The absolute difference between self and Other disappears,”<sup>123</sup> and that “Husserl advocates a strong *symmetrical* relation between the ego and the Other.”<sup>124</sup> As soon as the absolute difference vanishes over the co-intentional horizon of intersubjectivity, and insofar as an alterity of the Other is normalized, domesticated, or neutralized in transcendental intersubjectivity, any relation between the ego and the Other necessarily relies on a symmetrical, harmonious, reciprocal, or “intentional interpenetration [*Ineinander*].”<sup>125</sup> While Husserl’s methodological attitude remains solipsistic in the transcendental subjectivity, its solipsistic position becomes serious and imperialistic in the transcendental intersubjectivity. Therefore, Husserlian phenomenology itself cannot be immune to solipsistic suspicions in that his solipsistic stance becomes even more unyielding rather than attenuated in the development of the intersubjective theory.

#### 4. The Hither Side of the Husserlian Method

Levinas’s critique of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology for its solipsism does not lead Levinas to entirely divorce himself from Husserl’s phenomenological method insofar as the

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<sup>123</sup> Dan Zahavi, “Husserl’s Intersubjective Transformation of Transcendental Philosophy,” in *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 237.

<sup>124</sup> Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology*, 115 (italics added).

<sup>125</sup> Husserl, CES 255. See also Moran, *Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 128.

fundamental principle of intentionality prepares the ground for Levinas's own phenomenology. As Levinas puts it, "To do phenomenology is to denounce the direct vision of the object as naïve."<sup>126</sup> For Levinas, however, the transcendental vision based on the intentional correlation of noesis-noema still remains naïve so that it cannot properly discern an ethical moment of the relation between the Same and the Other. Because the Other is neither an object like a datum that can be analyzed by scientific eyes nor a noema that is correlated with noesis, the appearance of the Other is not a *plain* phenomenon that is given to consciousness in an unequivocal manner. Levinas ceaselessly claims that the manifestation of the Other is not a mere phenomenon among others but a phenomenon *par excellence* that can be neither deduced from nor reduced into others; it is "the principle of phenomena"<sup>127</sup> that signifies the infinite in the finite, the more in the less, and the Other in the Same. The infinity is not a sheer noema that can be captured by noesis; rather, it is an exceptional *ideatum* that always overflows the *idea*. The infinite manifests itself as a surplus or excess by disrupting the idea that thinks of it. Likewise, the Other transcends, surpasses, and exceeds the intentional horizon, which phenomenologically reduces the alterity of the Other into the *Sinngebung* of the Same.

For Levinas, Husserl's phenomenology based on the *Rückfrage* fails to identify the primordial signification of the idea of the infinity, which signifies the asymmetric relation between the Same and the Other. As will be seen in Chapter Four, Levinas's phenomenology begins with an "intentionality of a wholly different type," which always presupposes an asymmetry, proximity, transcendence, distance, and non-correlation between the Same and the Other, which can be

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<sup>126</sup> DEHH, 160; DEH, 94.

<sup>127</sup> TI, 92; TeI, 65. In his Epilogue to the German edition of *Time and the Other*, Ludwig Wenzler states that the "kernel and agitation" of Levinas's thought come from thinking of "what is beyond the horizon in the inescapable horizon of being." Ludwig Wenzler, "Zeit Als Nahe Des Abwesenden: Diachronie der Ethik und Diachronie der Sinnlichkeit nach Emmanuel Levinas," *Die Zeit und der Andere* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2003), 67 (my translation).

reducible neither “to knowledge of the Other by the Same, nor even to the *revelation* of the Other to the Same.”<sup>128</sup> Consequently, in order to elaborate on his own phenomenology, Levinas, along with Husserl, does not accept the natural or psychological attitude that conceives of an object with a naïve vision while he, against Husserl, delves into a more primordial dimension of consciousness—or what he calls “psyche”—that cannot be exhaustively encapsulated by the intentional—whether subjective or intersubjective—structures.

Against this phenomenological backdrop, Levinas attempts to describe an ethical dimension in which the alterity of the Other suspends the sovereign autonomy of the Same and its solipsistic world. Levinas appreciates the achievement of Husserl’s phenomenology, which underlies the reduction of the *naïveté* of the natural attitude in favor of the reconstruction of the given by way of the “return to the neglected concreteness of its *mise-en-scene* that offers up the meaning of the given.”<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, Levinas asks whether the given can transparently present itself in intuition and whether the Husserlian phenomenological method can exhaustively capture the meaning of the given. In a similar vein, Jean-Luc Marion also points out Husserl’s naïve understanding of the given as a “*flat* phenomenon,” by committing “the reduction of the phenomenon to presence.”<sup>130</sup> Out of the way of taking the natural attitude, Husserl goes into the

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<sup>128</sup> TI, 23, 28; TeI, xi, xvi, respectively. In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas concisely explicates his own phenomenological method in comparison with those of Husserl and Heidegger. I will examine this issue later in the following chapters.

<sup>129</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Violence of the Face,” in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 174-75.

<sup>130</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 57-62. Jean-Luc Marion here maintains that the Husserlian phenomenon gives itself as “perfectly present,” and thus it is a “*flat* phenomenon (without reminder, slack, superficial).” Jacques Derrida also calls Husserl’s phenomenology “the metaphysics of presence.” Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomena: An Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 22. According to Marion, Heidegger does not simply follow the Husserlian determination of phenomenon on the basis of presence but goes into “the *depth* of the Heideggerian phenomenon.” Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 62. The next chapter will deal with the methodological difference, albeit not quite different for Levinas, between Husserl and Heidegger.



logical, theoretical, transcendental, and phenomenological way, which is, for Levinas, too naïve, intellectualistic, or *doxical* to appreciate the meaning of phenomena as they are.

It is important to note that, contrary to Heidegger's critique of Husserl's intellectualism, Dermot Moran advocates that Husserl is not exclusively interested in theoretical knowledge; rather, "[Husserl] includes all forms of knowing-how and emotional states wherein something can be intuited and fulfilled—for example, what it means to be in love."<sup>131</sup> By the same token, in the reading of the First Meditation of *Cartesian Meditations*, Ricoeur endorses that Husserl's philosophy of "sense [*sens*]" in a broadest sense goes "much beyond any narrow intellectualism," because it contains "perceived sense, imagined sense, willed sense... and logical sense."<sup>132</sup> Ricoeur and Moran, however, seem to rely on a dichotomy of sense and intellect, which even Husserl would not accept with respect to intentionality; in other words, both sense and intellect, insofar as they are based on the lived experience, are intentional rather than indifferent or natural. When it comes to Husserlian phenomenology, one can ask whether "sense," narrowly speaking, is nothing other than intellect, or conversely, whether intellect in a broad sense is nothing but sense. Is not the dualistic attitude "natural" rather than transcendental? From the Levinasian viewpoint, whether intellect or sense, Husserlian phenomenology of "sense [*sens* or *Sinn*]" rests on its intellectualism in which any place of the alterity of the Other is displaced—or phenomenologically suspended and bracketed—by the constitution of the transcendental Ego, which is the ultimate locus of all the phenomenological sense and validity. In his reading of the Fifth Meditation, eventually, Ricoeur himself acknowledges that "phenomenology becomes a description of an ongoing totalization,"<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 108.

<sup>132</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 89. See also Nam-In Lee, "Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Mood," in *Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl*, eds., Natalie Depraz and Dan Zahavi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 103-20. Lee investigates Husserl's phenomenology of mood or feeling as an "irrational or antirational phenomenon," which is also a part of the intentional analysis that has a "transcendental phenomenological meaning" (103).

<sup>133</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 140.

which is in accord with Husserl's phenomenological method of the *Rückfrage* into the *Sinngebung*, that is, the regressive way back to "the secret nostalgia of all modern philosophy."<sup>134</sup> Ricoeur's defense of Husserlian phenomenology would not only ironically betray [*trahir*] Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological principle, but also unintentionally betray [*traduire*] the radical core of Levinas's phenomenology situated in his suspicion on an intellectualistic hubris of Husserlian phenomenology.

Levinas's attack on intellectualism of Husserlian phenomenology comes from the doxical conception of knowledge in which "an opinion, in the normal sense of a *belief*, has been confirmed or attested."<sup>135</sup> Against a definite opposition between *doxa* (*δόξα*: a mere opinion, belief, or everyday knowledge) and *episteme* (*ἐπιστήμη*: justified or rational knowledge), Husserl argues that "the disparaged *δόξα*...claims the dignity of a foundation for science" in favor of devoting a "theoretical interest to the 'life-world' as the general 'ground' of human world-life."<sup>136</sup> In his later lecture, moreover, Husserl insists on "the transformation from original *theōria*, the fully disinterested seeing the world...to the *theōria* of genuine science, the two being mediated through the contrast of *δόξα* and *ἐπιστήμη*."<sup>137</sup> Moran here recognizes an "*inbuilt possibility* of a radical shift of perspective...towards the purely contemplative or theoretical, what Husserl calls the doxic-theoretical (*Ideas* II §2). This shift in perspective, for Husserl, is what enables scientific understanding."<sup>138</sup> In Husserlian phenomenology, thus, *doxa* is not a sheer opinion as opposed to attested knowledge, but a ground of theoretical or logical knowledge. The target of Levinas's condemnation is this doxical conception of knowledge in that, due to the intertwining of *doxa*

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<sup>134</sup> Idea-I, 142.

<sup>135</sup> LI-II, 228.

<sup>136</sup> CES, 155, 12, respectively.

<sup>137</sup> Edmund Husserl, "The Vienne Lecture," in CES, 285.

<sup>138</sup> Dermot Moran, "Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's and Brentano's Accounts of Intentionality," *Inquiry* 43 (2000): 61.

and *episteme*, “everything can always be transformable into knowledge.”<sup>139</sup> The doxical-intellectualistic facets of Husserlian phenomenology render phenomena “flat” and so transparent to consciousness that Levinas attempts to overcome by means of his own phenomenology.

As soon as Levinas’s phenomenology fundamentally departs from Husserl’s intellectualistic phenomenology, it comes to confront a kind of “failure of phenomenology.”<sup>140</sup> However, this does not mean that Levinas leaves phenomenology behind as Colin Davis might hold. On the contrary, the beginning of phenomenology on which Levinas keeps his eye—especially when it comes to death—is the very “failure point” of Husserlian phenomenology. It is the *paradox* of Levinas’s phenomenology of death that phenomenology should fail in order to be phenomenology itself. The failure of phenomenology, I claim, culminates in phenomenology of death since death is neither a plain or *flat* phenomenon that transparently appears to consciousness nor a sheer non-phenomenon irrelevant to all phenomenological investigations, but rather an extraordinary or overflowing phenomenon—I will say a “*para*-phenomenon”<sup>141</sup>—that cannot be captured by phenomenology itself. Levinas argues that death “resists all appearing, all phenomenal aspects, as if emotion passed by way of the question, without encountering the slightest quiddity, toward that acuity of death, and instituted an unknown that is not purely negative but rather in

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<sup>139</sup> GDT, 187; DMT, 219. Levinas also maintains that “[e]very act of consciousness, as knowledge, is belief and position or *doxa*,” GDT, 113; DMT, 129.

<sup>140</sup> Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1999), 24. Colin Davis argues that because of “[phenomenology’s] inability to envisage an encounter with the Other” (24), Levinas abandoned phenomenology in order to develop his own “post-phenomenological ethics” (8) and then articulated in *Totality and Infinity* “a distinctive way out of the ethical impasse of phenomenology” (33). Much later on, Davis goes on to mention Philippe Nemo’s question about Levinas’s phenomenology of the face: “Levinas suggests that in response that phenomenology may be the wrong word, since phenomenology describes what appears” (133). In the original conversation, however, Levinas himself says with a less nuanced tone: “I do not know if one can speak of a ‘phenomenology’ of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears,” EI, 85; EeI, 79.

<sup>141</sup> In order to avoid the *naïveté* of the natural attitude toward the given, I employ the term “*para*-phenomenon,” which also can avoid a logic of Hegelian negativity that Levinas rejects. For now, it is sufficient to say that death as a *para*-phenomenon belongs neither exclusively to the noumenal realm nor to the phenomenal one; rather, it shakes the very strict distinction. As will be seen in Chapter Four, this *para*-phenomenality of death is related to the *para*-doxical notion of what Levinas calls religion, that is, “relation without relation.”

proximity without knowledge.”<sup>142</sup> For Levinas, death reveals itself in the failure moment in which phenomenology faces what it cannot thematize; thus, the manifestation of death surfaces on the hither side of all doxical, intentional, or phenomenological thematizations. As far as death *qua* a para-phenomenon is concerned, phenomenology remains at a loss. The *para-phenomenality* of death heralds a tragic and yet auspicious fate of phenomenology, that is, the inevitable failure of phenomenology that leads Levinas to develop his own phenomenology by means of breaching the all-embracing, intellectualistic, and doxical lucidity of Husserlian phenomenology.

The paradox of phenomenology of death *qua* a para-phenomenon signifies that phenomenology itself in no way exhausts the meaning of death and so discloses its own “built-in” limits. At the margin of Husserlian phenomenology, I claim, Levinas’s phenomenology recognizes both the possibility and the impossibility of phenomenology in terms of the para-phenomenality of death. The methodological challenge of this dissertation lies in the paradoxical peculiarity of Levinas’s phenomenology; that is, his pungent criticism of Husserl’s phenomenology comes from Levinas’s own *unintended* intention that, following the phenomenological slogan “*zu den Sachen selbst*,” he remains more Husserlian than Husserl himself in his methodological approach to the theme of death. In order to address this paradoxical challenge, this dissertation will demonstrate that Levinas’s phenomenological methodology uncovers why Husserl, as the founder of phenomenology, is not Husserlian enough and, in doing so, further reveal how Levinas *does* his own phenomenology by way of considering the para-phenomenality of death. The following chapters will disclose that the ethical signification of death emerges from the primordially of the *para*-doxical meaning of death beyond or on the hither side of the doxical thematization of death.

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<sup>142</sup> GDT, 17-8; DMT, 26-7. In a similar vein, Etienne Feron depicts death as a phenomenon insofar as it “carries in itself its own withdrawal from the realm of manifestation.” Etienne Feron, *Phénoménologie de la mort: Sur les traces de Levinas* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 43 (henceforth my translation).

## Chapter II

### Heidegger's Ontological Thematization of Death

During his scholarly life, Levinas never loses his interest in the problem of death, which is the subject of his early and later published works.<sup>143</sup> His consideration of death is conducted *via* confronting the “fundamental ontology” of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), mainly discussed in *Being and Time* (1927).<sup>144</sup> As far as the theme of death is concerned, most Levinasian scholars deal with Levinas's ethical reflections on the death of the Other in relation to the ontological interpretation of Dasein's death.<sup>145</sup> In order to find a place for alterity, transcendence, or infinity of the Other where an ethical meaning takes place, Levinas asserts the responsibility for the death

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<sup>143</sup> Both works are comprised of a series of lectures. On the one hand, among four lectures delivered at the Philosophical College in 1946-47, the third lecture discusses “the proximity of death and the other,” which is later developed in *Totality and Infinity*. Those lectures first appeared in a collection entitled *Le Choix, le Monde, l'Existence* (Paris: Arthaud, 1947) and are later published as Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temp et l'autre* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979); in English, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987). On the other hand, one of two lecture courses delivered at the Sorbonne University in the academic year 1975-76 deals with “Death and Time” and is published as Emmanuel Levinas, *La mort et le temps* (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1991). It was reprinted along with the other lecture, “God and Onto-theo-logy,” in Emmanuel Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, Le Livre de Poche (Paris: Grasset, 1993); in English, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bertina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Derrida also states that Levinas's ongoing interest lies in the issue of death: “[A]ll of Levinas's thought, from the beginning to the end, was a meditation on death.” AEE, 120; AE, 206.

<sup>144</sup> Levinas notes that his “admiration for Heidegger is above all an admiration for *Sein und Zeit*”; indeed, he does not pay much attention to Heidegger's later texts since “the later work of Heidegger... is much less convincing.” EI, 37-38, 41; EeI, 28, 32, respectively. In *Totality and Infinity*, he criticizes Heidegger's later work for its “faint materialism” because it is dominated by the “*Logos*,” *i.e.*, the Being of beings, which is “the word of no one.” TI, 299; TeI, 275. Thus, the ontological logos cannot be the call, command, speech, or language starting from the Other. By contrast, Derrida depicts Levinas's language employed in *Totality and Infinity* as a “language without phrase,” which is not a real language, since it can “say nothing, offer to the Other.” WD, 147; ED, 217. I will elaborate on this issue in Chapter Five.

<sup>145</sup> Etienne Feron's *Phénoménologie de la mort: Sur les traces de Levinas* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999) is one of the most comprehensive studies of Levinas on death in comparison with Heidegger's ontological account of death. For a feminist approach to Levinas's understanding of death in relation to Heidegger's, see Tina Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). On an analysis of Levinas's conception of death in strong opposition to Heidegger's, see Richard A. Cohen, “Levinas: Thinking Least about Death – Contra Heidegger,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60:1 (2006): 21-39. From the Heideggerian perspective, Iain Thompson views Levinas as a post-Heideggerian thinker and investigates how profoundly Heidegger's thanatology influences Levinas's ethical interpretation of death. Iain Thompson, “Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death,” *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 14 (2009): 23-43.

of the Other as opposed especially to the mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] of death in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. In order to recognize Levinas's treatment of death, therefore, it is necessary to first examine Heidegger's thanatology, which paves the way for Levinas's own ethical consideration of the death of the Other.

The aim of this chapter is to revisit Heidegger's ontological-existential account of death, which provides the thematic approach to the topic of this dissertation: the theme of death. This chapter will begin by drawing upon the question of Being [*Seinsfrage*] through which Heidegger elaborates the existential analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* (Division One) and then the temporal structure of the ontological understanding of Dasein's death (Division Two). Heidegger poses the question of the meaning of Being [*Sein*] that has been neglected in the long history of metaphysical tradition and probes into the "deep" or "authentic" dimension of the existential-ontological meaning of Dasein's death. According to Heidegger's ontological thematization of death, Dasein understands the impossibility of its own existence as the most authentic possibility, by which the doxical-ontological meaning of death is unconcealed. However, by means of unveiling the enigmatic feature of death—or what I call a "*para*-phenomenality," Levinas discredits the doxical transparency of the ontological thematization of death in which the ethical meaning of death has been concealed. This chapter claims that, despite the depth of the existential analytic of Dasein, Heidegger's thanatology thematically repeats the doxical *naiveté* of Husserlian phenomenology in the sense that it takes death to be a "flat" phenomenon that Dasein understands as its own possibility *par excellence*. This dissertation argues that the Levinasian question puts Heidegger's thanato-*logy* into question and lays bare its doxical characters, which suppress the para-doxical signification of death. At the margin of the thematization of death, the para-phenomenality of death as a question, which exhibits both the possibility and the impossibility of

Heideggerian thanatology, offers this dissertation the thematical approach to Levinas's "phenomenology of death."

### 1. The *Seinsfrage*: Departure from Husserlian Phenomenology

When Husserl as a phenomenologist loses everything in order to regain it in the transcendental realm by performing the transcendental reduction in the self-reflection, Heidegger as his most outstanding and yet doubtful student, who also remains a phenomenologist, attempts to retrieve what has been lost or bracketed from the transcendental realm through the existential analytic of Dasein. According to Heidegger in *Being and Time*,<sup>146</sup> Dasein exists within the world before theorizing, reflecting, contemplating, and so constituting it in a transcendental way, and therefore the world is not a correlated or reduced world as the product of the transcendental Ego's self-reflection, but the world whereinto Dasein is already thrown [*geworfen*] in the first place. Prior to the theoretical, reflective, and transcendental consciousness that objectifies the world as its correlate, there is a more basic and fundamental dimension in human life—it is what Heidegger calls "facticity [*Faktizität*]"<sup>147</sup> that signifies the way in which Dasein exists in the world. In his

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<sup>146</sup> There are two standard English translations by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson and Joan Stambaugh. I will refer to both and freely modify them along with the German edition. For a general introduction to Heidegger's thought, see Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999). For an influential commentary on *Being and Time*, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991). For a lucid interpretation of Heidegger's analysis of death in terms of time, see, with the "Foreword" by Hubert L. Dreyfus, which is also a great achievement, Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005). For a genesis and evolution of Heidegger on death from his early works via *Being and Time* to his later works, see Cristian Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort: Existentialité, authenticité, temporalité* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014). This work includes the comprehensive and updated lists of the works on Heidegger's interpretation of death since 1930.

<sup>147</sup> SZ, 135. "Facticity is not the factuality [*Tatsächlichkeit*] of the *factum brutum* of something present-at-hand, but a characteristic of Dasein's Being." Heidegger also states: "The concept of facticity implies that an 'innerworldly' being has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with Being of those beings which it encounters within its own world," SZ, 56. He goes on to say that "the subject's inside and its 'inner sphere' is certainly not to be thought as a kind of a 'box' or 'cabinet'." SZ, 60. As Cristian Ciocan puts it, "Heidegger proposes the concept of Dasein as an alternative to the traditional concept of subjectivity. It is a factual 'subjectivity' that is situated in the world from the outset, and not in an oppositional relation to the world, like a 'box' from which it would then escape in order to reach the 'object' which remains in front of itself and in standing against itself." Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 73 (henceforth my translation). In this context, the relation

letter to Husserl, Heidegger expresses how the transcendental constitution takes place only on the basis of the facticity of Dasein:

Transcendental constitution is a central possibility of the *ek*-sistence of the factual self. This factual self, the concrete human being, is as such—as a being—never a “worldly real fact,” because the human being is never merely present-at-hand but rather *ek*-sists. And the element of “wonder” lies in the fact that the eksistence-structure of Dasein makes possible the transcendental constitution of every posited being.<sup>148</sup>

All theoretical, intellectual, or intentional activity of a conscious life is already founded upon the *factual* fact that human life is born into the world, practically comports [*verhält*] itself toward other beings, and is limited [*begrenzt*] by its own death. Since Aristotle, according to Heidegger, the subject matter of metaphysics has been determined by the “predominance of an empty and thereby fantastic idea of certainty and evidence,”<sup>149</sup> without considering in what way the human

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between human beings and the world is not the same as the relation between subject and object (SZ, 60). Much later on, Heidegger argues against Husserl that “The that of facticity is never to be found by *intuiting* it [*Das Daß der Faktizität wird in einem Anschauen nie vorfindlich*].” SZ, 135 (italics added).

<sup>148</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Letter to Husserl, October 22, 1927, with Appendices,” in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)*, eds. and trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 138 (translation slightly modified and italics added).

<sup>149</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 33. In his interpretation of Heidegger’s critique of Husserl, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, who was assistant to Heidegger for the last ten years of Heidegger’s life, argues that our practical life fully engaged within the world fundamentally underlies our disinterested activity of conscious life. Thus, he presents Heidegger’s “hermeneutic phenomenology” whose “understanding looking” focuses on the pre-theoretical facticity of the practical life within the world in contrast to Husserl’s “reflective phenomenology” whose “theoretical knowing” misses the fundamental aspects of our practical life by reducing them into the theoretical, epistemological, or transcendental domain. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology*, trans. Kenneth Maly (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2013), 16-29. By the same token, Mark Okrent argues that Heidegger’s conception of intentionality is always “practical rather than cognitive,” so that “the primary form of intending is doing something for a purpose rather than being conscious of something.” Mark Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 10. In this context, Dagfinn Føllesdal acknowledges that Heidegger’s primary contribution to philosophy consists in rejecting a traditional idea that “practical activity presupposes theoretical understanding of the world” and thus recognizing “our practical ways of dealing with the world as more basic than the theoretical.” Dagfinn Føllesdal, “Husserl and Heidegger on the Role of Actions in the Constitution of the World,” in *Essays in Honor of Jaakko Hintikka: On the Occasion of His Fiftieth Birthday on January 12*, eds. Esa Saarinen et al. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 371. However, Hubert L. Dreyfus insists that too much emphasis on Heidegger’s criticism of the priority of theory over practice would overlook his most original insight, that is, the “understanding of Being...more basic than either practice or theory.” Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality,” *Social Research* 60/1 (1993), 38. Dreyfus then concludes that Heidegger’s contribution to Western philosophical tradition is “the



being factually *is* within the world. Heidegger's main target here is Husserl's theory of intuition, which deprives the facticity of Dasein, its Being, and its world—in short, its Being-in-the-world, in which an intentional life is fundamentally grounded. Heidegger writes: “Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world. Thus, Being-in-the-world, as a fundamental constitution, must be interpreted *beforehand*.”<sup>150</sup> Dasein is able to be itself, not because it is self-consciousness [*Selbstbewusstessein*], but because it *is* itself [*Selbstsein*]. Moreover, Heidegger raises a radical question of intentionality in terms of Dasein's transcendence. When it comes to the problem of transcendence, the question of “what makes it possible for beings to be encountered within the world” should not be reduced to that of “how does a subject get outside to an object.”<sup>151</sup> If Husserl's concept of “immanent transcendence” characterizes an intentional relation of noema-noesis or the transcendental Ego and its correlated object, Heidegger considers the ontological condition for immanent transcendence that renders intentionality possible: “intentionality is possible on the grounds of transcendence.”<sup>152</sup> What is urgent to Heidegger's phenomenology is to begin with what is the most fundamental and ultimate regarding its subject matter, which serves as “the ground and soil” to nourish and support not simply the root *qua* metaphysic but also the

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discovery of the primacy of this understanding of Being, not of the primacy of practical activity” (38). However, against most Heideggerian scholars, including Dreyfus, who endorse that Heidegger overcomes Husserlian epistemological or representational approach to intentionality or “Husserl's intellectualism,” Moran maintains that they consider scientific cognition as a “deficient form of practice” and underemphasize the significance of “the disinterested, theoretical attitude for scientific knowledge.” Dermot Moran, “Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's and Brentano's Accounts of Intentionality,” *Inquiry* 43 (2000), 39. The problem of whether Heidegger's criticism of Husserl's intellectual attitude is fair or not goes beyond the scope of this chapter whose primary purpose is to show how much they remain similar to rather than different from each other. And their affinity becomes apparent when the peculiarity of Levinas's phenomenological method is taken into consideration.

<sup>150</sup> SZ, 62. Levinas describes Heidegger's departure from Husserl as “the abandonment of the traditional notion of consciousness as the point of departure, with the decision to seek for the basis of consciousness itself in a more fundamental notion of being: the existence of Dasein,” MHO, 405-06 (henceforth my translation). The original version of “Martin Heidegger et l'ontologie” was published in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* in 1932, and then its abridged version, with some modifications, was republished in DEHH. I will refer to the former.

<sup>151</sup> SZ, 366.

<sup>152</sup> PA, 106; WE, 135.

entire tree *qua* philosophy.<sup>153</sup> The proper subject of Heidegger’s phenomenology is the Being of beings, which is the very ground and soil for metaphysics and philosophy; thus, phenomenology itself is “the science of the Being of beings—ontology.”<sup>154</sup>

Although the question of being has long been examined under the rubric of “metaphysics,” according to Heidegger, it has never been taken seriously as a “*thematic question of actual investigation*”<sup>155</sup> in the metaphysical tradition. When metaphysics asks what it means *to be*, it has never conceived of Being [*Sein*] in an authentic way, but only in terms of something present-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]. In *Being and Time*, thus, Heidegger argues that it is necessary to ask the question of the meaning of Being [*die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein*] through “‘repeating or retrieving’ this question [»*Wiederholung*« *dieser Frage*].”<sup>156</sup> However, this does not mean that Heidegger first settles upon a clear and distinct definition of Being and then uses it to demonstrate his own dogmatic claims about it. Instead, he provides a vague or everyday [*alltäglich*]

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<sup>153</sup> Descartes metaphorically explicates the nature of philosophy as follows: “the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics, and morals.” René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume I*, trans. John Cottingham *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 186. Citing Descartes’s metaphor of philosophy as a tree, whose root is metaphysics that buttresses its own branches including ethics, Heidegger asks: “Out of what ground do the roots, and thereby the whole tree, receive their nourishing juices and strength?” He delves further into a more fundamental ground, which can sustain the root as metaphysics by asking “What is metaphysics?” PA, 287; WE, 277. For Heidegger, what Descartes’s radical doubt fails to doubt is the way of the Being of the *ego cogito*: that is, “*the meaning of the Being of the ‘sum’*” (SZ, 24), which serves as the fundamental ground or soil of the very *ego cogito*. Hence, Heidegger would reverse Descartes’s axiom “*Cogito ergo sum*” as “*Sum ergo cogito*.” Only when the ontological question of the Being of the *sum* is determined, then “the manner of the *cogitationes* becomes comprehensible” (SZ, 46). In this context, Ricoeur states: “The term ‘Being-in-the-world’ expresses better the primacy of care over the gaze, and the horizontal character of that to which we are bound. It is indeed Being-in-the-world which precedes reflection.” Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Science: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106.

<sup>154</sup> SZ, 37. Heidegger also says: “Phenomenology is the way of access to, and the demonstrative manner of determination of, that which is to become the theme of ontology. *Ontology is possible only as phenomenology*” (SZ, 35).

<sup>155</sup> SZ, 2.

<sup>156</sup> SZ, 26. The term “*Wiederholung*” can be literally translated as “repeating” or “holding again.” Macquarrie and Robinson translate this technical term as “restating,” which cannot convey the literal meaning and Heidegger’s own. Stambaugh’s translation as “retrieval” might be more appropriate. This term plays a significant role in the *Seinsfrage* since the *Seinsfrage* explicates the temporality of Dasein in a repetition or retrieval of its historical possibilities.

understanding of Being that we already pre-understand in some ways; then, he constantly reinterprets it during the entire course of his investigation. In this regard, Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* rests on a *circular* structure of interpretation, called the "hermeneutic circle."<sup>157</sup> This circular process of interpretation is neither tautological nor vicious, but rather *spiral* because each turn around the circle goes into a deeper or more authentic dimension of the meaning of Being and thereby makes an implicit understanding of Being more and more explicit. Accordingly, an everyday understanding of Being leads to an everyday interpretation, which in turn makes possible a deeper understanding that yields a deeper interpretation, and so forth; there is no final understanding and interpretation of Being since the Being itself is historical [*geschichtlich*]. In the investigation of the meaning of Being, therefore, the *Seinsfrage* is the starting point by which we are "not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way."<sup>158</sup>

In order to make clear the right way of raising the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by presenting what Being is *not*: "Being [*Sein*] of beings is not a being [*Seiende*]" nor an "origin [*Herkunft*]" (like God) of beings having a "character of some possible being [*möglichen Seienden*]."<sup>159</sup> This initial account of Being anticipates the significance of the "ontological difference" between Being and a being, which plays a pivotal role in Heidegger's entire thought in the sense that the oblivion of Being in the metaphysical tradition is due to its lack of the consideration of the ontological difference. For Heidegger, the neglect of this difference partly stems from a grammatical ambiguity of "to be [*sein*]" in Western languages; grammatically, "to

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<sup>157</sup> SZ, 153, 315.

<sup>158</sup> SZ, 153. By opposing hermeneutics not to phenomenology itself but to Husserlian idealism, Ricoeur points out the latter's disadvantage with regard to Heideggerian hermeneutical ontology. "The ideal of scientificity, construed by Husserlian idealism as ultimate justification, encounters its fundamental limit in the ontological condition of understanding." Then, he immediately adds: "The Husserlian demand for the return to intuition is countered by the necessity for all understanding to be mediated by an interpretation." Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Science*, 105.

<sup>159</sup> SZ, 6.

be” can designate either a being [*Seiende*] in a substantive sense or Being [*Sein*] in a verbal sense. Because of this grammatical ambiguity of “to be” that entails the ontological indifference, traditional metaphysics remains onto-theo-logical and thereby fails to recognize the right way of questioning. On the one hand, metaphysics is onto-logical in considering Being of beings as “the ground-giving unity of what is most general [*der ergründenden Einheit des Allgemeinen*]” common to all beings; onto-logically, Being is understood as the “*ultima ratio*,” which serves to give the ground to all beings.<sup>160</sup> On the other hand, metaphysics is theo-logical in considering Being as “the founding unity of the allness [*der begründenden Einheit der Allheit*]” antecedent to all beings; theo-logically, Being is considered as the “*causa prima*,” which reinforces its foundational role to give a genetic cause to all beings.<sup>161</sup> Onto-theo-logically, metaphysics has never thought of Being *per se*, but always has reduced it to a variation of beings as “the grounding ground,”<sup>162</sup> which functions as the timeless, eternal, and unchangeable foundation of all beings. Consequently, the metaphysical tradition establishes the *ahistorical* or *non-historical* [*geschichtslos*] conception of Being by reducing it to the most general and highest being, which accordingly leads to the oblivion of Being as such throughout the history [*Geschichte*] of Being.

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<sup>160</sup> ID, 58, 60, respectively.

<sup>161</sup> ID, 58, 60, respectively (translation modified). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which begins with the fundamental question, “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?” Heidegger asserts that any theological proclamation—like “In the beginning, God created heaven and earth”—cannot be the answer to the question since this why question is not about the origin or cause of beings “on the same level as beings themselves,” but about “the domains that lie ‘at the ground,’ even pressing into the ultimate, to the limit.” IM, 1, 8, 3, respectively. See also PA, 287; WE, 207. Iain Thomson explicates the onto-theo-logical features of metaphysics as both “a bottom-up, ground-giving or establishing” and “a top-down, theological founding or justification.” Iain Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>162</sup> ID, 58. This grounding ground is the “metaphysical concept of God” as *causa sui* whose existence traditional metaphysics attempts to prove in various ways (60). As will be seen, *Sein* by itself can never exist, but only a *Seiende* exists. For Heidegger, the proof of God’s existence leads to a contamination of *Sein* by God through reducing *Sein* to a supreme *Seiende*; hence, there is no place for *Sein* itself in onto-theo-logy. In “Introduction to ‘What is Metaphysics?’,” Heidegger also states: “In fact, metaphysics never answers the question concerning the truth of Being, for it never asks this question. Metaphysics does not ask this question, for it thinks Being only by representing beings as beings. It names beings as whole, although it speaks of Being. It names Being and means beings as beings. From its beginning to its completion, the propositions of metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings and Being.” PA, 281; WE, 199-200.

Furthermore, an onto-theological understanding of Being entails a misunderstanding of the nature of (human) beings. Traditional anthropology defines human beings either as the *animal rationale* in a philosophical sense or the *imago Dei* in a theological sense. Heidegger attacks both approaches because they see human beings in terms of the Being-present-at-hand [*Vorhandenseins*] rather than of their own Being.<sup>163</sup> What the onto-theological tradition of metaphysics has long failed to recognize is “a way of Being [*eine Weise des Seins*]”—or what Heidegger calls “existence [*Existenz*]”<sup>164</sup>—which concerns human beings’ relation or comportment [*Verhalten*] to their own Being at its most basic and primordial level, by means of reducing the human way of Being or the facticity of human existence to presence-at-hand or objective presence [*Vorhandenheit*]. Human beings *are* not simply out there in the mode of presence-at-hand among other objects, but they *exist* such a way to comport themselves to beings, as Heidegger puts it: “The being that is in the way of existence [*Existenz*] is the human being. The human being alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist.”<sup>165</sup> Insofar as metaphysics strives for the Being *qua* the foundation or origin, which all beings share ontologically, and, from which all beings issue theologically, what is taken for

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<sup>163</sup> SZ, 48-49. According to Heidegger, beings manifest themselves in three different modes: 1) as presence-at-hand or objective presence [*Vorhandenheit*], which refers to the bare fact that a being is present—rather than absent—to a theoretical, disinterested, or contemplative gaze, 2) as readiness-to-hand or handiness [*Zuhandenheit*], in which a being reveals itself to Dasein as a useful, practical set of equipment, and 3) as human Dasein, who reveals itself to itself and has temporal existence, alone *exists* in the world. Roughly speaking, Heidegger’s great achievement in *Being and Time* consists of explicating a practical—primordially antecedent to theoretical—relation between *Zuhandenheit* and Dasein’s Being in terms of care [*Sorge*] (Division One) and an existential relation of Dasein to itself in terms of temporality—and especially its own death (Division Two). In his interpretation of Heidegger’s ontology, Levinas states: “Precisely, Being revealed to Dasein is revealed not under the form of a theoretical concept that one contemplates, but a care [*souci*] that Dasein has for its very existence... To understand Being is to exist in such a way that one takes care of one’s own existence.” MHO, 407. Levinas points out Heidegger’s critique of traditional philosophy for its intellectualist understanding of human existence: “All intellectualist philosophy—empiricist or rationalist—seeks to know human beings, but it means to do so through the *concept* of human beings, leaving aside the *effectivity* of human existence and the meaning of this effectivity.” MHO, 430.

<sup>164</sup> SZ, 135. See also PA, 283; WE, 202. Levinas writes: “It is the abandonment of the traditional concept of consciousness as the point of departure, along with the decision to seek for the basis of consciousness itself in a more fundamental notion of Being—a notion of the existence of Dasein,” MHO, 405-6. Human existence is thus the condition for the conscious life, and not *vice versa*.

<sup>165</sup> “*Das Seiende, das in der Weise der Existenz ist, ist der Mensch. Der Mensch allein existiert. Der Fels ist, aber er existiert nicht.*” PA, 284; WE, 204 (translation modified).

granted is the very Being; hence, the Being, *i.e.*, the way of human existence, has remained unquestioned and overlooked in the history of metaphysics.

Heidegger goes on to provide what Being *is* in the broadest sense that challenges the onto-theological foundationalism: “Being is always the Being of beings.”<sup>166</sup> As seen above, the Being is not any kind of a primal origin or foundation prior to all beings; rather, it is only in and through beings—though Heidegger becomes more conscious of an independent status of Being in his later works.<sup>167</sup> As soon as a being is thrown into the world, it is already interrogated, though not yet conceptually or authentically, but vaguely or preliminarily, with regard to its own Being. The way of the *Seinsfrage* is always already predetermined by the questioner’s preliminary understanding of his own Being. This predetermination of the *Seinsfrage* by the questioner’s pre-understanding of Being implies the right way of the *Seinsfrage* that Heidegger envisions. In order to formulate the *Seinsfrage* in the right way, Heidegger takes Dasein as an “exemplary being [*das exemplarische Seiende*]”<sup>168</sup> who can work out its own *Seinsfrage*; Da-sein is a name for a being who is [*sein*] there [*da*]. Basically, he designates Dasein not only as the being who is able to interrogate its own Being (the “*Gefragte*” or what is being asked about: Being) but also as the being who is interrogated (the “*Befragte*” or what is interrogated: Dasein), for the sake of the authentic meaning

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<sup>166</sup> SZ, 9.

<sup>167</sup> Generally speaking, after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertakes his famous turn [*das Kehre*] in the course of retrieving the *Seinsfrage*, a shift from Being on the basis of Dasein to Dasein on the basis of Being. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates the question of Being by means of the fundamental ontology, *i.e.*, the existential analytic of Dasein. The central task for the later Heidegger is no longer to develop the fundamental ontology—indeed, he abandons it; instead, his primary focus is on the thinking of Being itself. However, Levinas believes that Heidegger promotes under the name “*Kehre*” what is not worthy of the name since he is still—even more—obsessed with the problem of Being itself [*das Sein selbst*] or Beyng [*das Seyn*]. This is why Levinas pays less attention to Heidegger’s later works. For Heidegger’s lifelong engagement in the question of Being, see Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). The detailed discussion of Heidegger’s *Kehre* will be presented in Chapter Four.

<sup>168</sup> SZ, 7. Unlike Husserl, who follows Kant and Scholasticism that designate “Dasein” whose way of Being is “natural things” in the mode of “*Vorhandenheit*,” Heidegger assigns Dasein to the specific way of Being that we exist: “We are at every moment a Dasein.” Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 28.

of Being (the “*Erfragte*” or what is to be obtained: the meaning of Being for Dasein). The threefold structure of Dasein’s questioning—or what Heidegger calls “the formal structure of the question of Being”<sup>169</sup>—can be epitomized as the “Dasein-in-the-question,”<sup>170</sup> which conveys the ontological-existential structure of Dasein’s entanglement with its own *Seinsfrage*.

Unlike beings in the mode of *Vorhandenheit*, Dasein alone places its own Being in question. It is through the *Seinsfrage* that Dasein transparently understands its own Being as thrown into the *da* where, accordingly, Dasein opens itself up to a disclosure [*Erschlossenheit*] of its Being in such a way that it understands its own Being. From the ground of Dasein’s understanding of Being, all kinds of theoretical activities of its conscious life emerges hereafter. It is the significance of the *Seinsfrage* that separates Heidegger from traditional philosophy—in particular, his scholarly mentor Husserl, to whom *Being and Time* is dedicated. Whereas the Heideggerian Dasein *qua* a questioner is always already involved—rather than detached from—in its ontological-existential questions, the Husserlian Ego *qua* the transcendental onlooker disinterestedly observes its contemplative questions outside and above them. It is “the ontological groundlessness of transcendental subjectivity,”<sup>171</sup> for which Heidegger criticizes Husserl’s phenomenology, and that he attempts to overcome through reviving the forgotten *Seinsfrage* in the right way.

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<sup>169</sup> See SZ, § 2. “Thus to work out the question of Being means to make a being—one who questions—transparent in its Being. Asking the question, as a mode of *Being* of a being, is itself essentially determined by what is asked about in it—Being. This being, which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being, we formulate terminologically as *Dasein*” (SZ, 7).

<sup>170</sup> In “What is Metaphysics?,” Heidegger also states: “[E]very metaphysical question can be asked *only* in such a way that the questioner as such is also there within the question, that is, is placed in question. . . . We are question, here and now, for ourselves.” PA, 82; WE, 103 (italics added).

<sup>171</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 257. However, Gadamer admits that “Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* does not completely escape the problematic of transcendental reflection.” What Heidegger attempts to show in *Being and Time* is a “new dimension within transcendental phenomenology. . . in terms of the temporality and historicity of Dasein” (256). Furthermore, Dreyfus even argues that in taking over Husserl’s phenomenology whose concept of intentionality “gives rise to more problems than it solves,” Heidegger makes his own phenomenology “exactly the opposite of Husserl’s proposed method.” Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 51, 30, respectively.

By means of raising its own *Seinsfrage*, Dasein does not simply understand and interpret itself epistemologically in terms of its own Being, but Dasein itself *is* ontologically what it understands and interprets its Being; simply put, Dasein exists by understanding its own Being. Here the understanding [*Verstehen*] is not a cognitive faculty in the Kantian sense of the term, which enables Dasein to know an object in terms of space and time; thus, it refuses the epistemological structure of the knowing subject and the object known. According to Levinas, the Heideggerian understanding is the very “dynamism” or “power [*pouvoir*]” that determines Dasein’s way of Being, *i.e.*, the mode of its existence.<sup>172</sup> Although Being reveals itself in and through beings, it is more than simply what it is to be revealed in Dasein since the basic mode of Dasein’s Being is the temporal [*zeitlich*], historical [*geschichtlich*]—or “epochal” in Heidegger’s later terminology—able-to-be. Being manifests and hides itself throughout the different epochs of its history [*Geschichte*] in various manners, and what can be said about the history of Being [*Seinsgeschichte*] is only *that* it is or happens [*geschieht*]. Heidegger states, “[O]ne cannot speak of a ‘why.’ Only the ‘that’—that the history of Being is in such a way—can be said.”<sup>173</sup> Any attempt to finalize knowledge based on any theological origin or ontological ground should fail because the Being itself is finite [*endlich*], historical, and epochal.<sup>174</sup> In *Introduction to*

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<sup>172</sup> Levinas acknowledges that the “originality” of Heidegger’s conception of existence consists in rejecting the traditional idea of consciousness and showing that the understanding has nothing to do with “theory” or “conscious awareness.” MHO, 415. Rather, the understanding constitutes Dasein’s mode of existence upon which any cognitive, contemplative activities are fundamentally founded.

<sup>173</sup> SD, 57.

<sup>174</sup> In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger comments that the aim of fundamental ontology is first to ask about a “relationship between the understanding of Being and the finitude in human beings” (161) and then to unveil the “finitude of Dasein as its fundament” (163). The finitude of human beings is not only “[what] is decisive for purpose of making the understanding of Being possible” (163), but also “the constant, although mostly concealed, shimmering of all that exists.” Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 167. Dreyfus appreciates the original achievement of White’s interpretation of Heidegger’s thanatology as follows: “our inability to spell out the understanding of Being in our background practices is one important aspect of what Heidegger means by human finitude.” Dreyfus, “Foreword,” xiii. For her own discussion on the finitude of Being, see White, *Time and Death*, 18-23, 72-75, 143-47.



*Metaphysics*, Heidegger contends that there is no such metaphysical ground, that is, a solid and secure foundation that onto-theological thinking has long sought.

Why are there beings at all (rather than nothing)? Why—that is, what is the ground? From what ground do beings come? On what ground do beings stand? To what ground do beings do? The question does not ask this or that about beings... The questioning seeks the ground for what is, insofar as it is in being. To seek the ground: this means to get to the bottom [*ergründen*]... But because we are questioning, it remains an open question whether the ground is a truly grounding, foundation-effecting, originary ground; whether the ground refuses to provide a foundation, and so is an abyss [*Ur-grund*]; or whether the ground is neither one nor the other, but merely offers the perhaps necessary illusion of a foundation and is thus an unground [*Un-grund*].<sup>175</sup>

In this passage, which undoubtedly alludes to Schelling's peculiar concept of the "non-ground [*Ungrund*],"<sup>176</sup> Heidegger explicates how the (onto-theological) ground is *ungrounded* from the beginning. In the first edition of "On the Essence of Ground," Heidegger also make a similar remark: "Where does the necessity lies for grounding? In abyss and in unground. And where is this? In Da-sein."<sup>177</sup> Once the *Seinsfrage* is retrieved in the right way, and thereby once the ontological difference between Being and beings is properly understood, the Being is not any kind of a stable, established, or grounding ground but manifests itself in the horizon of time, as the title *Being and Time* suggests.<sup>178</sup> In this context, Heidegger's criticism of onto-theology clearly shows that the determination of Being does not rely on any kind of *trans*-epochal foundationalism or casual determinism, which might unexceptionally operate throughout the epochs of the history of

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<sup>175</sup> IM, 3.

<sup>176</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 68. After stating that the ground of God is not identical with God, but found in God, Schelling claims: "anarchy still lies in the ground... as if initial anarchy had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things" (29). This anarchy is what he calls the "indivisible remainder" (29) or the "original ground or non-ground" (68), which is never assimilated into the ground while remaining "eternally in the ground" (29).

<sup>177</sup> PA, 100; WE, 127 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>178</sup> In the Introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes time as "the horizon of the understanding of Being in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein which understands Being," SZ, 17.

Being; rather, the manifestation of Being is essentially temporal, historical, and epochal. Therefore, what the ongoing change of “the epochal transformations of Being”<sup>179</sup> exposes is the fact that there is no eternal, unchangeable, or ahistorical ground which guarantees a transcendental or metaphysical foundation that the onto-theological tradition seeks. Heidegger’s attack of the onto-theological understanding of Being culminates in his ontological interpretation of Dasein’s death, which discloses the temporality, historicity, and finitude of Dasein’s Being.

## 2. Death Thematized

### 2-1. The Peculiar Modes of Dasein: Authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*] and Totality [*Ganzheit*]

As seen above, the essence [*Wesen*] of Dasein does not rely on something other than itself, such as the most general foundation or highest origin in terms of the Platonic participation, the Aristotelian causality, or the Thomistic analogy that synthesizes these two principles;<sup>180</sup> for

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<sup>179</sup> SD, 57.

<sup>180</sup> Regarding the Thomistic synthesis, John D. Caputo states as follows: “It is clear then that one cannot separate the doctrine of participation from the principle of causality. Participation has a causal sense. Participated *esse* depends on unparticipated *esse* as an effect does upon its cause.” John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 142. According to Anselm K. Min, Aquinas would not accept the Heideggerian notion that “God and things ‘are’ but that human beings ‘exist’” since “all finite beings are equal; they are beings by participation, not by essence, beings by grace, not by merit.” Anselm K. Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 46-47. When Aquinas speaks of existence, his focus is on the ultimate, profound, and intimate act of existing [*esse*], which cannot be reduced to essence. By means of participation in the creative *esse* of God *qua* the ultimate cause, all beings *qua* His effects come into existence [*esse*]. Aquinas says: “all beings apart from God are not their own *esse* but *esse* by participation.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981), I, 44, 1. According to Aquinas, finite beings are finite precisely because they do not have in themselves the ground of their existence [*esse*]. Thus, they depend on the divine *esse* of God as the “*ipsum esse per se subsistens*” (I, 44, 1) in which they participate; in God alone, “His essence is His existence” (I, 3, 4). However, as will be seen, Heidegger argues that the peculiarity of Dasein, which differentiates the mode of Dasein from *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, consists in the fact that its essence is no other than its existence. Finally, Min’s statements show why Heidegger criticizes Thomism for its ontotheological stance. “Important as a human being is in the hierarchy of beings, a human being is still fundamentally one being among others, to whom Aquinas applies exactly the same ontological categories. . . . that he does to everything else.” Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 47. If Aquinas’s primary interest lies in distinguishing between the Creator as the Cause and all other creatures as its effects and thereby exhibiting the absolute, total, and unilateral relationship between God as “*esse* by essence” and creature as “*esse* by participation,” Heidegger’s is to show the distinction between human beings who exist (existence) and other things that are (*Vorhandenheit* or *Zuhandenheit*). For Heidegger, thus, the Thomistic conception of God in terms of participation and causality exemplarily remains ontotheological.

Heidegger, they all fall under the ontotheological tradition. Heidegger here asserts that “the ‘essence [*Wesen*]’ of Dasein lies in its existence [*Existenz*].”<sup>181</sup> Levinas appreciates Heidegger’s contribution to the phenomenological tradition, which marks a “new phase” of the phenomenological movement, when he argues that Dasein is distinguished from things not by its essence or property, but by “the existence, the very way of being-there [*être-là*].”<sup>182</sup> In the endnote to *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger provides an etymological account of existence in terms of “*Ek-sistenz*,” which means “standing-out into the openness of the there.”<sup>183</sup> Dasein does not simply remain a static entity as a being-given-out-there, but always stands out of itself as a being-thrown-into-the-there. In this context, Dasein never fully actualizes its own Being *at* its end, but always remains *ecstatic* on the way *toward* its end; thus, it is already an ahead-of-itself [*Sich-vorweg-sein*] and, at the same time, always a not-yet-itself [*Noch-nicht-sein*].<sup>184</sup>

The peculiarity of Dasein’s existence consists in its “transcendence” in such a way that Dasein transcends its ontic mode of a presence-at-hand and thereby exists or *ek-sists* in the ontological mode of Being-in-the-world. Dasein as an ecstatic being transcends itself toward the world into which it is thrown as the not-yet-self and toward which it projects itself as the ahead-of-itself. Transcendence characterizes the ecstatic mode of Dasein’s Being as a thrown-projection [*geworfener Entwurf*], as Heidegger states: “And, as thrown, Dasein is thrown into the mode of

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<sup>181</sup> SZ, 42. White succinctly depicts the term existence as follows: “Dasein *is* as an understanding able-to-be which in its Being makes an issue of this Being.” White, *Time and Death*, 72.

<sup>182</sup> MHO, 395, 397, respectively. According to Levinas, the fundamental point of Heidegger’s philosophy is that “*the essence of human is simultaneously his existence*.” In other words, “*That* which human is is at the very same its way of Being, its way of Being-there, its way of ‘temporalizing’ itself” (405). The concept of the existence, which marks the difference between human subjects and other things, shows the distinction between “the gnoseological attitude that foregrounds the theory of knowledge” and “the ontological attitude” that underlies the former (397).

<sup>183</sup> SZ, 442. The original note reads: “*Dasein existiert und nur es; somit Existenz das Aus- und Hinaus-stehen in die Offenheit des Da: Ek-sistenz.*”

<sup>184</sup> As soon as Dasein is thrown into the world, and as long as it is there, “Dasein is always already its *not-yet* [*Noch-nicht*]” (SZ, 244), and “the ‘ahead-of-itself [*Sich-vorweg*]’ presented itself as a ‘not-yet [*Noch-nicht*]’” (SZ, 317). Even in death, “Dasein is neither fulfilled nor does it simply disappear; it has not become finished or completely at its disposal as something at hand [*Zuhandenes*]” (SZ, 245).

Being of projecting.”<sup>185</sup> Insofar as Dasein transcends toward the world into which it is thrown, and as long as Dasein remains in the world into which it projects, the transcendence of Dasein’s Being should be understood in terms of finitude [*Endlichkeit*] rather than of infinitude [*Unendlichkeit*]. In other words, the world is not only the there [*da*] that allows Dasein to transcend itself toward the openness of Being, but also the horizontal end [*Ende*] that *de*-limits or *circum*-scribes its possibility of existing in its thrown projection; thus, the world releases Dasein’s Being as “finite [*endlich*] transcendence.”<sup>186</sup> In invoking Dasein’s ecstatic mode of Being, Heidegger elucidates how finite transcendence constitutes Dasein’s Being as Being-in-the-world in the sense that it belongs to “Dasein as the *fundamental constitution of this being, one that occurs prior to all comportment.*”<sup>187</sup> In its finite transcendence, as will be seen in Heidegger’s ontological exposition of death, Dasein finds its own fundamental finitude in which Dasein’s peculiar modes of authenticity and totality are clarified.

As opposed to the mode of the presence-at-hand that is present objectively out there, Heidegger insists, the existence of Dasein points to the peculiar way of Being in such a way that Dasein within the world exists temporally [*zeitlich*], historically [*geschichtlich*], and thus finitely [*endlich*]. Dasein’s Being must be understood on the basis of time; time is “the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being,” and thus the meaning of Dasein’s Being can be found in its “temporality [*Zeitlichkeit*].”<sup>188</sup> The existential way of Dasein’s Being in terms of time is the

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<sup>185</sup> SZ, 145.

<sup>186</sup> In explicating that transcendence belongs to the essence of Dasein and thus constitutes Dasein’s Being, Moran claims that transcendence is the “indicator of Dasein’s finitude.” Dermot Moran, “What Does Heidegger Mean by the Transcendence of Dasein?,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22/4 (2014): 499.

<sup>187</sup> PA, 108; WE, 137.

<sup>188</sup> SZ, 17. Much later on, Heidegger says: “The primordial ontological ground of the existentiality of Dasein is *temporality*. The articulated structural totality of the Being of Dasein as care first becomes existentially intelligible in terms of temporality” (SZ, 234). In this context, Levinas states: “Now all of Heidegger’s work tends to demonstrate that time is not a frame where human existence—or such and such other acts of the understanding of Being—is situated, but that the ‘temporalization [*Zeitigung*]’ of time, in its authentic form, is this understanding of Being itself.” MHO,

most fundamental subject matter of ontology in the first place. Ontology should begin with what Heidegger calls “the fundamental ontology,” inspired by the *Seinsfrage*, which investigates the possibility [*Möglichkeit*] of the factual-existential way of Dasein’s Being. This fundamental ontology discerns an “*a priori* condition for the possibility,”<sup>189</sup> the condition for all other ontologies that consider Being of such and such beings and, in turn, for ontic inquiries that concern themselves with the actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] of these beings in the mode of *Vorhandenheit*. In opposition to *categories* applied to “the actuality of the thing as the fundamental stratum,”<sup>190</sup> *existentials* are applied solely to the possibility of Dasein’s Being. Thus, insofar as the fundamental ontology of Dasein is concerned, Heidegger notes, “Higher than actuality stands possibility.”<sup>191</sup> Dasein is essentially its own possibility—rather than actuality—to be able to be or to be a potential for its Being [*Seinkönnen*].<sup>192</sup> With regard to Dasein’s possibility, Heidegger introduces two distinctive yet interconnected modes of Being: authenticity and inauthenticity.

Dasein *is* always its possibility. It ‘has’ this possibility, but not just as a mere property of presence-at-hand. And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can* ‘choose’ itself in its Being and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so. But only provided that Dasein is essentially something possible as *authentic*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. The two modes of Being, *authenticity* [*Eigentlichkeit*] and *inauthenticity* [*Uneigentlichkeit*]—are based on the fact that Dasein is in general determined by mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*].<sup>193</sup>

It is clear from this passage that, in and as its own possibility, Dasein can choose [*wahlen*] to be either authentic or inauthentic and then individualizes itself in this choice. The problem of whether Dasein can be authentic or inauthentic depends on its own extreme possibility—or what Heidegger

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404. For a detailed discussion on the temporality of Dasein, See White, *Time and Death*, 93-126; Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 149-56.

<sup>189</sup> SZ, 11.

<sup>190</sup> SZ, 99. For a distinction between categories and existentials, see SZ, 143-44.

<sup>191</sup> SZ, 38.

<sup>192</sup> SZ, 143-44.

<sup>193</sup> SZ, 42-43.

calls “the possibility of the impossibility of existence”<sup>194</sup>—that is, Dasein’s Being toward its own death. If Division One of *Being and Time* is dedicated to explicating the ontological structure of various ontic-inauthentic possibilities of Dasein’s Being as Being-in-the-world through the fundamental ontology or analytic of Dasein, Division Two focuses on the temporality of Dasein, which determines the primordial mode of the authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*] and totality [*Ganzheit*] of Dasein as Being-toward-death [*Sein zum Tode*]. In the beginning of Division Two, Heidegger clearly states that the existential analytic of Dasein hitherto concerns only “the *inauthentic* Being of Dasein and of Dasein as *less than total* [*das uneigentliche Sein des Daseins und dieses als unganzes*].”<sup>195</sup> The entire Division One of *Being and Time* is thus incomplete since it does not take into consideration the primordial and authentic totality of Dasein. Therefore, the phenomenon of death marks a “transitional consideration”<sup>196</sup> which reads off as the thematic development of the phenomenological investigation elaborated in *Being and Time*. Unless the ontological analysis of death is properly considered, the existential analytic of Dasein cannot be fully accomplished.

The theme of a totality [*Ganzheit*] in terms of Dasein’s end delimits the scope of the analytic of Dasein. As seen above in his critique of ontotheology, Heidegger is interested neither in the origin of Dasein (before its birth or not-yet-being-there) nor in its afterlife (after its death or no-longer-being-there); rather, his phenomenological interest lies in the way of Being-in-the-world (being-there), that is, the way that Dasein *ek-sists* within the world. Thus, the end of Dasein [*Daseinsende*] is not only its death but also its beginning, *i.e.*, its birth; it is the existential end to

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<sup>194</sup> SZ, 262.

<sup>195</sup> SZ, 233. Ciocan writes: “the validity of the ontological task regarding Being of Dasein essentially depends on the achievement of this original and authentic totality.” Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 158. See also Piotr Hoffman, “Death, Time, History: Division II of *Being and Time*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222-23.

<sup>196</sup> Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 307. White calls the transition from Division One to Two “the mystery,” which entails various misinterpretations of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death. White, *Time and Death*, 53. I will discuss this issue later in detail.

enclose or circumscribe [*eingrenzen*] the totality of Dasein [*Daseinsganzheit*].<sup>197</sup> The existential mode of Dasein's Being can be characterized in such a way that it is dying as soon as it is born; thus, the fact that Dasein *is there* means that Dasein is born into death. In this context, birth and death are "the *same* phenomenon,"<sup>198</sup> which marks not only the *Existenz* of Dasein as Being-in-the-world but also the *Ganzheit* of Dasein's Being-toward-death.

Given that Dasein always remains a not-yet-itself as well as an ahead-of-itself, why does the issue of totality matter in the thematic investigation of Dasein's death? At a glance, Heidegger's answer seems to be not fundamental enough or even somewhat misleading; the lack of totality in Dasein's Being is due to the fact that "there is still something outstanding [*Ausstand*] in its-able-to-be."<sup>199</sup> Following this initial answer, the totality of Dasein can be understood only after fully paying all outstanding debts, namely, ending its life or actualizing all its possibilities. However, Heidegger rejects his initial account since it is proper to *Vorhandenheit*, not to Dasein itself: "Death is not something not yet present-at-hand nor the last outstanding element reduced to a minimum, but an *imminence* [*Bevorstand*]."<sup>200</sup> For Dasein, death is not an event *at* which everything outstanding in its Being can be finally solved, the moment *at* which Dasein transforms its not-yet-being to its full-blown-being by means of finalizing or completing its own Being. Rather, death is an impending end which constantly stands before Dasein and thereby *toward* which Dasein projects itself in its ahead-of-itself and comports itself in its not-yet-being; it remains its own possibility from the beginning to the end—that is, the possibility in its totality. Consequently, death

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<sup>197</sup> Heidegger states: "Death is, after all, only the 'end' of Dasein, and formally speaking, it is just *one* of the ends that embraces the totality of Dasein. But the other 'end' is the 'beginning,' 'birth.' Only the being 'between' birth and death presents the total [*Ganze*] we are looking for." SZ, 373.

<sup>198</sup> François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 270.

<sup>199</sup> SZ, 236.

<sup>200</sup> SZ, 250. On Heidegger's contrast expressions between standing-out [*Ausstand*] and standing-before [*Bevorstand*], see the note of John Macquarrie's translation. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 2008), 294, note 1.

as the end of Dasein determines the totality of Dasein's Being as Being-toward-the-end [*Sein zum Ende*], which is distinct from Being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*] in the mode of *Vorhandenheit*.

What the totality of Dasein in terms of its end signifies is the existential fact that Dasein individualizes itself in its authenticity; hence, death is always a matter of Dasein itself. According to Heidegger, the ontical fact of the death of others, taken as “a substitute theme for the analysis of totality,” blurs the boundary of the totality of Dasein and distracts Dasein itself from the ontological fact that death is always an “existential phenomenon of Dasein which is in each case its own.”<sup>201</sup> The problem of the death of others thus obscures an ontological meaning of Dasein's death. Only the thematization of death as the totality of Dasein discloses the way Dasein exists authentically, the way Dasein opens itself to its authentic Being as Being-toward-death. In this regard, the thematic investigation of death brings to light the authentic Being of Dasein in its totality and thus takes the central place in the *architectonic* structure of the existential analytic of Dasein.<sup>202</sup> The totality of Dasein's Being does not mean a mere sum of all possibilities, but the possibility *par excellence* to be able to be in its primordially [*Ursprünglichkeit*] by which Dasein discloses itself as authentic and total. Therefore, death is an a priori and primordial possibility that characterizes Dasein's *Existenz* as the able-to-be-as-total [*Ganzseinkönnen*] underlying all other possibilities; it remains the possibility proper from the beginning to the end. As will be seen below,

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<sup>201</sup> SZ, 240.

<sup>202</sup> SZ, 233. Ciocan characterizes *Being and Time* as an “architectural construction” and works out “the architectonic structure of the analytic of Dasein,” by means of examining the phenomenon of death. Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 15, 7, respectively. Throughout this architectonic structure, Ciocan categorizes five phases of the totality of Dasein as follows: 1) Being-in-the-world as totality that is the point of departure of the analytic of Dasein in § 12, 2) the integrality of Dasein in terms of care in §§ 12-45, 3) Being-toward-death in §§ 46-53, 4) Being-for-authentic-Being-as-totality in §§ 54-60, and 5) the anticipatory resolution as the ultimate phenomenon of Dasein in §§ 61-66. Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 157-58. See also White, *Time and Being*, xli. In a similar vein, Peter Kemp writes: “to Heidegger, death gives humankind its highest possibility of recovering lucidity and understanding itself as a finite totality, as a coherence of human time from the beginning of existence to its end.” Peter Kemp, “Ricoeur between Heidegger and Levinas: Original Affirmation between Ontological Attestation and Ethical Injunction,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21:5/6 (1995), 42.



most misinterpretations of Heidegger's ontological description of death—especially, that of Paul Edwards—are largely generated by their failure to recognize this *a priori* characteristic of the possibility of the impossibility, which determines Dasein's authenticity and totality, prior to all possibilities.

## 2-2. Ontological Thematization of Death as the Possibility Proper

It seems to phenomenologists that any description of death is an impossible or absurd task since one cannot experience one's own death, as the Epicurean paradox shows: "When we are, death is not, while when death is, we are not."<sup>203</sup> However, Heidegger *qua* a phenomenologist takes death as a phenomenon and attempts to describe how Dasein understands its own death in an ontological way. This ontological description of Dasein's death enables Heidegger to get out of the Epicurean pitfalls and to seek the ontological meaning of death. In order to describe death as a thematic phenomenon, Heidegger first makes a distinction between perishing [*Verenden*], demising [*Ableben*], and dying [*Sterben*]. Dying does not refer to a way of Being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*], the end *at* which Dasein stops existing, but a way of Being-toward-the-end [*Sein zum Ende*], the end *toward* which Dasein is thrown. Thus, the way of Being-toward-the-end is "the way of Being in which Dasein is toward its own death [*Tod*],"<sup>204</sup> which should be distinguished from perishing, the end of "what is alive [*Lebendigen*],"<sup>205</sup> and from demising, the collapse of our intelligible world that leads to "the gateway to heaven or hell, the beginning of the next cycle of

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<sup>203</sup> In his letter to Menoecus, Epicurus mentions that we do not need to be afraid of our death because it is nothing to us: "while we exist, death is not present, and whenever death is present, we do not exist." Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, trans. Eugene O'Connor (New York: Prometheus Book, 1993), 63.

<sup>204</sup> SZ, 247. As seen above, dying indicates the way in which Dasein relates itself to its own death in terms of Being-toward-the-end rather than of Being-at-the-end. For a discussion on the fundamental transition from Being-at-the-end to Being-toward-the-end, see Ciocan, *Heidegger et le problème de la mort*, 95-97.

<sup>205</sup> SZ, 240.

karma, or the cessation of consciousness.”<sup>206</sup> If something present-at-hand [*zuhanden*] that is merely perishes, Dasein who *exists* alone *dies*. Whereas perishing and demising signify a kind of an event that occurs at a particular moment, dying is “a way to be [*eine Weise zu sein*]”<sup>207</sup> in which Dasein is toward its death and thereby undertakes as its own possibility, as soon as it has been thrown into the world, and as long as it is there [*da*]. For Heidegger, therefore, death is not a “one-shot” event or occurrence to abruptly happen to Dasein, but the “phenomenon of life”<sup>208</sup> to be understood ontologically by Dasein in its authenticity and totality.

Heidegger defines the ontological-existential conception of death by employing five quite simple yet somewhat perplexing terms: the most authentic [*eigenste*], non-relational [*unbezügliche*], insuperable [*unüberholbare*], indefinite [*unbestimmte*], and certain [*gewisse*] possibility.<sup>209</sup> Firstly, death is the “most authentic [*eigenste*]” possibility of Dasein. Dasein does not simply understand its death as the impossibility of its existence, but as the *possibility* of the impossibility of its existence, that is, the possibility of “no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [*Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens*].”<sup>210</sup> In its ecstatic temporality, Dasein as a being-ahead-of-itself foreruns into its end [*Vorlaufen*] and projects itself into the nothingness of its existence [*Entwurf*], from which it could never run away. Just as death is always Dasein’s own and so not external to its

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<sup>206</sup> White, *Death and Time*, 70.

<sup>207</sup> SZ, 245. Heidegger says: “In such Being-toward-its-end, Dasein exists in a way which is authentically whole as that being which it can be when ‘thrown into death.’ This being does not have an end at which it just stops, but it *exists finitely*.” SZ, 329.

<sup>208</sup> SZ, 246. Heidegger also states: “Dying is not an event [*Begebenheit*] at all; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially.” SZ, 240. Thus, death is neither an event which has not happened yet to Dasein, nor an end which is something not yet objectively present. Rather, death is always already immanent for Dasein since Dasein exists in such a way that its not-yet belongs to itself: “As thrown being-in-the-world, Dasein is always already delivered over its death.” SZ, 259.

<sup>209</sup> SZ, 258-59. “The full existential and ontological concept of death can now be defined as follows: *as the end of Dasein, death is the most authentic [eigenste], non-relational [unbezügliche], certain [gewisse], and as such, indefinite [unbestimmte] and insuperable [unüberholbare] possibility of Dasein.*”

<sup>210</sup> SZ, 250.

Being, “No one take the other’s dying away from him.”<sup>211</sup> In his interpretation of Dasein’s death, Derrida points out that “one has to give [death] to oneself by taking it upon oneself.”<sup>212</sup> In the course of giving and taking its own death, Dasein transparently understands its death as its irreplaceable mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] that it alone must undertake. Ontologically understood, death belongs solely and exclusively to Dasein itself, insofar as it is there. Heidegger states: “With death, Dasein stands before itself in its most authentic able-to-be [*eigensten Seinkönnen*]....[and] is *completely* thrown back upon its most authentic able-to-be.”<sup>213</sup> In its “anticipatory resoluteness [*vorlaufenden Entschlossenheit*],”<sup>214</sup> paradoxically, Dasein understands the impossibility of its own existence as its most authentic possibility, and thereby discloses itself as an able-to-be-there in its authenticity and totality. Dasein’s *Seinkönnen* becomes “authentic and transparent [*durchsichtig*] in the understanding Being-toward-death as its most authentic possibility.”<sup>215</sup>

Paul Edwards’s (in)famous polemic against Heidegger ignites an extensive debate on the ontological interpretation of death in the Heideggerian scholarship.<sup>216</sup> According to Edwards,

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<sup>211</sup> SZ, 240 (italics removed). It is true that one can die for the other for the sake of such and such a cause or reason. But this does not mean that the other can be absolved from its own death. The other, as long as it is Dasein, must take dying upon itself. Thus, every Dasein must—or more properly speaking, can [*können*—die. Heidegger notes elsewhere: “Dying for the other does not mean that the other has thus had his own death taken away and abolished. Every Dasein must take dying upon itself as its very self, as Dasein. More precisely, *every Dasein, insofar as it is, has already taken this way of Being upon itself. Death is in each instance and in its time my own death*; it belongs to me insofar as I am.” Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 310.

<sup>212</sup> GD, 46 (italics removed).

<sup>213</sup> SZ, 250.

<sup>214</sup> SZ, 310. Heidegger notes: “In its anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein has now been made phenomenally visible with regard to its possible authenticity and totality.” See also White, *Time and Death*, 109. White here explicates the etymological link between *Er-schlossenheit* and *Ent-schlossenheit*. They share the verb form “*schliessen*,” which means “to close” or “to shut.” The prefix “*er-*” attached to “*schliessen*” means an action of “disclosing” or “opening,” while the prefix “*ent-*” attached to “*schliessen*” refers to, White argues, “entry into a new state or the abandonment of a previous state.” In this sense, the concept of *Entschlossenheit* conveys the *ongoing* transformation or what Heidegger calls “Appropriation” of the *Erschlossenheit* of Dasein’s Being from inauthenticity to authenticity. This transformation does not stop *at* the “moment of insight [*Augenblink*]” of authentic Being toward death since Dasein remains a not-yet-being [*Noch-nicht-sein*]; thus, there is *always* something to be disclosed in Dasein’s Being. Heidegger thus writes: “it is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is constantly something unsettled [*eine ständige Unabgeschlossenheit*]” (SZ, 236).

<sup>215</sup> SZ, 307.

<sup>216</sup> In the Preface to *Time and Death*, White mentions that Edwards’s antagonistic interpretation of Heidegger’s notion of death leads her to write this work. White, *Time and Death*, xlix. See also, among many others,

Heidegger's interpretation of death is at least found to be false and at best a "platitude and not a deep and original insight."<sup>217</sup> However, Edwards's criticism relies on his own confusion of the ontic-categorical and the ontological-existential notions of death, which renders Heidegger's thanatology ridiculous.<sup>218</sup> Although Heidegger does not reject the ontic aspects of Dasein's death, his primary interest lies in the ontological death as the most authentic possibility that can disclose Dasein's Being in its authenticity and totality. As Heidegger puts it, "Dasein's disclosure [*Erschlossenheit*] is the most primordial phenomenon of truth,"<sup>219</sup> in which the discoveredness [*Entdecktheit*] of other inner-worldly beings is grounded. In this regard, the totality of Dasein's Being is at issue on account of its own death as the most authentic possibility. Therefore, death for Dasein is not merely an ontic possibility among others but rather the ontological possibility proper that underlies all other possibilities and makes them possible.

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Stephen Bungay, "On Reading Heidegger," *Mind* 86 (1977): 423-26; Lawrence Hinman, "Heidegger, Edwards, and Being-toward-Death," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* XVI (1978): 193-212; John Llewelyn, "The 'Possibility' of Heidegger's Death," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 14/2 (1983): 127-38; Dan Magurshuk, "Heidegger and Edwards on *Sein-zum-Tode*," *The Monist* 62/1 (1979): 107-18; Jamshid Mirfenderesky, "Concerning Paul Edwards' 'Heidegger on Death': A Criticism," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 13/2 (1982): 120-8; Carol J. White, "Dasein, Existence and Death," *Philosophy Today* 28/1 (1984): 52-65; Max O. Hallman, "Edwards and Heidegger on the Significance of Death," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 16/3 (1985): 301-6; Sharon Janusz and Glenn Webster, "In Defence of Heidegger," *Philosophy* 66 (1991): 380-5; Paul Edwards, "A Reply to Crude and Reckless Distortions," *Philosophy* 67 (1992): 381-5; Denis McManus, "Sympathy for the Devil: Edwards and Heidegger," *Philosophy* 70 (1995): 263-72. Occasionally, a misleading interpretation entails a fruitful outcome not only by illuminating wrong ways we should not go to, but also by awakening us to an underestimated yet crucial theme we should go to. As far as Heidegger's theme of death is concerned, Edwards's contribution, although it receives numerous criticisms from the Heideggerian scholars, to the Heideggerian academia should not be overlooked, whether his criticism of Heidegger is fair or not.

<sup>217</sup> Paul Edwards, *Heidegger and Death: A Critical Evaluation* (La Salle, Illinois: The Hegeler Institute, 1979), 59-60. In this work, Edwards examines almost every aspect of death except ontological, such as emotional (8), psychological (8), rhetorical (9), grammatical (13-14), metaphorical (25-26), literal (26), logical (54), and empirical (59).

<sup>218</sup> Lawrence M. Hinman attacks Edwards's criticism of Heidegger's view on death for his continuous confusions of Heidegger's decisive terminologies, such as categorial and existential, ontic and ontological, and authentic and inauthentic. Lawrence Hinman, "Heidegger, Edwards, and Being-toward-Death," 193-212. White condemns both Edwards and Hinman because they fail to recognize the distinction between the death of Dasein and that of a particular person; hence, they cannot capture the meaning of Dasein's mineness in death. White, "Dasein, Existence and Death," 52-65.

<sup>219</sup> SZ, 220-1.

Secondly, death is the “non-relational [*unbezügliche*]” possibility, by which Dasein finds its own authentic individuality. Provided that the anonymous they [*das Man*] continuously justifies and proliferates “the *temptation* of covering up from oneself one’s most authentic Being-toward-death,”<sup>220</sup> the non-relational possibility of death individualizes Dasein down to its own Being as Being-thrown into there [*da*], in which it reveals itself as its able-to-be in total isolation from the they. Death is precisely “the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself toward anything, of every way of existing.”<sup>221</sup> In the anticipation [*Vorlaufen*] of death that releases Dasein from the temptations, tranquilizations, or “illusions of the they,”<sup>222</sup> all relations other than Dasein’s own relation with itself are broken down and meaningless, and thereby Dasein can confront its authentic Being in its totality. Heidegger thus notes: “Anticipation utterly individualizes Dasein and allows it to become certain of the totality of its able-to-be.”<sup>223</sup> Michael Zimmerman here provides a moralist interpretation of death in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity. According to him, in an inauthentic mode of Being, Dasein remains its “egological attachment to unexamined ways of living” and manipulates something ready-for-hand “for selfish purpose”; then, he concludes, “If I accept that death is always possible, the complacency of egoism disappears.”<sup>224</sup> However, inauthenticity does not convey any vulgar conception of morality, such as something bad, wrong, or deficient—or in Heidegger’s own language, “a bad and deplorable ontical property.”<sup>225</sup> What is at stake in terms of authenticity is that death individualizes Dasein

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<sup>220</sup> SZ, 253. Heidegger adds: “Thus, the they provides a *constant tranquilization about death*....*The ‘they’ does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death*....The they is careful to distort this anxiety into the fear of a future event.” SZ, 254.

<sup>221</sup> SZ, 262.

<sup>222</sup> SZ, 266.

<sup>223</sup> SZ, 266.

<sup>224</sup> Michael E. Zimmerman, *The Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), 73, 44, 73, respectively.

<sup>225</sup> SZ, 176. Heidegger writes: “But the inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify any ‘lesser’ Being or any ‘lower’ degree of Being. Rather, it is the case that even in its fullest concretion Dasein can be characterized by inauthenticity” (SZ, 43). In his later work entitled “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger also states: “the terms

not as what it simply is in the mode of the presence-at-hand, but as what it is *able-to-be* in the temporal-ecstatic mode of existence. The non-relational possibility of death is not any ontic matter of whether “some people do [or] some people do not die alone,”<sup>226</sup> as Edwards conceives. Rather, it signifies that death is always already a matter of mineness that Dasein alone undertakes, as Heidegger states: “*Every Dasein itself must take dying upon itself in every instance.*”<sup>227</sup>

When it comes to the non-relational possibility of death, White points out that most interpreters, including Edwards, confuse Heidegger’s concept of individualization with that of personalization when they inattentively consider Dasein as a particular or individual person. As seen above, Heidegger does not designate Dasein as a particular person who has a unique personality or character in nature, thereby making itself different from other Daseins, but, rather, as an exemplary being who puts its own Being into question. “Again,” Heidegger says, “we are here suggesting, methodologically, an extreme existential-ontological model.”<sup>228</sup> According to White, Heidegger’s focus here is on the Being in general or the Being of beings, which distances the mode of Dasein’s existence from those of *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*, rather than on what makes “me *me* and not you.”<sup>229</sup> Moreover, this individuality [*Vereinzelug*] of an authentic

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‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity,’ which we used in a provisional fashion, do not imply a moral-existentiell or an ‘anthropological’ distinction but rather a relation which, because it has been hitherto concealed from philosophy, has yet to be thought for the first time, an ‘ecstatic’ relation of the essence of man to the truth of Being.” BW, 236.

<sup>226</sup> Edwards, *Heidegger and Death*, 59.

<sup>227</sup> SZ, 240 (italics added). In this context, Heidegger states: “The ‘they’ never dies because it *cannot* die; for death is in each case mine” (SZ, 425).

<sup>228</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundation of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 190.

<sup>229</sup> White, *Time and Death*, 31. White asserts that we have to read Heidegger not from the perspective of “a curious admixture of Kierkegaard and Husserl,” but as “a descendant of Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant” (31). She goes on to say that “Just as Dasein is something we share in common, Dasein’s self is not something which differentiates one person from another but rather what makes us both Dasein” (37). Finally, regarding Dasein’s individualization, she concludes that “we need to focus on the peculiar character of Dasein as the entity that makes an issue of what it is to be in general, not just Dasein in its everydayness and certainly not just the individual person living within the realm of the Anyone” (98). Her conclusion shows the pivotal role of the theme of death in the existential analytic of Dasein, which entails the radical transition from Division One to Division Two in *Being and Time*. Incidentally, provided that for Heidegger, essence is no other than existence, the individuality of Dasein can be understood as a quiddity or “whatness” that all Daseins share and thereby that makes Dasein Dasein in *general*, rather than as a haecceity or “thisness” that differentiates this particular Dasein from all other Daseins and thus that makes Dasein this Dasein in

Dasein does not give rise to a harmonious fulfillment, completion, or consummation of its own life, as Charles Guignon might hold. Guignon rightly states that death does not refer to “some future event but to the essential finitude of our Being,” through which an authentic Dasein recognizes “the gravity of the task” in taking full responsibility for its own Being.<sup>230</sup> In other words, it is only through its own mortality that Dasein can be responsible for its Being. However, he misleadingly argues that Dasein’s life is “lived as a unified flow characterized by cumulativeness and direction” or “lived as a coherent story.”<sup>231</sup> According to Guignon’s view, the entire meaning of Dasein’s life is accomplished and consummated only *at* the end of its life. But this *at-the-end* is the mode proper to *Zuhandenheit* rather than to Dasein, as Heidegger unambiguously states: “In death, Dasein is neither fulfilled nor does it simply disappear; it has not become finished or completely available as something ready-to-hand [*Zuhandenes*].”<sup>232</sup> From the ontological-existential perspective, Dasein cannot entertain such a self-narrative or autobiographical perspective on its entire life since—as long as Dasein is there—Dasein is always on the way *toward* its end and thus remains always as a not-yet-being that never accomplishes its full life by actualizing all its possibilities and, at last, death as its most authentic possibility of the impossibility of its existence. According to Heidegger, death is not an end at which the accumulated culmination of Dasein’s life is retrospectively evaluated, judged, or assessed in light of its whole life, but “an end beyond all completion or fulfillment, a limit beyond all limits.”<sup>233</sup> Ontologically, Dasein

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*particular*. For a detailed discussion on Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s individuality, see White, *Time and Death*, 30-40. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the individuality or isolation [*Vereinzelug*] of Dasein, which never allows substitution, sacrifice, or dying for the other that the later Levinas advocates.

<sup>230</sup> Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 133-35.

<sup>231</sup> Charles Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 229-30.

<sup>232</sup> SZ, 245.

<sup>233</sup> IM, 168. Heidegger goes on to say that Dasein has “no way out in the face of death, not only when it is time to die, but constantly and essentially. Insofar as humans *are*, they stand in the no-exit of death.” IM, 169. See

experiences its own death as the possibility of the impossibility rather than as its actualization of this impossible possibility.

Thirdly, death is the “insuperable [*unüberholbare*]” possibility of Dasein in the sense that it cannot be overcome by or reduced into any other possibilities. This insuperable possibility has nothing to do with any ontic possibility that Dasein can actualize, bypass, postpone, or avoid; moreover, it is not a theological possibility that enables Dasein to conceive of any kind of an “other-worldly speculation.”<sup>234</sup> Rather, this possibility only has to do with the ontological possibility that Dasein lives through as it is thrown into the *this*-world—more exactly, the *there*-world [*da-Welt*]. However, the insuperable possibility of death internal to Dasein’s existence does not allude to a pessimistic view on Dasein’s authentic Being, as Hubert L. Dreyfus maintains. In opposition to Guignon’s optimistic account of the coherent or harmonious consummation at the end of the Dasein’s life, Dreyfus notices that there is “an unsatisfactory structure”<sup>235</sup> even in Dasein’s authentic way of Being. He is quite right insofar as this structure is understood as what Heidegger calls the “ontological guilt.” Ontologically—not morally, emotionally, or ontically—understood, this guilt signals the *factual* fact that Dasein is already thrown into the there, from which it cannot escape, and thus in which Dasein alone has to take responsibility for its own Being. Dasein here can never overcome or outstrip [*unüberholen*] the facticity of existence, thrownness,

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also SZ, 244-46. In this context, White argues that “For Dasein, there is no sort of final, Hegelian or Kierkegaardian overcoming of death.” White, *Time and Death*, 90.

<sup>234</sup> SZ, 248. As seen in the issue of Dasein’s totality [*Ganzheit*], Heidegger here delimits a scope and task of his ontological analysis of death: “But our analysis of death remains purely ‘this-worldly’ in that it interprets the phenomenon solely with respect to the question of how it *enters into* each and every Dasein as its able-to-be. We cannot even ask with any methodological assurance about what is after death until death is understood in its full ontological essence....The this-worldly, ontological interpretation of death comes before any ontic, other-worldly speculation.” He thus immediately adds: “The existential analysis is methodologically prior to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy, and theology of death.” SZ 248. In his Heraclitus seminar, he makes a curious remark about immortality: “immortality is no category, but rather an existentiale, a way that the gods relate themselves to their Being.” Martin Heidegger, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67*, trans. Charles H. Seibert (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 111. The notion of immortality is not appropriate to mortal, finite Dasein, but only to the gods. While Dasein who *exists* alone can *die*, the gods who *are* cannot die.

<sup>235</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 306.



being-guilty, and responsibility since there is no metaphysical ground or origin for Dasein's Being and its world. Therefore, Dasein is in no way *causa sui*.

However, Dreyfus might be wrong in arguing that due to Dasein's unsatisfactory structure, "there is something wrong with Dasein," and thereby "Dasein has no possibilities of its own and...it can never acquire any" in the face of anxiety.<sup>236</sup> It is *at* the end that Dasein may not have any possibility at all due to its mental or physical conditions, as Dreyfus holds. As seen above, this is exactly what Heidegger means by the ontical end, which signifies the mode of *Vorhandenheit's* Being-at-the-end. Death as the ontological end is not the end of the possibilities, but the very *possibility* of the end that cannot be superable and concluded even *at* its end. From the ontological perspective, Dasein is thrown *toward* its death that remains its own insuperable possibility. As Levinas points out, "what makes the possibility always remains possibility, even *at* the moment when it is exhausted, is death."<sup>237</sup> According to Heidegger's ontological viewpoint, what the insuperable possibility signifies is not an "unsatisfactory" or "wrong" fate of Dasein who has no possibility at all in anxiety; rather, it discloses the ontological finitude of Dasein's Being as Being-toward-death.

Fourthly, death is the "indefinite [*unbestimmte*] possibility" of Dasein. As long as Dasein is the there, it is always exposed to a "constant *threat* arising from its own there."<sup>238</sup> William Blattner claims that authentic Dasein must be "prepared for the attendant anxiety"<sup>239</sup> because

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<sup>236</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 306, 305, respectively. Taylor Carman criticizes Dreyfus's view of Dasein's Being for its "overly impoverished or pessimistic conception of authentic existence." Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 271. Later, Dreyfus accepts Carman's critique in saying that his own interpretation of Dasein's authentic structure as "a serious structural lack" would in a way suggest a "negative feature of Dasein's finitude only to those with a metaphysician's longing for absolute certainty." Dreyfus, "Foreword," xxiii.

<sup>237</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "L'existentialisme, l'angoisse et la mort in Heidegger," *Exercices de la Patience. Cahiers de Philosophie Paris*, 3-4 (1982), 27 (my translation and italics added).

<sup>238</sup> SZ, 265.

<sup>239</sup> William Blattner, "The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*," in *Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. I: Dasein, Authenticity, and Death*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (London: Routledge, 2002), 314.

“anxiety may strike at any time.”<sup>240</sup> For Dasein already thrown into the world, however, death is not a sudden or unexpected attack, for which Dasein can or cannot be ready. According to Heidegger, unlike “fear [*Furcht*]”<sup>241</sup> whose object is a definitive thing, the object of “anxiety [*Angst*]”<sup>242</sup> is not a thing that can be defined as a definite thing; it is the nothing [*Nichts*]. Due to this essential indetermination, Dasein feels “uncanny [*unheimlich*]” or “not-being-at-home [*Nicht-zuhause-sein*]”<sup>243</sup> and faces its own Being in the pure nothingness of its own existence; hence, the entire mundane or ontic world becomes meaningless and irrelevant to Dasein itself. Thus, Heidegger writes: “Ontologically, however, the world belongs essentially to Dasein’s Being as Being-in-the-world. So if what anxiety is about exposes the nothing—that is, the world as such—this means that *that about which anxiety is anxious is Being-in-the-world itself*.”<sup>244</sup> Nothing alone matters to Dasein in anxiety; it is the nothing of which Dasein makes sense since there is nothing to make sense of. Dasein might be able to be ready for fear, but not for anxiety since Dasein is anxious about nothing that cannot be determined as a *definite* thing—it is the no-thing that is not a thing at its own disposal. The successful preparation for anxiety then would lead to the reduction of ontological anxiety to ontic fear. In the haunting anxiety, Dasein confronts its own death as the

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<sup>240</sup> William Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 88.

<sup>241</sup> SZ, 185: “[W]hat we fear is always a detrimental innerworldly beings which comes from some definite region, which may remain absent.”

<sup>242</sup> SZ, 186: “What anxiety is about is not an innerworldly being. Thus, it is essentially incapable of having an involvement or explanation [*Bewandtnis*]...In anxiety, one does not encounter this or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement.” In this context, Levinas says that Dasein can encounter the determinate object of fear in the world as opposed to the object of anxiety, which is not definitive and “not in the interior of the world”; thus, anxiety reveals to Dasein the insignificance of innerworldly [*innerweltlich*] objects. Levinas then adds: “*Anxiety presents a way of Being in which the nonimportance, the insignificance, the nothingness of all innerworldly objects becomes accessible to Dasein.*” MHO, 427. Anxiety renders impossible the understanding of Dasein in terms of possibilities that relate to innerworldly objects; thus, it saves Dasein from its fallenness or dispersion into these objects. Anxiety thus brings Dasein back to the most authentic possibility of its existence as Being-in-the-world. Consequently, Levinas states: “Anxiety must constitute the situation in which Dasein is individualized in the unity of the totality of its ontological structures.” MHO, 428.

<sup>243</sup> SZ, 188.

<sup>244</sup> SZ, 187.

possibility of the impossibility of its existence, which thereby lets Dasein find its bare Being as the able-to-be to hold open to this indefinite possibility of death without making sense of it.

Lastly, death is the “certain [*gewisse*]” possibility of Dasein. Death is empirically—or ontically—a certain possibility since it will undoubtedly take place *at* some time, whereas it is ontologically a certain possibility in that “I” as Dasein can embrace it as my own authentic possibility so as to be “able to be” *toward* death. As Being-toward-death, I am always already ahead of myself, able-to-be what I am not yet: “in each case Dasein is *already* ahead of itself in its Being.”<sup>245</sup> The idle talk [*Gerede*] of the anonymous they prompts me to reduce the ontological certainty to the ontico-empirical one that everyone dies for sure, but not me and not this time. In this idle talk, death is no longer a matter of mineness, but only, Levinas says, of a “neutral public event,”<sup>246</sup> which pacifies me as if I were an exception to this event right now. Heidegger thus remarks: “The ‘they’ does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death.”<sup>247</sup> In this context, Taylor Carman’s interpretation of dying as “the constant closing down of possibilities”<sup>248</sup> rests on an ontic-empirical analysis. It might be true *ontically* that, as he notes, “To say that we are always dying is to say that our possibilities are constantly closing down around us.”<sup>249</sup> Ontologically understood, however, death is neither an empirical possibility that comes to an end when Dasein is dead, nor a vaporable possibility that becomes lesser and lesser in the course of dying. Rather, death remains the certain possibility as “the possibility of the measureless [*maßlosen*] impossibility of existence” that cannot be measured or calculated; Heidegger clearly argues, “In

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<sup>245</sup> SZ, 191. “[A]s long as any Dasein is, it too is already its ‘not-yet’.” SZ, 244.

<sup>246</sup> GDT, 48; DMT, 58. As Heidegger himself puts it: “The publicness of everyday being-with-one-another ‘knows’ death as a constantly occurring event, as a ‘case of death [*Todesfall*], be it a neighbor or a stranger” (SZ, 252-53). He goes on to say that “the ‘they’ provides a *constant tranquilization about death*. At bottom, however, this is a tranquilization not only for him who is ‘dying’ but just as much for those who ‘console’ him...[t]his tranquilization...forces Dasein away from its death.” SZ, 254-55.

<sup>247</sup> SZ, 254 (italics removed).

<sup>248</sup> Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic*, 285.

<sup>249</sup> Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic*, 282.

the anticipation of this possibility, it becomes ‘greater and greater’...Being-toward-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as possibility.”<sup>250</sup> Thus, the certain possibility has nothing to do with any certainty of an onto-empirical possibility, but only with the inescapable certainty of death, into which Dasein is simply thrown.

What Dasein’s Being-toward-death ultimately means is the ontological-existential finitude of Being. Whereas the Husserlian Ego is a conscious subject that is the self-sufficient source of *Sinngebung*, the Heideggerian Dasein does not take “the place of the term ‘consciousness’” in the first place; rather, it names “that which is *first of all* to be experienced, and *subsequently thought accordingly* [dann entsprechend gedacht], as a place—namely, as the locality of the truth of Being.”<sup>251</sup> Heidegger thus rejects the traditional conception of truth as an adequation between our judgment of a thing and the judged thing or a correlation between noema and noesis since it is not fundamental enough. Instead, he argues that truth [*aletheia*] is a matter of revealing, letting-be, opening-up, or unconcealing what shows itself as a phenomenon, which renders any adequation or correlation possible. Levinas also appreciates that Heidegger recognizes “for the first time” that the finitude of human existence can be the “foundation of the concept of the subject” in an ontological sense and that “*consciousness* itself would be possible”<sup>252</sup> only on the basis of this

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<sup>250</sup> SZ, 262.

<sup>251</sup> PA, 283; WE, 202 (italics added). Heidegger does not accept Husserl’s transcendental presupposition that designates the transcendental Ego as the locus of all meaning and validity that: “the point of departure from an initially given ego and subject totally fails to see the phenomenal content of Dasein.” SZ, 46. Heidegger warns us not to read *Being and Time* on the basis of the Cartesian-Husserlian tradition: “Any attempt, therefore, to rethink *Being and Time* is thwarted as long as one is satisfied with the observation that, in this study, the term ‘being there’ is used in place of ‘consciousness’.” Martin Heidegger, “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 271.

<sup>252</sup> MHO, 408.

finite existence. Consequently, Dasein—as soon as it is thrown there—is already always toward its end [*Ende*], that is, death, from which it cannot escape; “it exists *finitely* [*endlich*].”<sup>253</sup>

### 3. The Hither Side of Heidegger’s Thanatology

For Heidegger, as seen so far, death is the most authentic, non-relational, insuperable, certain, and indefinite possibility of Dasein. The primary purpose of his thematization of death as the possibility of the impossibility is to describe the ontological-existential-authentic structure of Dasein’s Being in terms of its ecstatic temporality. Ontologically, Dasein’s death is always a matter of possibility rather than of actuality; otherwise, the ontological analysis of Being-toward-death is reduced to an ontic interpretation of Being-at-the-end as perishing or demising. Nevertheless, it might be true, as Dreyfus points out, that Heidegger’s distinction between the ontic and the ontological, the authentic and the inauthentic, or demise and death is not always clear enough and thus that a variety of misleading interpretations of Heidegger’s thanatology, to a certain extent, might be somewhat understandable.<sup>254</sup> Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death is so delicate and sophisticated that it might resist becoming a *text* to be interpreted; by betraying the hermeneutical principle, it seems not to be *the* text that does not permit any further interpretation. However, just as Heidegger himself says that “The dialogue with Parmenides never comes to an end...because what is said there continually deserves more thought,”<sup>255</sup> Levinas would say that it is necessary to reinterpret Heidegger’s interpretation of death again and again. For Heidegger, there

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<sup>253</sup> SZ, 329. According to Levinas, Heidegger recognizes “for the first time” that the finitude of human existence can be the “foundation of the concept of the subject” in an ontological sense and that “*consciousness* itself would be possible” only on the basis of this finite existence. MHO, 408.

<sup>254</sup> Dreyfus, “Foreword,” xvii-xviii. Iain Thomson even presents a careful analysis of a “necessarily overlap and interpenetrate” (278) relationship between ontic demise and ontological death found in *Being and Time*. Iain Thomson, “Death and Demise in *Being and Time*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 260-90.

<sup>255</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 100-101.

is no Parmenides in himself, that is, *the* Parmenides that no longer requires interpretation; likewise, there would be no Heidegger in himself, *the* Heidegger in which no further interpretation would be possible. Despite the Heidegger whose ontological view of Being culminates in the existential analysis of death, Levinas wants to become more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself when he betrays the Heidegger by means of taking death as a question *par excellence* that calls into question the *Seinsfrage* rather than as a theme to be intelligible in the *Seinsfrage*.

Levinas's radical question is quite simple: whether an ontological grasp of death, essentially entangled in the interplay of Being and nothingness, can exhaust the meaning of death itself. Ontologically understood, the death of others is subordinated to the ontical moment that covers up the ontological mineness of Dasein itself; thus, it is only a matter of the idle talk, which keeps saying that "death of others is not my business." Is not Heidegger's conception of anxiety already a form of indifference to the death of others? More directly and graphically speaking, does the anxiety of dying trump the fear of killing? In my silent indifference or modest tolerance that makes me endure, authorize, or even reinforce the killing of others, I become an accomplice in murder, slaughter, massacre, genocide, and the Holocaust. This is why Levinas cites Pascal's aphorism in the epigraph appeared in *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*: "'That is my place in the sun.' Here is the beginning...of the usurpation of the whole world."<sup>256</sup> Likewise, does not the *Da* of my Dasein refer to my taking the place of others? As will be seen in the following chapters, Levinas recognizes in the death of others the ethical moment, which has been suppressed by the ontological analysis of Dasein's death.

In Heidegger's ontological account of death, Dasein's relationality radically shifts from all the relations with others to its own relation with itself. In the face of death as the most authentic

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<sup>256</sup> OBBE, vii; AEAE, vi (translation modified). This quotation is originally from Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1995), § 64 (295).

possibility of the impossibility, Dasein has no relation other than its own relation to itself since Dasein by and for itself undertakes its own death in isolation. In the anticipation, Dasein confronts its solitary finitude by turning even its own impossibility of existence into its authentic possibility, which constitutes the temporal structure of its ontological conditions. Dasein, in its authentic solitude, can stand upright in front of the possibility of the impossibility and “choose its hero” who obtains the complete mastery of itself in its “anticipatory resoluteness.”<sup>257</sup> Ironically, the heroic Dasein understands the utter impossibility as its authentic possibility *par excellence*, so that death is transparently comprehended and, in doing so, inevitably becomes a “flat” phenomenon. Although, as mentioned above, Marion speaks of the *depth* of the Heideggerian phenomenon in contrast to the flatness of Husserlian phenomenon, this dissertation will show that a deep or *unfathomable* dimension of death is lost in the heroic capacity or power [*pouvoir*] of Dasein’s transparent understanding [*Verstehen*] of death, into which an ethical meaning of the Other’s death is crucially subordinated or reduced.

One can notice here a doxical aspect of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death, as seen in the case of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. Against a disdainful account of *doxa* as something merely “imaginary,” “subjective,” and so “false” in opposition to *Sein* as the locus of *aletheia*, Heidegger expounds how *doxa* is fundamentally entangled with the *Sein* when he translates the Greek word *δόξα* as *Schein* [seeming, appearing, or shining], which has multiple meanings: glory, semblance, opinion, and so on.<sup>258</sup> He focuses on a constitutive role of *doxa* in the process of *aletheia*; thus, the multifold meaning of *doxa* can retain “the essential traits of Being in the word.”<sup>259</sup> He goes on at last to claim, “Seeming, *doxa*, is not something external to Being and

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<sup>257</sup> SZ, 385.

<sup>258</sup> IM, 107-10. For an account of the ambiguous meaning of *doxa*, see Marin Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 190-91.

<sup>259</sup> IM, 110.

unconcealment but instead belongs to unconcealment.”<sup>260</sup> In this context, death is understood as a *doxical* phenomenon to appear [*scheinen*] to Dasein as the most authentic possibility in its totality. It is in and through the doxical characteristic of the ontological understanding of death that Dasein interprets, grasps, and comprehends its own utter impossibility as the most authentic possibility in which the doxical-ontological meaning of death is unconcealed.

In the place where Heidegger would say that “the anticipation of [its] own death renders Dasein transparent to [it]self,” Jacques Taminiaux notes that Levinas instead detects one of the “signs of a breach of [the] totality.”<sup>261</sup> This dissertation claims that a Levinasian question paralyzes the transparent heroism of the doxical-ontological thematization of death and prompts the heroic and solitary Dasein to a more primordial—if not authentic—dimension of death, that is, the vulnerable receptivity or passivity of the unfathomable death. Levinas takes death to be the question that fundamentally disrupts the heroic, seamless, and architectonic regime of the self-enclosed solitude of Dasein; it marks “the end of the subject’s virility and heroism.”<sup>262</sup> In the solitary heroism of Dasein’s self-understanding of death, which reduces the mystery of death into the mastery of death, according to Levinas, an ethical meaning of the Other’s death inevitably disappears over the ontological horizon; it is ontologically secondary and even meaningless. In this context, the lonely and heroic Dasein becomes merely another name for the transcendental Ego. Levinas keeps a suspicious eye on the Western philosophical tradition in order to preserve an ethical meaning of the death of the Other from ontological meaninglessness: the retrieval of the

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<sup>260</sup> IM, 205. In his etymological account of a phenomenon, Heidegger asserts that it is important to understand that the two meanings of a phenomenon as “that which shows itself [*Sichzeigende*]” and as “semblance [*Schein*]” are “structurally interconnected.” SZ, 28-29.

<sup>261</sup> Jacques Taminiaux, “The Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*,” in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Joëlle Hansel (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 21-22. See Heidegger’s own remarks: “When one has an understanding Being-toward-death—toward death as one’s *most authentic possibility*—one’s able-to-be becomes authentic and totally transparent.” SZ, 307.

<sup>262</sup> TO, 72; AT, 59.



exigent priority of the death of the other from the authenticity of the mineness of Dasein's death. As he puts it, "prior to the plane of ontology, the ethical plane preexists."<sup>263</sup> For Levinas, therefore, the priority of the death of the Other over Dasein's death discloses how traditional philosophy in the West has largely reduced the Other, alterity, transcendence, infinity, and ethics into the Same, identity, immanence, totality, and ontology.<sup>264</sup>

When Levinas announces in *Totality and Infinity*, "The face of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy"<sup>265</sup> as well as "Western philosophy has most often [*le plus souvent*] been an ontology,"<sup>266</sup> he never distracts his attention from the unremitting suspicion of Western philosophy, despite the risk of any exaggeration of his critique of totality and ontology. In the entire history of Western philosophy, for Levinas, the Other has never taken its own, proper, or authentic place because its alterity is always subordinated to the sameness of the Same by means of mediation of a "third or middle term [*troisième terme*],"<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> TI, 201; TeI, 175 (translation modified).

<sup>264</sup> Richard A. Cohen points out: "[Levinas] opposes the primacy which philosophy quite naturally accords to ontological and epistemological interests, the hegemony to which it raises the quest for truth." Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 121. In opposition to Cohen who might exaggerate or oversimplify Levinas's polemic against Western philosophy, Eisenstadt insists that Levinas himself is well aware that "the West is, in actuality, *not* a will to ontological truth," and then traces "the otherwise than being" in the long tradition of the West, such as the biblical sources, the rabbinic texts, Plato, Descartes, and so on; thus, she contends that "[Levinas] does not even criticize all forms of totality and ontology." Eisenstadt, *Driven Back to the Text*, 7, 335, n. 9. Her claim is quite right especially when it comes to *Otherwise than Being*, in which Levinas scrupulously struggles with ontology—rather than simply refutes it—in order to find a certain form of ethical language within or through ontological language. Nevertheless, it is also oversimplifying and erroneous to say that Levinas follows the traditional way of ontology in which the ethical meaning of the alterity of the Other has been largely neglected and marginalized. In this sense, Robert Bernasconi, whom Eisenstadt also follows, impartially, if not verifiably, states, "Levinas is at his weakest when he sets himself up against individual philosophers or philosophy in general [and] at his most penetrating when he finds the otherwise than being within philosophy." Robert Bernasconi, "Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, eds. by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 152.

<sup>265</sup> TI, 21; TeI, x (translation slightly modified).

<sup>266</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 13.

<sup>267</sup> TI, 42; TeI, 12. Levinas here argues that Being as the middle term is the "light" or horizon in which beings not only appear and present themselves as they understand their own Being, but also become comprehensible and intelligible as they are interpreted according to its own Being; thus, in and through this light, "the shock of the encounter of the Same with the Other is deadened." In his early work, Levinas metaphorically explains this point as follows: "[I]n the world, the other is an object already through his clothing....He washed out, wiped away from the night and the traces of in tis instinctual permanence from his face; he is clean and abstract," DEE, 53; EE, 31. By means of its garment as the light, the nudity of the face of the Other is covered up by and disappears into the

such as Form (Eidos), Idea, Being, Concept, Spirit, Logos, Light, and so forth—all of which neutralize the alterity of the Other into the identity of the Same in the totalizing system for the sake of shaping a solid, harmonious, and so heroic architecture, like Heidegger’s *thanato-logy* meticulously articulated in *Being and Time*. By contrast, Levinas ceaselessly argues that no third or intermediary term can necessarily nullify the essential distance between the Other and the Same by smothering the shock of the vulnerable alterity with the spontaneous identity. The primary purpose of this dissertation is not simply to verify or refute Levinas’s critique of traditional philosophy, but, rather, to discover what he intends to achieve through his very critique with a focus on the theme of death.

Levinas’s critical stance on the ontological understanding of death becomes more obvious throughout his philosophical texts. In order not to miss what Levinas really intends to describe about death, one must pay careful attention to the reason why he attacks ontology and to how he thematically differentiates himself from the ontological approach to the theme of death. The fact that Levinas’s idea of death is deeply rooted in his critical stance on ontology shows that the theme of death in his ethical thought is formulated against the background of Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death. The thematic challenge of this dissertation hinges upon the sense in which Heidegger repeats the doxical *naïveté* of Husserlian phenomenology in terms of the ontological thematization of death, *i.e.*, *thanato-logy*, which screens off an ethical meaning of death, and, consequently, exposes an ethical exigency of the Levinasian question on the hither side of the Heideggerian *Seinsfrage*. For Levinas, Dasein’s positing its own question to itself, that is, the

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illumination of the light. Levinas goes on to say that “due to the light, an object, while coming from the outside, is already ours in the horizon which precedes it; it comes from the outside already apprehended and comes into being as if it came from us, as if it were commanded by our freedom” DEE, 66-67; EE, 41 (translation modified). Ironically, the illumination of the light is a clothing or “enveloping” rather than a revealing or unveiling of the nudity of the Other. For a more detailed analysis of the light, see DEE, 63-70; EE, 38-44.

*Seinsfrage*, “would never be possible unless the relationship with the Other and the question mark of his face had come about.”<sup>268</sup> But this does not mean that Levinas’s ethical interpretation of death wholly rejects the ontological understanding of death and simply leaves it behind. When Levinas challenges Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death, as will be seen in the next chapter, his aim is not to merely dismiss it but to disclose its hither side, from which an ethical meaning of death emerges. For Levinas, “to be or not to be” is not the proper question to be asked in the first place. He recognizes the more primordial question inscribed in the face of the Other who commands: “Thou shalt not kill!” This interdiction is the question proper that has been suppressed by the doxical-ontological comprehension of death; nevertheless, it ceaselessly arises on the hither side of the ontological question.

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<sup>268</sup> GDT, 114; DMT, 130.

## Chapter III

### Zero: The *An-archic Arche* of Levinas's Phenomenology of Death

The first two chapters have considered Husserl's transcendental method of phenomenology and Heidegger's ontological thematization of death, which provide the methodological and thematical backgrounds for this dissertation: Levinas's phenomenology of death. Given that Husserl's phenomenological method of the *Rückfrage* is to inquire [*fragen*] into the way back [*zurück*] to the ultimate source of the *Sinngebung* (Chapter One) and Heidegger's ontological thematization of death starting from retrieving the *Seinsfrage* uncovers Dasein's transparent understanding of its own death as the possibility of the impossibility (Chapter Two), Levinas's early phenomenology of death already reveals the limits of both Husserlian phenomenology and the Heideggerian analysis of death. Nevertheless, these limits do not lead Levinas to leave them behind but offer him the starting point for "what to look for" and "how to look at." This does not mean that Levinas looks at the same thing in the same way as they do; rather, he looks at "elsewhere" in an *other* way that their questions largely overlook. Levinas's term "the hither side [*en deçà*]" describes this elsewhere when he takes his equivocal stance towards Husserl and Heidegger; namely, Levinas's own question departs *with* and *from* both the Husserlian *Rückfrage* and the Heideggerian *Seinsfrage*. Although Levinas's engagement with Husserl and Heidegger turns out to be the basis of his sharp departure from their thoughts and thereby the launch of his own articulation of ethics as first philosophy, Levinas never forgets his points of departure which ceaselessly haunt throughout the gradual evolution of his philosophy.

This chapter explores how Levinas begins to formulate his own phenomenological method by means of examining his peculiar concept of "there is [*il y a*]" as opposed to the Heideggerian

“It gives [*Es gibt*]” which leads him to pay attention to the theme of death. Indeed, Heidegger’s early view on the *Es gibt* suggested in *Being and Time* (1927) much inspires Levinas’s early elaboration of the *il y a*. As Derrida rightly points out in his critical reading of Levinas, in order to recognize the peculiar notion of the *il y a* developed in Levinas’s early texts—such as *Existence and Existents* (1947) and *Time and the Other* (1947)—it is important to attend to its “systematic confrontation with Heidegger’s allusions to the ‘*es gibt*’ (*Being and Time*, *Letter on Humanism*).”<sup>269</sup> Unfortunately, Derrida does not delve deeper into this significant confrontation but simply mentions it in passing. One of the tasks of this chapter is to elucidate Derrida’s intimation. In doing so, this chapter claims that Levinas’s initial critique of the *Es gibt* already disrupts, suspends, or overturns Heidegger’s mature idea of it, as fully articulated in *On Time and Being* (1962-64), before this later work was even published—as if the early Levinas would already anticipate the appearance of the later Heidegger, as if he would not endorse the so-called *Kehre* in Heidegger’s philosophical evolution. Accordingly, Levinas’s early critique of the *Es gibt* in favor of the *il y a* discloses in what sense Heidegger, despite the *Kehre*, remains consistent in his thinking of Being and, on that account, why the later Heidegger remains of little interest to Levinas. Although the concept of the *il y a* emerges, albeit not exclusively, from the inchoate background of the *Es gibt* in *Being and Time*, its philosophical seriousness and consequence become clearer and more distinct in the context of Heidegger’s later works—*On Time and Being*, in particular—where the *Es gibt* takes the full-fledged shape. In order to make clear the philosophical contexts from which Levinas’s early conception of the *il y a* comes, the first section of this chapter considers how the later Heidegger develops the concept of the *Es gibt* in various ways.

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<sup>269</sup> WD, 90; ED, 133.

The second section discusses the dawn of Levinas's question, which aims to unveil the most brutal and naked facet of *être*, that is, existence without existents or the *il y a*, by which Levinas interrogates and, more properly, radicalizes Heidegger's *Seinsfrage*. Levinas's early critique of Heidegger does not result from his refutation of Heidegger's ontology to invent another ontology for the sake of investigating the meaning, truth, happening, or thinking of Being, but from his rigorous endeavor to reveal what precedes the Being to be thought or the thinking of Being [*Seinsdenken*]. This chapter brings the early Levinas face to face with the later Heidegger—although Levinas himself does not do so in an explicit or systematic way—in order to lay bare the brutal nakedness of *être*, *i.e.*, the *an-archic il y a* prior to *Sein* and even to the *Es gibt*. In doing so, Levinas's early formulation of the *il y a* discloses that Heidegger himself remains not Heideggerian enough whether or not there is any *Kehre* in his philosophy. Therefore, the peculiarity of Levinas's radical question does not consist in his successful, justified, or legitimate criticism of Heidegger to simply dismiss ontology, but in the fact that he becomes even more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself by means of exposing the hither side of ontology that the *Seinsfrage* fails to tackle. The central purpose of this chapter is to take account of Levinas's early view of the *an-archic il y a* against the backdrop of Heidegger's later consideration of the *Es gibt* which lays the groundwork of his ethical consideration of death in his mature works.

### **1. *Kehre* Matters?**

As seen in Chapter Two, Levinas's critical reading of Heidegger largely rests on the fundamental ontology presented in *Being and Time* with no special attention to the later texts, as if the ingenious and architectonic import of *Being and Time* could represent Heidegger's entire thought—namely, as if there would be no turn, change, reversal, or what is called *das Kehre* in his

philosophy. In a retrospective interview in 1981, Levinas admits that his appreciation of Heidegger comes from “above all an admiration for *Sein und Zeit*,” which awakens the “verbality” of the term Being while disregarding the later works “much less convincing.”<sup>270</sup> Levinas’s almost exclusive interest in *Being and Time* is more problematic since the *magnum opus* remains incomplete; indeed, only a small portion of Heidegger’s bold project planned in the work is officially published under the title of *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>271</sup> With regard to Levinas’s polemic against Heidegger, some crucial questions follow here: Can his critical view of Heidegger be justified in light of the later Heidegger?; Why and in what sense does he complain about the later work of Heidegger?; Is it possible to say that there is *the* Heidegger at all? All these questions lead Levinas to face the conundrum that his critique of Heidegger may not sound convincing precisely because of his neglect of the later Heidegger.<sup>272</sup> The eventual question thus arises: Why does the later Heidegger not matter to Levinas? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to revisit a much-discussed issue: the so-called *Kehre* in Heidegger’s philosophy.

In the *Résumé*, prepared to be sent to Heidegger for his comments, William J. Richardson traces a certain *Kehre* in Heidegger’s philosophy—it is the “reversal” that distinguishes the earlier and later thought of Heidegger that Richardson names “Heidegger I” and “Heidegger II,”

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<sup>270</sup> EI, 37, 41; EeI, 28, 32 (respectively).

<sup>271</sup> In the Introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger announces its outline; the complete work is to consist of two Parts, each of which has three Divisions, but only the first two Divisions of the first Part were published under the title of *Being and Time* (SZ, 40-1). The third Division “Time and Being” is omitted along with the entire Part Two. Almost thirty-five years later, Heidegger delivers a lecture of “Time and Being.” I will deal with this matter below. For discussions on the missing Division III, see a collection edited by Lee Braver, *Division III of Heidegger’s Being and Time: The Unanswered Question of Being* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015).

<sup>272</sup> John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson point out, in Levinas’s critique of Heidegger, one of “invariant features” that Levinas “limits his critical commentary on Heidegger to *Being and Time* with a few exceptions”; then, they go on to argue that his hesitation to read the later works of Heidegger probably “truncates Levinas’s claims about Heidegger” and thus causes “a certain polemical intensity to Levinas’s work.” John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson, “Introduction,” in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, eds. John E. Drabinski & Eric S. Nelson (Albany: State University of New York, 2014), 3-4. This volume contains essays that attempt to reinterpret Levinas’s critique of Heidegger in light of the later Heidegger and then to find some unexpected affinities, similarities, or parallels between the two thinkers that Levinas himself might fail to see (see especially chapters Two, Three, Five, Seven, Eight, and Eleven).

respectively.<sup>273</sup> In his complete published work entitled *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*,<sup>274</sup> Richardson further elaborates on the distinction between the two Heideggers by arguing the “reversal” of Heidegger’s focal point from Dasein-centeredness in the Heidegger I to Being-centeredness in the II: the *Kehre* from thinking of Being on the basis of Dasein to thinking of Dasein on the basis of Being.<sup>275</sup> Following Richardson’s view on the *Kehre*, Frederic A. Olafson states that the significant turning in Heidegger’s thought took place during 1930s: “a Heidegger I who preceded this ‘turning’ and a Heidegger II who followed it.”<sup>276</sup> Theodore Kisiel also points out that the genuine meaning of the *Kehre* is that “Heidegger returns to earlier insights left unpursued” in order to envision the full “Story” of *Being and Time*.<sup>277</sup> By contrast, Thomas Sheehan argues that the *Kehre* is not a matter of content but of method; thus, he describes it not as the shift in the central theme from the fundamental ontology of Dasein to the history of Being, but as the shift in the methodic treatment of the very theme: “the process from a transcendental-horizonal to a *seinsgeschichtlich* approach.”<sup>278</sup> In a similar vein, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann

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<sup>273</sup> The *Résumé* is first published in German in 1965 and then translated into English and published as William J. Richardson, “Heidegger’s Way through Phenomenology to the Thinking of Being,” in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (London: Routledge, 2017), 79-94.

<sup>274</sup> William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963). For a discussion on the reversal which makes a distinction between Heidegger I and II, see especially 209-97.

<sup>275</sup> In the interpretation of “On the Essence of Truth,” Richardson argues that “WW [*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*] is the breakthrough. Here (1930), Heidegger II emerges out of Heidegger I....The shift of focus from There-Being [Dasein] to Being is more than a change in terminology; it is a genuine transformation of thought.” Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 243. He goes on to say that “the difference: only one of focus. In SZ, it fell on There-being; now it falls on Being” (247). See also Eric S. Nelson “Heidegger, Levinas, and the Other of History,” in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, 60.

<sup>276</sup> Frederic A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 153. Adopting Olafson’s view of the *Kehre*, Blattner describes it as “a rejection of his early ontological idealism” in order to take “a quasi-mystical stance toward the obtaining being.” And this rejection characterizes the “transition from the early to the later Heideggerian philosophies of being.” Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*, 290-91.

<sup>277</sup> He immediately adds: “The Story should therefore conclude—at this stage it will not, for practical reasons—by going beyond BT in order to assume a larger perspective upon the decade that preceded BT, to assess its significance for Heidegger’s entire thought, to determine whether, for example, it already contains *in ovo* everything essential that came to light in the later Heidegger’s thought.” Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>278</sup> Thomas Sheehan, “The Turn,” in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 90.



notes that through “the event-historical turn [*die Ereignisgeschichtlichen Kehre*],” Heidegger enters his second path which differs from the first in *Being and Time*; thus, the *Kehre* refers to “the transformed perspective [*die gewandelte Blickstellung*]” from transcendental questioning to the event-historical questioning.<sup>279</sup> As far as Heidegger’s *Kehre* is concerned, consequently, Richardson’s work inaugurates the classical paradigm in the Heideggerian scholarship in the sense that his characterization of the *Kehre* as a decisive transformation, which divides Heidegger’s thought into the Heidegger I and the II, is generally accepted among most Heideggerian commentators.<sup>280</sup>

However, Sheehan goes on to contend that the Heideggerian scholarship is now “on the verge of a paradigm shift,”<sup>281</sup> due to the publications of *Beitäge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (published in 1989) and its English translation *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (published in 1999), neither of which Richardson could refer to at the time (1963).<sup>282</sup> The appearance of these texts requires a shift of the old paradigm, which has long missed exactly what Heidegger means by the *Kehre*. Now, according to Sheehan, what is at issue regarding the *Kehre* is no longer a matter of content or method, but rather of an actual meaning of the *Kehre* in Heidegger’s thought, which is typically and yet cryptically presented in *Contributions to*

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<sup>279</sup> Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, “„Sein und Zeit“ im Licht von Heideggers „Laufenden Anmerkungen“ Von „Sein und Zeit“ zu „Zeit und Sein“,” *Heidegger Studies* 35 (2019), 78 (my translation).

<sup>280</sup> Among many others, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger’s Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), viii, 10-2, 39, 117; Parvis Emad, “‘Heidegger I,’ ‘Heidegger II,’ and *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*,” in *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.*, ed. Babette E. Babich (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 129-46; Lee Braver, *Heidegger’s Later Writings: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 1-4; Julian Young, “Was There a ‘Turn’ in Heidegger’s Thought?” in *Division III of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 329-48.

<sup>281</sup> Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” *Continental Philosophical Review* 34 (2001), 183.

<sup>282</sup> Martine Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989). It is written in 1936-38 and first published in German in 1989. It is first translated into English by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly in 1999. A new translation appears in 2012 as *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012). I will refer to the German text along with the two English translations.

*Philosophy*. This does not mean that Sheehan rejects the classical interpretations of the *Kehre*; instead, he attempts to dig further into the genuine sense of the *Kehre* or what he calls “Kehre-1” while stamping the classical view as “Kehre-2.”<sup>283</sup> In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger is no longer satisfied with the term *Sein* elaborated in *Being and Time* since it is contaminated by metaphysical language. This is why he gives up writing the Division III of Part One of *Being and Time*: “The division in question was held back because everything failed in the adequate saying of this *Kehre* and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics.”<sup>284</sup> The analytic-metaphysical language, in which *Being and Time* is involved, is not appropriate to articulate a pre-metaphysical, poetic, contemplative, or *meditative* thinking of Being. Heidegger thus demands a sort of a paradigm shift to find a way out of a metaphysical thinking and to seek a new beginning for the path of a meditative thinking: “Here everything is reversed.”<sup>285</sup>

### **1-1. Ontological Coverings: *Seyn*, *Ereignis*, *Unterschied*, and *Austrag***

With a close reference to *Contributions to Philosophy*, Sheehan reconsiders exactly what Heidegger himself means by the *Kehre*, called the Kehre-1, in terms of *Ereignis* and *Seyn*. To Sheehan, the basic problem concerning the term *Kehre* is not a matter of interpretation but of translation in the first place; namely, Sheehan translates it as a “reciprocity” rather than interprets it as a turn, shift, or reversal. The central theme that Heidegger never changes, shifts, or reverses, Sheehan argues, is the very *Kehre*, that is, a reciprocal relation, bond, or link between *Dasein* and Being. It is the internal “‘reciprocity’ [*Gegenschwung*] of *Dasein*’s need of *Sein* and *Sein*’s need of *Dasein*” or “‘oscillation’ [*Erzittern*] between *Dasein*’s thrownness into and its sustaining of

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<sup>283</sup> Sheehan, “The Turn,” 87-94. To the *Kehre*-list, he adds “Kehre-3” that refers to “the *existentiell* transformation of human beings and their worlds of meaning” (94).

<sup>284</sup> BW, 231.

<sup>285</sup> BW, 231.

*Sein*”<sup>286</sup> that is already presented—albeit without any reference to the proper noun of the *Kehre*—in *Being and Time*. Following Sheehan’s view of Kehre-1, Richard Polt points out that the *Kehre* does not mean a “stage in Heidegger’s own development,” but the reciprocal turn in which Dasein and Being gain “the proper rapport that lets them flourish.”<sup>287</sup> Rather than to the transformation of Heidegger’s thought that happened during his academic journey in terms of either content or method (Kehre-2), the *Kehre* refers above all to his ongoing interest in the vital, dynamic, and turning relationship (Kehre-1) between Dasein and *Sein* in the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*], as Heidegger himself says: “*Die um Ereignis wesende Kehre.*”<sup>288</sup> The *Kehre* as the inner movement of the *Ereignis* does not designate any metaphysical, static notion to analyze the formal structure of the relation between Dasein and Being; rather, it is a relating relation, stripped of all causal or ontotheological overtones, between Dasein and Being as appropriated to each other. The later Heidegger struggles to disclose that the reciprocal, turning, or relating relation [*die Kehre*] is itself more fundamental than what is related, *i.e.*, Dasein and Being.

### ***Sein and Ereignis***

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<sup>286</sup> Sheehan, “The Turn,” 81.

<sup>287</sup> Richard Polt, *The Emergence of Being: On Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 44, 111, respectively. See also Joan Stambaugh, “Introduction,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii-xi; Laurence Paul Hemming, “Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6 (1998), 393-423.

<sup>288</sup> BP, 407. I cite the German phrase without translating it since it consists of heavy-loaded terms—as if the entire work of *Contributions to Philosophy* would be dedicated to elucidating it repeatedly. This poetic expression might be translated in a quite prosaic manner as “The dynamic inter-relationship between Dasein and Being that essentially presents in the event of appropriation.” Sheehan partly translates it as “The *Kehre* operative in the *Ereignis*.” In addition, the new English version translates it as “The turning which essentially occurs in the event” while the old one as “The turning that holds sway in enowning.” All options indeed remain unsatisfactory to convey the implication of the original German. I will not be committed to the translation issue, which does not affect the purpose of this chapter; basically, what is at stake here is not a matter of the translation of Heidegger’s texts, but of the interpretation of what he intends to say through the texts.

In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger employs an old-fashioned term for *Sein*—it is “*das Seyn*”<sup>289</sup> that refers to the happening [*Geschehen*] of the *Kehre* in the *Ereignis* in which *Sein* primordially emerges. The *Seyn* as the happening of the *Kehre* is not determined by Dasein’s understanding of *Sein*; rather, the *Seyn* essentially presents [*west*] as the event of appropriation, which grounds the there [*Da*] where Dasein understands its own Being as Being-in-the-world and projects its most authentic possibility as Being-toward-death, as Heidegger states: “*Seyn west als das Ereignis des Dagründung.*”<sup>290</sup> In *Contributions to Philosophy*, thus, Heidegger goes into a more fundamental dimension in which the fundamental ontology elaborated in the published part of *Being and Time* is grounded; now Heidegger conceives of what brings about Dasein’s *Sein* in terms of “this reciprocity of needing and belonging [that] constitutes *Seyn* as *Ereignis.*”<sup>291</sup> Therefore, the original or primordial *Seyn* lets *Sein* manifest itself as meaningful in the event of appropriation; the *Seyn* in the *Ereignis* is “the meaning-giving source of the meaning of the meaningful”<sup>292</sup> in such a way that *Sein* lets Dasein reveal itself to be meaningful.

Provided that *Seyn* in the *Kehre* is a more fundamental thing [*die Sache selbst*] to be thought than *Sein*, Sheehan concludes that Heidegger’s main theme is neither Dasein nor even *Sein* itself, but “what brings about being [*Sein*], namely, *Ereignis*—the opening of a clearing in which entities can appear as this or that.”<sup>293</sup> Against this strong claim, Richard Capobianco also makes an argument in an opposite way. According to Capobianco, *Seyn* in the *Ereignis* is “(only) another

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<sup>289</sup> I will leave it untranslated in order to compare and contrast between *Sein* in the Heidegger I and *Seyn* in the II.

<sup>290</sup> BP, 247. Heidegger even mentions: “*Das Seyn ist das Er-eignis*” (470). There are numerous references relevant to this formulation (see BP, 30, 41, 58, 116, 256).

<sup>291</sup> BP, 251 (italics removed).

<sup>292</sup> Sheehan, “The Turn,” 86.

<sup>293</sup> Thomas Sheehan, “*Kerhre* and *Ereignis*: A Prolegomenon to *Introduction to Metaphysics*,” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s “Introduction to Metaphysics,”* eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

name for Being [*Sein*] itself,”<sup>294</sup> as long as it is properly understood as one of the names that refers to the fundamental thing to be thought. On the way to finding the fundamental path of Heidegger’s thought, Sheehan and Capobianco take different approaches. On the one hand, Sheehan penetrates deep into *Seyn* that primordially grounds *Sein*; thus, *Seyn* and *Sein* might appear to be situated in the different “grounding-layers” for thought. On the other hand, Capobianco encounters *Sein* again since there would be no such different layers but merely different names for *Sein*, such as *Ereignis*, *Kehre*, and *Seyn*, insofar as they ultimately refer to *die Sache selbst* to be thought.

### ***Unterschied and Austrag***

Whatever the case may be, however, the consideration of the *Kehre* with regard to the turning relationship between Dasein and Being readily falls prey to metaphysical language in that the “reciprocal” relation might convey an ontic relation that works between two different things at the same level. The ontological difference [*Die ontologisch Differenz*] between Being and a being here is not helpful to identify the distinctive feature of the turning relation because it signifies that Being is—although it is not a being—only in and through a being; it still considers Being in terms of a being. In *Identity and Difference* (1956-7), then, Heidegger claims that what has been forgotten in the history of metaphysics is not merely the ontological difference itself but the primal “origin [*Herkunft*]” or “essence [*Wesen*]”<sup>295</sup> which opens up and holds fast the very difference between Being and beings. It is the “differentiation [*Unterschied*]” that underlies the *Differenz*. The oblivion of Being stems from the forgetfulness of the “differentiation alone [that] grants and holds apart”<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>295</sup> ID, 71; 140, 72; 141, respectively.

<sup>296</sup> ID, 65; 132. The twofold character of the differentiation constitutes a circle of the coming-over and the coming-in, “the circling of Being and beings around each other” ID, 69; 138. For a discussion on the differentiation, see John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 147-84. According to Caputo, what is oblivious in Aquinas’s thought is not the difference between Being

the ontological difference in such a way that Being comes over [*überkommt*] beings and beings come in [*ankommt*] the Being. One of the main purposes of *Identity and Difference* is to show that “the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics has its essential origin in the perdurance [*Austrag*].”<sup>297</sup> Therefore, it is the differentiation in the perdurance [*Unterschied im Austrag*] that engenders historically [*geschichtlich*] the various ways of the coming of Being over beings [*Überkommnis*] and the coming of beings in Being [*Ankunft*].

In the historical perdurance where the turning relationship between Being and beings appears as the interplay between the coming-over (concealing in unconcealment) and the coming-in (unconcealing in concealment), Being gains different names in the history of Being according to the mode of the givenness of Being. “It gives/There is Being [*Es gibt Sein*] only in this or that particular destined [*geschicklichen*] character: Physis, Logos, Hen, Idea, Energeia, Substantiality, Objectivity, Subjectivity, the Will, the Will to Power, [and] the Will to Will.”<sup>298</sup> What *is* then the “It [*Es*]” that gives Being? *Is* “the It” the differentiation in the perdurance that sustains the ontological difference? At the end of the text, however, Heidegger points out the essential difficulty regarding a “what-*is*” question that Western languages cannot elude since they are more or less marked by ontotheological metaphysics. The question of “What *is* the *Es*—whatever it *is*—of the *Es gibt Sein*?” is already assaulted with the metaphysical language in the sense that “the little word ‘is,’ which speaks everywhere in our language and tells of Being”<sup>299</sup> even before speaking about the *Es* itself. When it comes to a “what-*is*” question, any definitive talk about “what” requires first an ontological talk about “is,” that is, the mode of Being of “what,” since the question of defining

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and beings; indeed, Aquinas thinks of it in terms of the distinction between *esse* and *ens*. What Aquinas fails to think is the “*Unter-Schied*, which grants to Thomas the possibility of thinking in terms of *esse* and *ens*” (176).

<sup>297</sup> ID, 68; 136.

<sup>298</sup> ID, 66; 134 (translation modified).

<sup>299</sup> ID, 73; 142.

“what” can be properly answered only after its way of Being is clarified or cleared [*lichtet*]; thus, the definition-question about the *Es* is basically determined by the manner in which *Es gibt Sein*. Heidegger then concludes: “Our facing this difficulty that stems from language should keep us...from speaking right away about perdurance [*Austrag*].”<sup>300</sup> The mystery of the “*Es gibt*” is hidden in the question of what the perdurance, which holds fast and holds apart the turning relation [*Kehre*] between Being and beings, *is*. Consequently, the problem of the *Kehre* finally leads to the enigma of the *Es gibt* that remains forgotten in the history of metaphysics—and yet unexamined in Heidegger’s thought.

## 1-2. *Es Gibt* as the Arche of Being

In *On Time and Being* (1972), Heidegger carries out a sort of a radical thinking-experiment [*Denkversuch*] to undertake the difficult task to elaborate on the enigmatic notion of the *Es gibt* and thus to speak about Being and time in a distinctive and cautious [*vorsichtig*] way; the thinking-experiment is “the attempt to think Being without beings [*Der Versuch, Sein ohne das Seiende zu denken*].”<sup>301</sup> The radicality of this thinking-experiment is attributed to the fact that it does no longer deal with Being in terms of beings; instead, it is the “step back [*der Schritt zurück*].”<sup>302</sup> to the

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<sup>300</sup> ID, 73-4; 142.

<sup>301</sup> SD, 2. I will refer to Joan Stambaugh’s translation along with the German text. This volume includes the lecture “Time and Being” delivered in 1962 whose title alludes to the missing part of *Being and Time*, the third Division of the first Part. In addition, it contains a “*Protokoll*,” (1962) a summary of the seminar on this lecture, written by Alfred Guzzoni and endorsed by Heidegger himself with some supplements, along with another lecture “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (1964) and Heidegger’s biographical essay “My Way to Phenomenology” (1963). For a critical reading of the lecture “Time and Being,” see John D. Caputo, “Time and Being in Heidegger,” *The Modern Schoolman* 50/4 (1973), 325-49; Joseph J. Kocklemans, “Heidegger on Time and Being,” in *Martin Heidegger: In Europe and America*, eds. Edward G. Ballard and Charles E. Scott (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 55-76.

<sup>302</sup> SD, 30. John D. Caputo points out two steps that constitute Heidegger’s step back. First, there is the step back from beings to Being that inaugurates the difference [*Differenz*], which belongs to the metaphysical tradition. In *Identity and Difference*, Hegel appears as the typical figure belonging to this tradition. Second, there is “the truly radical step back, from the difference within which metaphysics moves to the *Austrag*,” the perdurance as the differentiation [*Unterschied*] that makes the difference possible. John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 152. In the history of Being, metaphysics thinks of the *Differenz* in and through beings but never of the *Unterschied* that opens

original source of *Sein* as the thing itself [*Sache selbst*] to be thought directly, not *via* any *Seiende*. To think Being directly without reference to beings does not refer to answering the question of “what Being is” but to thinking about the way in which *Es gibt Sein*. Although the history of metaphysics is the history of answering the question “what Being *is*,” Heidegger argues, this *what-is* question cannot be applied to Being and time since they *are not*; to put it another way, they are not something [*etwas Seiendes*] that can be found among other beings. “We say of beings [*Seienden*]: they are.... We do not say: Being is [*Sein ist*], time is [*Zeit ist*], but rather: it gives Being [*Es gibt Sein*], and it gives time [*Es gibt Zeit*].”<sup>303</sup> When it comes to Being and time in which “we remains cautious [*vorsichtig*],”<sup>304</sup> Heidegger says neither “It is Being or it is time [*Es ist Sein oder es ist Zeit*]” nor “Being is or time is [*Sein ist oder Zeit ist*],” but only “It gives Being or it gives time [*Es gibt Sein oder es gibt Zeit*].” It is the *Es* that gives both Being and time; hence, the *Es* signifies the “ands” in *On Time and Being* as well as in *Being and Time*. Being is then no longer considered with regard to beings but to time, as Caputo states that the *Es* is “the meaning of Being in terms of time, and of time in terms of Being.”<sup>305</sup>

In Heidegger’s entire thought, the significance of the *Es* which Caputo calls the “Archimedean point of every fundamental Heideggerian theme” entails a problematic question again: What *is* the *Es*? Before considering the problem of the *what-is* question concerning the *Es*, it is worthwhile to first recall Heidegger’s own answer as follows:

What determines both, time and Being, in their own, that is, in their belonging together, we shall call: *Ereignis*.... We have called both—Being and time—things [*Sachen*]. The “and”

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up and sustains that *Differenz*. Caputo claims that the *Unterschied* as the *Austrag* is “the hidden source of metaphysics” (152). In this context, Caputo singles out Aquinas who exemplarily emphasizes the ontological difference [*Differenz*] between *esse* and *ens*. Thus, Aquinas moves within the first step of the *Differenz* without thinking of the ultimate source (*Unterschied*) from which the *Differenz* emerges (154-56).

<sup>303</sup> SD, 5-6.

<sup>304</sup> SD, 4-5.

<sup>305</sup> Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 168.



between them left their relation to each other indeterminate. We now see: What lets the two things belong together, what brings the two into their own and, even more, maintains and holds them in their belonging together—the way the two things comport as the matter at stake [*Sache-Verhalt*—is *Ereignis*....The matter at stake first appropriates [*ereignet*] Being and time into their own [*Eigenes*] by virtue of their relation, and does so by the appropriating that is concealed in destiny [*Geschick*] and in the clearing reaching [*lichtenden Reichen*]. Accordingly, the It [*Es*] that gives in “It gives Being” and “It gives time” proves to be the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*].<sup>306</sup>

It seems clear from this passage that Heidegger unequivocally answers the what-is question of the *Es*; it is the *Es gibt* as the *Ereignis* that gives, grants, and sends Being and time. The French “*Il y a*” and the English “There is” cannot properly translate the connotation of *cautiousness* that the German “*Es gibt*” has. The *cautious* signification of the “*Es gibt*” involves a donation, generosity, richness, or abundance of Being that both “*il y a*” and “there is” cannot properly convey. However, Heidegger immediately adds that the above passage is “correct [*richtig*] and yet also untrue [*unwahr*]: it conceals the matter at stake from us, for we inadvertently represented the *Ereignis* as some present being [*etwas Anwesendes*].”<sup>307</sup> On the one hand, it is correct insofar as it conveys what Heidegger himself intends to *cautiously* say with regard to the *Es gibt* as *Ereignis*, which is a persistent juncture [*Austrag* or *Unterschied*] that gives Being and time and brings them into their belonging together. The giving here should be understood as the letting, opening, sending, or clearing [*Lichtung*] that grants Being; accordingly, to say that Being is given by the *Es* is to say that Being lets beings present by bringing them into the openness in which they reveal themselves.

On the other hand, however, it is untrue to say that the passage in question expresses exhaustively what the *Es gibt* is by means of *incautiously* resolving the enigma of the *Es*. Insofar

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<sup>306</sup> SD, 20 (translation significantly modified). The translator, Joan Stambaugh, arbitrarily inserts her own interpretation of *Ereignis* into the original passage: “the event of Appropriation, *Ereignis* will be translated as Appropriation or event of Appropriation. One should bear in mind, however, that ‘event’ is not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible.” See Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>307</sup> SD, 20 (translation modified).

as the giving of or as the *Es* is considered in terms of the ultimate cause or origin, it is reduced into something present like a supreme being; the *Es* would then appear as an ontic cause that produces, makes, or creates Being, and thereby the enigma of the *Es* disappears. In order not to fall back into an ontotheological thought, that which gives, grants, sends, or opens up Being should thoroughly remain a concealed mystery or what Heidegger calls “the enigmatic It.”<sup>308</sup> In the midst of giving, the *Es* withdraws itself for the sake of the manifestation of Being as the gift that it gives; thus, the *Es* functions like an expletive, dummy, or pseudo subject like “It rains.”<sup>309</sup> Just as there is no such a thing that rains, there is no thing that gives Being. The *Es* itself remains impersonal, anonymous, enigmatic, and thus withdrawn from the gift in the very moment of giving. This withdrawal or holding back is the original meaning of the Greek word *epoché* [ἐποχή], which does not simply imply a certain period of time in the chronological or calculable history [*Historie*], but rather “the particular holding-back of the *Es gibt* in favor of the discernibility of the gift” in the epochal history [*Geschichte*] of Being.<sup>310</sup> In this *epoché*, the enigma of the *Es gibt* obscurely resides as the source of the various transformations of Being throughout the epochal history. The epochal identification of the *Es gibt* is determined by the step-back movement to the originary source from which the metaphysical determinations of Being spring under different names; the *Es gibt* constitutes to the history of metaphysics while the *Es* remains itself indeterminate, anonymous, and withdrawn in its enigma, and so concealed in that history. Therefore, the giving of the *Es gibt* is sustained only

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<sup>308</sup> SD, 17. Heidegger points out the ongoing danger that any talk about the *Es* engenders by positing it as a “indeterminate power” (17) which is supposed to produce Being and time in terms of the causal relationship between a cause and its effect, between a creator and its creature, as ontotheological tradition has long conceived. In this causal relation, a cause or origin is reduced into the ontic mode of a being *par excellence*. Thus, Being and the *Es* that gives Being have never been thought altogether in that tradition.

<sup>309</sup> SD, 18. According to Heidegger, Greek and Latin languages have no such “It” as a separate word. But this does not mean that “what is meant by the It is not also in their thought: in Latin, *pluit*, it is raining; in Greek, *chre*, it is needful” (18).

<sup>310</sup> SD, 9. For an analysis of Heidegger’s distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, see Nelson, “Heidegger, Levinas, and the Other of History,” 59-68. According to Nelson, the former refers the history of the first beginning as the metaphysical origin while the latter refers to the disruptive prehistory of the other beginning.

on the basis of the enigmatic *Es* that can preserve the entire process of the giving from ontotheological metaphysics, which would interpret the enigmatic source of *Es* as an ontic cause or a supreme being. It is the indeterminate, anonymous, and enigmatic *Es* that safeguards the giving itself.

So far, the *Es gibt qua Ereignis* has been brought into view in light of the giving. However, does the source—albeit anonymous and enigmatic—that gives Being not still connote, in a sense, an ontotheological implication? Toward the end of “Time and Being,” Heidegger himself raises an eventual question: “*Was ist das Ereignis?*”<sup>311</sup> As seen above, this what-is question can be answered after determining the way that the *Ereignis* is, namely, the mode of its Being; then, it leads back to the *Seinsfrage* concerning the *Ereignis*, a question of “what demands its own determination: Being in terms of time.”<sup>312</sup> However, the question of “what is the *Ereignis?*” is misleading from the outset since the *Ereignis* is neither a being to be asked “What is it?” nor Being to be said as “It gives it”; it can be merely said “It gives Being [*Es gibt Sein*].” Here Heidegger cautiously says about the *Ereignis*: “The *Ereignis* neither is, nor does it give the *Ereignis*.”<sup>313</sup> He immediately adds: “What remains to be said? Only this: Appropriation appropriates [*Das Ereignis ereignet*].”<sup>314</sup> How, why, or in what sense does the appropriation appropriate? Heidegger answers by citing Goethe’s saying:

How? When? and Where?—the gods remain silent!  
You hold yourself to *Because*, and ask not *Why?*<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> SD, 21.

<sup>312</sup> SD, 21.

<sup>313</sup> SD, 24. The original reads: “*Das Ereignis ist weder, noch gibt es das Ereignis.*”

<sup>314</sup> SD, 24.

<sup>315</sup> SD, 52. This saying is already cited in the 1956 lecture. See Martine Heidegger, “The Principle of Ground,” trans. Keith Höller, *Man and World 7/3* (1974): 219. In this lecture, Heidegger scrutinizes the proposition concerning the ground, *i.e.*, the principle [*Grundsatz*]: “Nothing is without ground [*Nihil est sine ratione*].” According to this principle, everything has a ground since *nothing* is *without* ground: “everything that is real has a ground for its reality” (207). Heidegger then asserts that Being has no ground since *nothing is without ground*: “Being means ground” (217). However, he concludes the lecture with a question: Does Being as the ground exhaust the essence [*Wesen*] of Being? The answer is found in the 1962 lecture “Time and Being” that deals with what gives Being, which eventually appears as something groundless, ahistorical, and “without why.” I will return to this problematic issue later.

Heidegger here steps back from the question of *why*—the why-question that readily leads the thinking-experiment to a relapse into the invincible trap of metaphysic that searches for a ground, origin, or reason in order to make sense of why appropriation appropriates or *Es gibt*. There is no cause, reason, or why in the proposition of “Appropriation appropriates” *because* the appropriation merely appropriates, due to the enigmatic *Es* that cannot be explained by a causality. In this context, Heidegger’s radical thinking-experiment to think Being without beings does not really refer to an attempt to think Being with no reference to beings; indeed, to think Being without beings does not imply that “the relation to beings is inessential to Being, that we should disregard this relation.”<sup>316</sup> What the thinking-experiment discloses is the fact that Being lets Dasein manifest itself in such a way that the *Es gibt* or the appropriation appropriates without “why.” Consequently, the central task of Heidegger’s thinking-experiment is to carry out a radical attempt to conceive of the dynamic, internal, reciprocal, or turning relationship between Being and Dasein, which is more fundamental than what is related, as his treatments of *Kehre*, *Seyn*, *Astrag*, *Unterschied*, and *Ereignis* already show.

Although Being is neither an origin of human Dasein nor “the product of human Dasein,”<sup>317</sup> the giving is itself possible only when there are a giver and a receiver. “If human Dasein were not the constant receiver of the gift given by the *Es gibt*,” Heidegger says, “human Dasein would not be human Dasein.”<sup>318</sup> Already in “Letter on Humanism” (1946-47), Heidegger notes that “the human Dasein is the shepherd of Being” whose authentic dignity consists in responding to the call for “the preservation of Being.”<sup>319</sup> Later in the *Four Seminars* (1966-73), Heidegger spells out in

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<sup>316</sup> SD, 35.

<sup>317</sup> SD, 17. I will translate “*Mensch*” to a gender-free form “human Dasein” rather than a “man.”

<sup>318</sup> SD, 13.

<sup>319</sup> PA, 260; WE, 342.

a more explicit and unequivocal manner what is meant by the shepherd of Being: “the human Dasein necessarily belongs to, and has its place in, the openness of Being. In order to open itself, however, Being needs human Dasein as the there [*Da*] of its manifestations.”<sup>320</sup> If *Being and Time* conceives of Dasein as the *leading* hero of Being who exists in the world by understanding of its own Being, now *Da-sein* appears as the *supporting* actor or the “place-keeper [*der Platzhalter*]”<sup>321</sup> who keeps, sustains, and preserves the place [*Da*] in which Being manifests itself in such a way that *Es gibt Sein* or *Ereignis ereignet*. Whatever the role of Dasein is in the manifestation of Being, Heidegger’s radical statement “to think Being without beings” should not be literally understood as “to think Being with no reference to beings”; rather, to think Being without beings means, as he clearly states, “to think Being without reference to a grounding Being in terms of beings” or “to think Being without reference to metaphysics.”<sup>322</sup> The main purpose of the thinking-experiment is undoubtedly consistent with his essential motivation of the *Seinsfrage* elaborated in *Being and Time*, since both concern how *not* to think Being metaphysically—or onto-theologically—in relation to beings.

For Heidegger and especially for the Heidegger II, the attempt to think of Being with regard not to a grounding Being but to the *Es gibt* as the *Ereignis* that gives Being suggests a way of describing metaphysics by means of a step back to the primal source from which all historical determinations or transformations of Being emerge. The history of metaphysics is the history of

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<sup>320</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 63 (translation modified).

<sup>321</sup> Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 63.

<sup>322</sup> SD, 2, 25, respectively. Heidegger clarifies this point as follows: “Along with the expression used on page 24 without regard to the relation of Being to beings, this phrase is the abbreviated formulation of: ‘To think Being without regard to grounding Being in terms of beings’...Rather, it means that Being is not to be thought in the manner of metaphysics, which consists in the fact that the *summum ens* as *causa sui* accomplishes the grounding of all beings as such” (35-6).

the epochal determinations of Being in the manner that the *Es* gives Being, and accordingly, Being lets Dasein essentially present itself in such a way that Being is given by the *Es gibt* without why. Now, it can be said cautiously [*vorsichtig*], according to their distinctive modes, that *Ereignis ereignet; Es gibt Sein; Seiende ist; and Dasein existert*. All these modes ultimately refer to a concealed, withdrawn, or “without-why” source from which they arise. There is no why in the proposition of “Appropriation appropriates” simply *because* it [*Es*] appropriates. Any logical, causal, or metaphysical explanation to make sense of why such a giving or appropriating comes to pass inevitably fails since the *Es* as the primordial source remains enigmatic. All propositional statements to explain the *Es* give rise to explaining *away* the enigmatic feature of the *Es* and thereby falling back into the ontotheological trap which seeks to find a cause or origin in order to settle down the “why” by depriving the enigma from the *Es*. The inescapable risk of the thinking-experiment of the lecture “Time and Being” delivered in the form of propositional statements lies in the fact that it attempts to express what cannot be expressed in the propositional statements. Any propositional clarification or explanation is not proper to saying about the enigmatic *Es* proper. It can be only said that, as Caputo cautiously puts it, “*Das Ereignis ereignet, weil das Ereignis.*”<sup>323</sup> It is the because [*das Weil*] that wards off the why-question to seek a reason or cause and that forbids any further propositional elaborations. It is, therefore, no surprise to observe that Heidegger’s lecture concludes with the self-defeating remarks: “The saying of *Ereignis* in the form of a lecture remains itself an obstacle of this kind. The lecture has spoken merely in propositional statements.”<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Caputo, “Time and Being in Heidegger,” 345.

<sup>324</sup> SD, 25.

However, the real surprise that might undermine the overall consistency of Heidegger's thought can be noticed in the "*Protokoll*,"<sup>325</sup> the summary of the seminar on the lecture "Time and Being." Heidegger here answers the question about "the possible end of the history of Being"<sup>326</sup> with regard to the provocative notion of the *Es gibt* as *Ereignis*. As seen above, *Ereignis* is not Being, and its peculiar mode is not reduced into the mode of Being; rather, it is that which gives, grants, and sends Being—more properly, it appropriates what metaphysics has called Being across the epochal determinations which constitute the history of metaphysics. Thus, the *Es* as *Ereignis* gives, grants, and sends Being as finite [*endlich*], temporal [*zeitlich*], and historical [*geschichtlich*]. The above-question points back to the historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] concerning the primordial source by which the history [*Geschichte*] of Being, and of metaphysics, comes to pass [*geschieht*]. It can be briefly expressed: Is the *Ereignis* itself historical?—to put it more *cautiously*, does appropriation appropriate historically? Heidegger here *incautiously* answers the former question rather than the latter: "what sends as appropriation *is* itself unhistorical [*ungeschichtlich*], or more precisely without destiny [*geschicklos*]."<sup>327</sup> In the *Four Seminars*, he also makes an incautious claim: "In *Ereignis*, the history of Being has not so much reached its end, as that it now appears as history of Being. There is no destinal [*geschicklich*] epoch of *Ereignis*."<sup>328</sup> The radical thinking-experiment suddenly stops in the confrontation with the non-historical and non-destinal source, which allows the historical manifestations of Being; ironically, the thinking-experiment to elaborate on the historicity of Being relies on the *ahistorical* thinking that eventually conceives of a non-historical, onto-theological, or metaphysical source, that is, "arche [*ἀρχή*]" of Being.

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<sup>325</sup> At the end of *Zur Sache des Denkens* (SD), Heidegger notes that the *Protokoll*, originally written by Alfred Guzzoni and endorsed by Heidegger himself, serves to clarify what remains questionable in the lecture "Time and Being." SD, 91-2. This work is modified by Heidegger and incorporated into *Zur Sache des Denkens*.

<sup>326</sup> SD, 43.

<sup>327</sup> SD, 44 (italics added).

<sup>328</sup> Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 61.

### 1-3. Heidegger's Self-victimization of Metaphysics

Contrary to his own cautious declaration that the impersonal, anonymous, and enigmatic *Es* sustains the entire process of the giving, Heidegger incautiously eradicates the enigma of the *Es* by reducing it to a non-historical, non-temporal, or metaphysical arche which renders the history of metaphysics possible. In this context, Jean-Luc Marion points out: "Heidegger immediately lifts the anonymity of the 'it' and obfuscates the enigma. He violates his own interdiction as soon as he formulates it by baptizing the 'it' with the name *Ereignis*."<sup>329</sup> On the way to overcoming onto-theological metaphysics through retrieving the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger encounters the *Ereignis* as the metaphysical arche which makes the *Seinsfrage* relapse into what he attempts to overcome. In this self-defeating gesture, Heidegger becomes, in Caputo's words, a "victim of metaphysics."<sup>330</sup> Heidegger could save the historicity of Being at the expense of falling back into the metaphysical tradition, as if he would confess that his thinking of Being can never be immune from metaphysics. In this regard, his thinking-experiment to think of Being directly without reference to metaphysics halts—or probably fails—in the face of the metaphysical arche of the *Es*. However, this failure does not mean that his thinking also fails to think of Being—at least, he could save the historicity of Being. The abrupt suspension of his thinking-experiment discloses how deeply obsessed Heidegger is with Being as the thing itself to be thought. What is at stake to Heidegger is "not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to follow the movement of showing,"<sup>331</sup> by virtue of his commitment to the phenomenological way *zu den Sachen selbst*

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<sup>329</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: A toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 37.

<sup>330</sup> Caputo, "Time and Being in Heidegger," 345. Caputo describes the metaphysical feature of the *Ereignis* as follows: "The *Ereignis* appears as the enduring (Plato) possibility (Aristotle) which is held out for the history of the West (Hegel)," 346. These remarks echo the metaphysical doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same. Heidegger's step back into the source of Being gives rise to the step back into metaphysics.

<sup>331</sup> SD, 2.



to be thought. Consequently, the radical thinking-experiment brings all the different things, such as *Sein*, *Seyn*, *Austrag*, *Unterschied*, *Ereignis*, and *Kehre* into the *Denken* in which they convey the *Sache selbst* in various ways; it is *das Sache selbst des Denken* as the ultimate locus of the *Sinngebung*, toward which these names are altogether oriented.

Whether or not Heidegger's philosophy belongs to metaphysical tradition, and whatever the *Kehre*—either a *Kehre-1* or a *Kehre-2*—is in his philosophy, his ceaseless obsession with Being is ineradicably placed in the heart of his thinking. Thus, the *Kehre* in Heidegger's thought does not lead to the two different Heideggers who think of different things but constitutes the historical—not simply *historisch* but *geschichtlich* in Heidegger's distinctive sense of the term—dynamism of Heidegger who thinks of the same thing or the thing itself [*die Sache selbst*]. As well known, Heidegger's profound attentiveness *zu den Sachen selbst*, displaying his commitment to phenomenology, is undoubtedly indicated in his response to Richardson's *Résumé*—it is the *Sache selbst* as *Sein* that manifests itself historically as it is given.<sup>332</sup> Heidegger points out the most fundamental aspect of phenomenology, which differentiates himself from his precursors:

[T]he meaning and scope of the principle of phenomenology, “to the thing itself” [*zu den Sachen selbst*], became clear. As my familiarity with phenomenology grew...the question about Being, aroused by Brentano's work, nevertheless remained always in view. So it was that doubt arose whether the “thing itself” was to be characterized as intentional consciousness, or even as the transcendental Ego. If, indeed, phenomenology, as the process of letting the thing manifest itself [*das Sichzeigenlassen des Sache selbst*], should characterize the standard method of philosophy...Being [*Sein*] then had to remain the first and last thing itself for thinking [*die erste und letzte Sache selbst für Denken*].<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Heidegger's response to the *Résumé* is translated by Richardson and incorporated, with the original German text, into Richardson's complete work. Martine Heidegger, “Preface,” in Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, iii-xxiii. The Preface is not a response to the complete work of Richardson but to his *Résumé*, which was given to Heidegger prior to the publication of the work. Richardson later responds to Heidegger's reaction to his *Résumé*. It is published as William J. Richardson, “William Richardson's Questions for Martin Heidegger's ‘Preface,’” eds. and trans. Richard Capobianco & Ian Alexander Moore, *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 9 (2019): 1–27.

<sup>333</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xii-xv. Henceforth, I will modify the English translation, whenever needed, in order to preserve the nuanced tone of Heidegger's terminologies that the translator, Richardson, unfortunately neutralizes in some cases.

In opposition to Husserlian phenomenology, according to which the transcendental Ego considers the thing itself as its own *cogitatum* in its transcendental reflection and, on that account, fails to reflect the non-static, pre-theoretical, vital, or dynamic historicity [*die Geschichtlichkeit*] of *Sein* and *Denken* altogether, Heidegger asserts that phenomenology as the philosophical method lets the thing manifest itself in terms of the temporal, epochal, or historical *co*-responding of *Sein* and *Denken*. The manifestation of the *Sache selbst* is always involved in the double interplay of the *Seinsdenken*: the Being of thinking and the thinking of Being. Heidegger explicates this double interplay as follows: “Being as such (*Seyn*) shows itself as that which is to be thought and, at the same time, as that which wants the thinking corresponding to it.”<sup>334</sup> It is Being as such that calls forth thinking (the Being of thinking) and, simultaneously, that the thinking seeks (the thinking of Being); thus, the thinking is a seeking that is always directed to what is sought, and yet it is already guided by what it seeks. The basic task of the thinking is to determine that which concerns the thinking in the first place, which is what is meant by the German term *Sache*: “Being—a thing, presumably *the* thing of the thinking.”<sup>335</sup> In this context, this crucial passage illustrates in an unequivocal manner that the later Heidegger still remains the early one who insists that “Ontology is possible only as phenomenology.”<sup>336</sup> For the later Heidegger as for the early one, ontology can

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<sup>334</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xvi-xvii. The original text reads: “*das Sein als solches (das Seyn) sich zugleich als jenes zu Denkende zeigt, was ein ihm entprechendes Denken braucht.*” Richardson translates “*es braucht*” to “there is want of” and interprets Heidegger’s statement in question as: “Now Being ‘wants’ thought. By reason of its nature, Being must itself be served, tended, guarded by thought, hence is ‘in want of thought’ in order to be itself.” Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 597. The essential affinity between phenomenology and ontology is enshrined in Heidegger’s *Seinsdenken*. In this regard, *Sein* is in want of *Denken* to be itself and manifests itself as it is thought. He goes on to say that “the correlation between Being and thought comes to expression as a mutual wanting” (600) and finally concludes: “Thought, as gathering-together by which man (re-)collects Being, rests in the center of man’s Being” (601).

<sup>335</sup> SD, 4. The original reads: “*Sein—eine Sache, vermutlich die Sache des Denkens.*”

<sup>336</sup> SZ, 35. He goes on to state: “When it comes to the subject-matter, phenomenology is the science of the Being of beings—ontology” (37). For Heidegger, ontology and phenomenology are conducive to philosophy itself in terms of its object and its method; then, he defines philosophy as “universal phenomenological ontology” (38).

be itself through phenomenology while phenomenology should begin with ontology. When phenomenology shows Heidegger “How to look at,” that is, the formal or methodological path toward the thing itself, ontology ushers him to “what to look for,” that is, the most fundamental thing to be thought. Phenomenology is then the ontological path *per se zu den Sache selbst für Denken*, which is “the first and last thing itself for thinking” and so “the most proper thing of thinking [*der eigensten Sache des Denken*].”<sup>337</sup> In the course of the ontological-phenomenological path, what remains the same thing [*die Sache selbst*], from the beginning to the end, is the very *Sein* for *Denken*, although the proper noun of *Sein* would be a unsatisfactory name for the *Sache selbst des Denkens*.<sup>338</sup>

The *Kehre* then can be reinterpreted in the context of *Being and Time* when Heidegger continues to make a claim: “The thinking of the *Kehre* results from the fact that I stayed with the thing to be thought in *Being and Time*.”<sup>339</sup> This statement alludes to the fact that his ongoing commitment to *Sein* entangled with the thinking of the *Kehre* is implicitly explored through the *Seinsfrage* in *Being and Time*. Just as the *Seinsfrage* implies the essential feature of questioning that *Dasein* as a questioner is already involved in its own question, epitomized not merely as the question of *Dasein* but rather as “*Dasein-in-the-question*,” the *Kehre* essentially plays within the thing itself: “the *Kehre-in-the-thing-itself*.” Rather than (re)visiting a (too) much discussed concept of the *Kehre*, Heidegger then advises, “One would simply engage oneself in the thing mentioned”; otherwise, one will merely attempt to demonstrate that “the *Seinsfrage* developed in *Being and*

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<sup>337</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xvi-xvii.

<sup>338</sup> When it comes to the word *Sein*, Heidegger’s dissatisfaction about language anticipates the deconstructive gesture that Sheehan reads in the later Heidegger. The word of *Sein* is *necessary yet inadequate* to represent the thing as such to be thought, so that Heidegger adopts “stratagems as spelling it archaically (*Seyn*), crossing it out (~~*Sein*~~), and finally dropping it from his lexicon.” Thomas Sheehan, “Introduction: Heidegger, the Project and the Fulfillment,” in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, vii.

<sup>339</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xvi-xvii.

*Time* is unjustified, superfluous, and impossible.”<sup>340</sup> Far from abandoning the *Seinsfrage* presented in *Being and Time* in favor of the *Kehre*, Heidegger argues that the fundamental question of Being is “decisively ful-filled [*er-gänzt*] in the thinking of the *Kehre*.”<sup>341</sup> In the midst of the phenomenological-ontological way toward the thing itself, all different names for the *Sache selbst*, such as *Sein*, *Seyn*, *Kehre*, *Unterschied*, *Austrag*, and *Ereignis*, cannot be properly understood apart from the *Seinsfrage*, and *vice versa*. Despite the dynamism, complexity, and wide-ranging scope of his philosophy with regard to the division of Heidegger I and II and the distinction of *Kehre*-1 and 2, consequently, the *Seinsfrage* remains the question *par excellence* for the Heidegger.

## 2. *Il y a: Anarchic Arche of Es Gibt*

Now it becomes obvious why Levinas pays little attention to the later Heidegger regardless of whether there would be any *Kehre* in Heidegger’s philosophy; indeed, Levinas himself rarely makes remarks about the *Kehre* in his critical consideration of Heidegger’s thinking of Being. Whatever the *Kehre* might turn out to be *Kehre*-1 or 2, Levinas’s intentional neglect of Heidegger II is largely due to the *Kehre* itself, which makes no difference to the Heidegger whose focus fundamentally remains on the thinking of Being. As the view of *Kehre*-2 indicates that there probably happens a turn, shift, or reversal from *Dasein* to Being with regard to a focus, theme, or orientation, Levinas would recognize that the ontological obsession with Being becomes even

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<sup>340</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xviii-xix.

<sup>341</sup> Heidegger, “Preface,” xviii-xix. In the Preface to the second German edition (1951) of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger states: “its path [elaborated in *Sein und Zeit*] still remains a necessary one even today, if the question of Being is to move [*bewegen*] our *Dasein*,” SZ, vi. In *On Time and Being*, Heidegger also claims that the fundamental question is not different from that of *Being and Time*: “What this text contains, written three and a half decades later, can no longer be a continuation of the text of *Being and Time*. The leading question has indeed remained the same, but this simply means: the question has become still more questionable and still more alien to the spirit of the times” (SD, 91).

more serious in the contemplative, meditative, or poetic work of Heidegger II.<sup>342</sup> The *Seinsfrage* does not allow elsewhere than *Sein* of beings in the sense that everything, including transcendence in the first place, is brought into *Denken* by leveling it down to the reference to *Sein*; therefore, the *Seinsdenken* at best thinks of another Being or Being otherwise, but never of elsewhere than Being or otherwise than Being. As will be seen, Levinas attempts to delve further into a more fundamental dimension of being and thus goes into an unexplored, unknown, or other way (than an ontological one), from which Heidegger holds back in his thinking-experiment—it is the purely verbal *être* without any substantive *étants* or what Levinas calls “*il y a*,” which appears as the ultimate locus of transcendence.

## 2-1. The Locus of Transcendence: *Être* or *Sein*

In his very early work entitled *On Escape* (1935-36), Levinas argues that Western philosophical tradition has been preoccupied with the problem of transcendence; Levinas himself is no exception to this tradition.<sup>343</sup> In spite of the fact that Levinas is well known as a philosopher

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<sup>342</sup> In a conversation with Edith Wyschogrod, Levinas answers, with a wink, the question of whether there would be any *Kehre* in his later texts: “*Je ne suis pas Heidegger*.” Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), ix. Both Levinas and Wyschogrod might consider Heidegger’s *Kehre* as the *Kehre-2* rather than the 1. Nevertheless, this view does not impact Levinas’s critical assessment of Heidegger.

<sup>343</sup> OE, 51; DE, 93. In a footnote to “God and Philosophy” first published in 1975, Levinas also states that what this essay seeks is the meaning of transcendence rather than of ethics even though the former is eventually to be founded in the latter. GWCM, 200, n. 23; DD, 114, n. 15. This essay is originally published in *Le Nouveau Commerce* 30-31 (Spring, 1975): 97-128. It is then incorporated into *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986), 93-127; *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55-79. It is first translated by Alphonso Lingis in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 153-73. It also appears in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 166-89. Bernasconi thus claims that Levinas’s focus on ethics comes from his concern for transcendence, and not the other way around. Robert Bernasconi, “Useless Sacrifice,” in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, 164. In distinguishing between transcendence as a “formal structure” and ethics as “its concretization,” Bernasconi elsewhere points out that Levinas presents himself as “first and foremost a thinker of transcendence.” Robert Bernasconi, “No Exit: Levinas’s Aporetic Account of Transcendence,” *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005), 102. Bettina Bergo also explores the significance of transcendence throughout Levinas’s works, which amounts to his original contribution to phenomenology beyond Husserl and Heidegger. Bettina Bergo, “Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas’s Philosophy,” *Research in Phenomenology* 35 (2005):141-77. Philip J. Maloney proposes two alternative models of the conception of transcendence in Heidegger and Levinas by employing

of ethics, his early works mainly pay attention to the meaning of transcendence instead of ethics itself. Indeed, in “Is Ontology Fundamental?” (1951), the essay published almost twenty years after the publication of his dissertation entitled *The Theory of Intuition of Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930), Levinas for the first time explicitly employs the term “the ethical” in an adjectival form to elaborate on the ethical signification of the other.<sup>344</sup> As seen in the previous chapters, the issue of transcendence is undoubtedly fundamental for Husserl and Heidegger who share the common concern for the subjectivity of the subject under the different names, such as the transcendental Ego and Dasein, respectively. On the one hand, Husserl insists on intentionality by arguing that the intentional subject transcends toward the transcendent object and then makes sense [*Sinn*] of it in the phenomenological realm; phenomenologically, all transcendence is immanent to the transcendental Ego. At last, Husserl identifies the phenomenological validity and meaning of the *Sache selbst* by means of intentionality as transcendence in immanence or *immanent* transcendence.

On the other hand, Heidegger criticizes traditional philosophy and Husserl’s phenomenology in particular for their treatments of transcendence, which remain not fundamental enough, so that they fail to recognize the ontological characteristics of Being in terms of transcendence. In opposition to the traditional—more properly, ontic—conception of transcendence, Heidegger proposes “finite transcendence,” which characterizes the ontological-

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“secularized transcendence”: poetry and prayer. Philip J. Maloney, “Dreaming Otherwise than Icarus: Heidegger, Levinas, and the Secularization of Transcendence,” in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, 31-50.

<sup>344</sup> This essay first appears under the title “*L’Ontologie est-elle fondamentale?*” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 56 (1951): 88-98. It is then incorporated into *Entre Nous: Essais sur penser-à-l’autre* (Paris: Grasset), 1991, 12-22; *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1-11. The essay is first translated by Peter Atterton and published under the title “Is Ontology Fundamental?” *Philosophy Today* 33/2 (1989): 121-29. For a general introduction to the essay, see Simon Critchley, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10; Michael Fagenblat, “Levinas and Heidegger: The Elemental Confrontation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 108.

existential way of Dasein's Being; transcendence is *finite* since "it belongs to *human Dasein* as the *fundamental constitution of this being, one that occurs prior to all comportment.*"<sup>345</sup> According to Levinas's reading of Heidegger, it is the "leap [*saut*]"<sup>346</sup> beyond beings toward Being that Heidegger basically designates as transcendence in the distinctive sense of the term. Heidegger's underlying criticism of Husserl consists in the fact that the intentional life can be properly intelligible only after clarifying the transcendence of Dasein, which constitutes Dasein's Being as Being-in-the-world. The fundamental structure of the subjectivity of the subject is illuminated in the finite transcendence that constitutes the ecstatic way of Dasein's Being at the primordial level, as Heidegger states: "to *be* a subject means to be a being in and as transcendence."<sup>347</sup>

This is where Levinas's own question begins; in other words, it asks whether Heidegger's (fundamental) ontology is fundamental enough with regard to "what it means to be." However, this does not mean that Levinas considers the *Seinsfrage* a misleading question, as if Heidegger would raise a question about something that has nothing to do with "what it means to be." Levinas indeed acknowledges that Heidegger's question deliberately confronts "the problem that has for its object the meaning of the existence of Being."<sup>348</sup> In fact, the problem with the *Seinsfrage* that Levinas has in mind is that the question fails to be itself sufficiently insofar as it considers Being in terms of beings; in other words, Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* always insinuates an inseparable complicity of Being and beings, which is elaborated by the ontological difference in the Heidegger I and by the *Es gibt* as *Ereignis* in the II. For Levinas, the *Seinsfrage* is not radical enough to penetrate further into a more fundamental dimension of pure being, which is covered up by the

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<sup>345</sup> PA, 108; WE, 137.

<sup>346</sup> MHO, 413.

<sup>347</sup> PA, 108; WE, 138 (italics in the original). When it comes to transcendence, what is more urgent to Heidegger is to investigate that in which the intentional life is basically rooted, that is, the existential-ontological horizon that renders the theoretical, intentional relationship between noema and noesis possible. The task of the fundamental ontology is to consider the finite transcendence of Dasein.

<sup>348</sup> TIHP, 154; TIPH, 218.

ontological coverings, such as *Sein*, *Seyn*, *Austrag*, *Unterschied*, *Kehre*, *Ereignis*, and *Es gibt*. It is the sheer being [*être*], prior to or without any existent [*étant*], that takes on a genuine meaning of transcendence. Far from constituting the intentional subjectivity of the transcendental Ego (immanent transcendence) or the ecstatic subjectivity of Dasein (finite transcendence), Levinas argues, transcendence in a genuine sense calls for the need of exit, escape, or evasion from being. In this context, Levinas's question departs with/from Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* in the sense that the fundamental ontology remains not fundamental enough and so fails to capture the primordial depth of pure being and transcendence altogether. When calling into question Heidegger's philosophy, ironically, Levinas becomes more Heideggerian than Heidegger himself by radicalizing the *Seinsfrage* to conceive of *l'être sans l'étant*, that is, pure existence without existents that bears the meaning of transcendence without being reduced into either a transcendental immanence or an ontological finitude. As will be seen, the early Levinas employs a neologism "excendence,"<sup>349</sup> which discloses the sheer nakedness of being by stripping off the ontological coverings accumulated in the pure *être per se*, and thereby which invites an escape embedded in the primordial depth of *être*. The main purpose of Levinas's very early work *On Escape* is to elaborate on the radical sense of transcendence in the name of excendence to pave the long way for otherwise than being and for elsewhere than ontology.

## 2-2. Escape from Being and Being Riveted to Being

In *On Escape*, Levinas begins by defining Western philosophy as a "bourgeois" philosophy which nourishes the conception of "the unity of I [*moi*]" that does not allow an "inner division," split, or schizophrenia and that remains in its self-contained sufficiency "to peace with itself [*soi-*

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<sup>349</sup> OE, 56; DE, 99.



*même*], achieve itself, enclose itself in itself, and rest on itself.”<sup>350</sup> The identical unity of the *moi* and the *soi* is conducive to the constitution of the bourgeois identity of being. However, the identity of “I” with myself does not simply a tautological process in which I posit myself, find myself, achieve myself, and remains myself in my reclusion; rather, it is the identification of the bourgeois I, *i.e.*, a mastery-process over “all that is unforeseeable,”<sup>351</sup> which menaces to break up my secure, tranquil, or serene place [*chez-soi*] of the present that I hold sway. The bourgeois philosophy buttresses the conservative and yet valorous spirit whose spirituality consists in its “instinct for possession,” which justifies an unremitting appropriation, integration, expansion, proliferation, and imperialism for its own sake, just as “a restless and enterprising capitalism”<sup>352</sup> thoroughly forages for everything that can produce profits all around the world. In its essential instinct, the identification of the I becomes the bourgeois identity, into which everything becomes appropriated and absorbed, and to which nothing remains foreign and unknown. The bourgeois conception of the identity of the *moi* with the *soi* indicates what Levinas briefly calls “Being is [*L’être ist*],” that is, “the brutality of the fact of being [that] is absolutely sufficient and refers to nothing else.”<sup>353</sup> In the profound depth of pure being in its self-sufficiency, however, Levinas diagnoses a symptom of an ontological claustrophobia that needs a breathing, exhalation, respiration, or transcendence. It is transcendence as an aspiration for the need to exit, escape, and get out of being that Levinas attempts to elaborate in the name of excedence in his early work.

When it comes to the bourgeois conceptions of transcendence, whether immanent or finite, all of which lapse into a seamless and oppressive regime of Being, Levinas argues that transcendence is a “search for refuge” somewhere within Being, which in turn receives, transposes,

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<sup>350</sup> OE, 49-50; DE, 91-2 (translation modified).

<sup>351</sup> OE, 50; DE, 92.

<sup>352</sup> OE, 50; DE, 92.

<sup>353</sup> OE, 51; DE, 93.

and conceals [*recèle*] itself; thus, bourgeois philosophy leaves “the stigma of being”<sup>354</sup> on transcendence. Levinas explains that, for Heidegger, the movement of transcendence is a leave-taking movement that the *moi* leaves the *soi* to take it again in a more explicit and authentic way; the movement never gets out of the ontological circle of the binary unity of the *moi-soi* since the bourgeois identity of the I [*moi*] does not allow any place foreign to itself [*soi-même*]. Transcendence is then a movement from implicit to explicit or from inauthentic to authentic understanding of Being. At the bottom of the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* that Western philosophy seeks, however, Levinas finds that the brutal fact of being appears as a heavy burden or unbearable suffering: namely, a sort of an ontological obesity which calls for a digestion and excretion to get out of being through breaking up the shackle of the bourgeois identity of the *moi* with the *soi*. What defines excedence *qua* transcendence is the urgent need to escape from the smothering prison of being and go toward elsewhere unknown [*insu*] to being, and to ontology. It is an indeterminate elsewhere on the hither side of being, *i.e.*, an unknown place that “Western philosophy, in effect, has never gone.”<sup>355</sup> The most basic and fundamental task of *On Escape* is to debunk the bourgeois conception of being, that is, “the fact that the *moi* is *soi-même*,”<sup>356</sup> and thereby uncover what the bourgeois philosophy has long covered up—the brutality of pure being as the locus of excedence or transcendence. The brutal fact of pure being does not primordially appear as an intentional achievement (Husserl) or a historical determination (Heidegger) but as an inescapable enchainment, bondage, burden, and “imprisonment from which one must get out.”<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> OE, 53-4; DE, 96-7.

<sup>355</sup> OE, 51; DE, 93.

<sup>356</sup> OE, 55; DE, 98.

<sup>357</sup> OE, 55; DE, 98. Levinas continues: “Escape puts in question precisely this alleged peace-with-self [*paix avec soi*], since it aspires to break the chains of the I to the self [*du moi à soi*]” (OE, 55; DE, 99). In this regard, the term escape lays bare “the sickness of the century [*mal du siècle*],” which signifies the characteristics of the too much capitalized modern society where the human life loses its meaning and values so that it has no longer an opportunity to think about what it means to be oneself in a serious way: “the individual...does not yet belong to himself, but an autonomous person who...feels liable to be mobilized” (OE, 52; DE, 94).

This is why Levinas never leaves the *Seinsfrage* behind and attempts to “renew the ancient problem of being *qua* being”<sup>358</sup> to unveil the primordial dimension of pure being in a verbal sense, which is exactly what Heidegger endeavors to seek, but fails to achieve.

Prior to the identification of being that buttresses the ongoing unity of the *moi* and the *soi*, the need for escape embedded in the brutal fact of pure being discerns the radical feature of the identity or what Levinas calls a “type of duality,”<sup>359</sup> a dual, fractured, or schizophrenic identity that signifies the inherent division of the *moi* and the *soi*. It is the inner split that entails the irremissible predicament of the need for escape from being and, simultaneously, being riveted to being. As the need for escape from being indicates, the *moi* no longer enjoys its comfortable, luxurious, and restful peace of the *en-soi*, but suffers from a sort of a schizophrenia that does not allow the *moi* to remain to be the *soi* in its self-sufficient identity. The experience of the schizophrenia disrupts the bourgeois complacency of being as the peaceful unity of the *moi* and the *soi*. The need for escape from being does not aim to search for somewhere in which any need is no longer necessary, and thereby in which it is completely satisfied through achieving a completion, complacency, richness, or abundance of being, as the Heideggerian *Es gibt* indicates. The need for escape here should not be understood as any kind of lack or privation of being derived from its finitude or limitation. Rather, Levinas contends that the need arises from the completion, perfection, sufficiency, or plenitude of being, which calls for the exit from being: “at the root of

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<sup>358</sup> OE, 56; DE, 99.

<sup>359</sup> OE, 55; DE, 98. John Llewelyn depicts the duality of the identity as a “disunity” and states: “Oneself is a twoself.” Strictly speaking, however, these remarks are somewhat misleading in that Levinas does not speak of two selves [*deux sois*]; rather, what he intends to say here is the duality enshrined in the identity, *i.e.*, the inseparable distinction between the *moi* and the *soi*, which disrupts the bourgeois assumption that the self-same identity is given from the beginning. Levinas later develops the *moi* in an accusative sense as opposed to the *Moi* in a subjective sense while further radicalizing the *moi* as a despite self [*malgré soi*] in *Otherwise Than Being or Essence*. Moreover, this type of duality in the identity prefigures the significant formulae that Levinas enriches in his elaboration of ethics, such as the other in the same, the infinite in the finite, and the more in the less. I will return to this matter in the next chapters.

need there is not a lack of being but, on the contrary, a plenitude of being. Need is not oriented toward the complete fulfillment of a limited being, toward satisfaction, but toward release and escape.”<sup>360</sup> For Levinas, the need for escape is an incessant desire to get out of being and go out into elsewhere than being, rather than a mastery-process toward the complete achievement of being. However, the promise of the need cannot be kept but gives rise to the inescapable fact of being riveted to being. It is not only because an elsewhere, at which the need to escape aims, remains indefinite, unfixed, indeterminate, and unknown, but also because in the need of escape, being appears as an irremissible burden that any satisfaction never completely dissolves. Levinas thus states: “What gives the human condition all its importance is precisely this inadequacy of satisfaction to need,”<sup>361</sup> which becomes clear in the pre-theoretical, pre-reflective, and affective phenomena, such as pleasure, shame, and nausea.

## Pleasure

Levinas describes pleasure as an affective movement that knows nothing of satisfaction in the sense that “pleasure appears as it develops.”<sup>362</sup> Pleasure ceaselessly increases in intensity and intoxication to the point of “an abandonment, a loss of oneself [*soi-même*], a getting out of oneself [*soi*], an ecstasy,”<sup>363</sup> that is, a total escape from the *soi*; thus, it is the promise of an evasion, escape, transcendence, or ex-cendence. Pleasure as an affective phenomenon appears as an unending process that seeks its satisfaction. However, it always fails its accomplishment since it has no goal, end, limit, or termination in which the I [*moi*] finds itself [*soi-même*] in its sufficiency and

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<sup>360</sup> OE, 69; DE, 120. To be sure, whenever speaking of “need” in *On Escape*, Levinas actually means “desire.” Levinas later makes a clear distinction between need and desire and develops the latter in terms of the “metaphysical desire” in *Totality and Infinity*. The next chapter deals with this matter.

<sup>361</sup> OE, 60; DE, 106.

<sup>362</sup> OE, 61; DE, 107.

<sup>363</sup> OE, 61; DE, 108.

complacency where the unity of the *moi* and the *soi* might be eventually achieved. The fact that the promise contained in pleasure cannot be realized shows that the escape from being is a “deceptive escape,”<sup>364</sup> which always fails to leave the being itself behind. However, this deceptive trait of escape does not refer to returning to the bourgeois concept of being that points to the solid and unifying ground of the identity, but to revealing the peculiar ambivalence of enchainment and transcendence that calls into question the bourgeois conception of being as the amalgamated unity of the *moi* and *soi*. Therefore, the failure to satisfy the need brings to light the inherent duality primordially inscribed in the bourgeois identity in terms of escape from being and being riveted to being.

## Shame

The disappointing moment of failure appears as “shame” by which the meaning of the failure of escape is highlighted. Far from conveying moral connotations, shame for Levinas reveals the brutal presence of being in the sheer nakedness. Shame is experienced as a failure of hiding, concealing, and veiling what one wants to hide, conceal, and veil; thus, it appears as the failure of covering up “the nakedness of an existence incapable of hiding oneself.”<sup>365</sup> A shameful experience drives one to confront its impotence, powerlessness, or impossibility of escaping from “the irremissible presence of the *moi* to the *soi-même*.”<sup>366</sup> In this context, the shameful presence of being is not simply due to the incapability to conceal this nakedness, but to the inevitable return to

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<sup>364</sup> OE, 62; DE, 109. However, this deceptive character of escape should not be understood as a misleading one that will nullify the radical sense of transcendence or ex-cendence. Rather, it signifies the peculiar feature of the duality that underlies the identity of being: the fundamental ambivalence of escape from being and, at the same time, being riveted to being. In this regard, Bernasconi points out that the term ex-cendence also explains the relation of Levinas to Heidegger: “the need to leave Heidegger behind, but the impossibility of doing so.” Bernasconi, “No Exist,” 104.

<sup>365</sup> OE, 64; DE, 112.

<sup>366</sup> OE, 64; DE, 112.

oneself, *i.e.*, being riveted to oneself. However, the failure of escape does not mean that the I [*moi*] has to remain at home with itself [*chez-soi*] in the bourgeois identity where the I has nothing to hide and thus has no sense of shame at all. By contrast, escape from being in terms of shame must fail since the *moi* has to confront the *soi* without losing itself in the *soi*-identity; the failure then reveals the pure nakedness of being, which is clarified in the materiality of the *soi*. In the shameful experience, the *soi* is posited neither as identity with the *moi* nor as the very *moi* in which there is no sense of shame; rather, it is a bodily, sensual, affective, and material exposure that never permits the *moi* any complete evasion from being. The nakedness of being already alludes to sensibility, affectivity, passivity, materiality, or vulnerability in terms of a bodily experience antecedent to consciousness, comprehension, and reflection. Therefore, the materiality of the *soi* interrupts the *soi*-contained, *soi*-sufficient, and *soi*-identical identity of the *moi* and opens the *moi* to be affected, touched, exposed, accused, and so ashamed. “What shame discovers is the being [*l’être*] that discovers itself,”<sup>367</sup> that is, the brutal presence of being riveted to being in which the powerlessness and impossibility of hiding, concealing, and fleeing oneself—the failure of escape—becomes clear.

## Nausea

In the phenomenon of nausea as an extreme form of shame, Levinas recognizes the radical dimension of pure being in its nakedness. “The state of nausea,” Levinas states, “encloses one on all sides”<sup>368</sup> without any issue or exit by which one could get out of oneself. In the experience of nausea, despite its painful refusal to remain to be oneself, one cannot but undertake the untenable and yet ineluctable burden of oneself. It is through the experience of nausea that one undergoes

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<sup>367</sup> OE, 65; DE, 114.

<sup>368</sup> OE, 66; DE, 115.

“its internal antagonism,”<sup>369</sup> which denotes the primordial duality embedded in the identity, that is, the twofold feature of being that the *moi* cannot be the *soi* and, simultaneously, that the *moi* cannot *not* be the *soi*. Levinas points out: “In nausea—which amounts to an impossibility of being what one is—we are at the same time riveted to ourselves, enclosed in a tight circle that smothers.”<sup>370</sup> This antagonistic situation of nausea, with regard to the desperate escape that ends in failure, characterizes “*the very experience of pure being*.”<sup>371</sup> What the dual identity, which culminates in the extreme experience of nausea, ultimately signifies is the fact that the *moi* and the *soi* are essentially “out of joint” from the outset—it is the primordial disjointedness of the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* that undermines the bourgeois conception of being which has long been manipulated by Western philosophy. Thus, the identity of the *moi* is not something settled in the *chez-soi* into which transcendence is absorbed in midst of the transcendental reflection (immanent transcendence) or the thinking of Being (finite transcendence). For Levinas, rather, it is in the out-of-joint moment that the brutality of pure being takes on the radical sense of excedence, whose signification consists neither in simply leaving being behind nor in obtaining an explicit and authentic comprehension of Being but in being riveted to being as the unbearable brutality of being, which incites the desire for elsewhere than being and for otherwise than being.

### **2-3. An-arche of *Il y a* Prior to Arche of *Es Gibt***

In *On Evasion*, Levinas attempts to reveal the pure nudity of *être*, in which the *moi* is out of joint with the *soi*, through the analysis of the affective phenomena. In the seminal text entitled

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<sup>369</sup> OE, 67; DE, 116.

<sup>370</sup> OE, 66; DE, 116.

<sup>371</sup> OE, 67; DE, 116.

“*Il y a*” (1946)<sup>372</sup> mostly written in the Stalag and later incorporated into *Existence and Existent* (1947),<sup>373</sup> he becomes more radical in inquiring into the pure depth of being even prior to the duality of the *moi* and the *soi*—it is anonymous existence without any existent: namely, there is [*il y a*]. Generally speaking, the French *il y a* is a simple translation of the German *Es gibt*, and they are translated as “there is” in English. But these translations overlook the different connotations of the terms to which both Heidegger and Levinas try to give. From the Heideggerian perspective, as seen above, the *Es gibt* can be translated neither as “there is” nor as “*il y a*” since they are the idiomatic translations that cannot convey the essence of Being as donation, generosity, richness, or abundance; instead, it should be literally translated as “it gives” in English or “*cela donne*” in French.<sup>374</sup> By contrast, Levinas does not accept the literal translation of *il y a* as “*es gibt*” in German or as “it gives” in English since his concept of *il y a* has no implications of donation and generosity that presuppose a non-historical source or metaphysical arche. In Levinas’s distinctive sense, the *il y a* conveys the verbal resonance of pure *être*, existence, or existing without any substantive implication; it should be translated into “there is.” Therefore, the term *il y a* signifies a sort of a “zero-zone” that preserves the impersonality, neutrality, and anonymity of pure existing even prior to the metaphysical arche of the Heideggerian *Es gibt* that refers to the plenitude and generosity of Being.

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<sup>372</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “*Il y a*,” *Deucalion: Cahiers de Philosophie* 1 (1946): 141-54. This work is originally written in captivity and then incorporated, with some modifications and supplements, into *De l’existence à l’existant* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Fontaine, 1947).

<sup>373</sup> The English title *Existence and Existent* neutralizes the implication of the original title *De l’existence à l’existant*. This work generally describes the movement “from existence to existents,” as the French title implies. In this chapter, I will deal with the first part, “from existence,” that is, *il y a* while considering the later part, “to existents,” in the next chapter.

<sup>374</sup> According to Marion, Heidegger’s term “*Es gibt*” does not allow the customary translation that “hides the semantics of givenness which structure the *es gibt*.” Marion, *Being Given*, 334, n. 60. While Levinas uses the German “*es gibt*,” Marion translates it either as “*cela donne*” or “*ça donne*” (33, 341, n.118), not as “*il y a*.” See also Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 102.



The precedence of the *il y a* or existence without existents over the *Es gibt* still remains problematic even when it comes to Heidegger's thinking-experiment [*Denkversuch*] to think Being without being. As seen above, however, Heidegger neither really means to think of Being without beings nor succeeds in thinking of Being with no reference to metaphysics. Although Heidegger speaks of Being without beings, his thinking continuously considers Being with regard to beings in order not to think of Being metaphysically, as his analyses of *Kehre*, *Austrag*, *Unterschied*, and *Ereignis* indicate. Moreover, his thinking-experiment fails to think of Being non-metaphysically when he assumes an ahistorical, onto-theological, or metaphysical arche as the *Es* that gives, grants, and sends Being. In *Time and the Other*, contemporary with *Existence and Existents*, Levinas points out the *profound* banality of Heidegger's thought when Heidegger distinguishes the verbal Being and the substantive beings. Heidegger's distinction between Being and beings only knows of the distinctive relation between the two but never of a "separation"<sup>375</sup> that unties the binding tie between Being and beings. In his analysis of the turning relation [*Kehre*] between Being and Dasein in the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*], the function of the "between" does not serve to leave both Being and beings on their own but to appropriate [*ereignen*] each other, as Heidegger himself states: "the 'between' of Da-sein overcomes the separation [*χωρισμός*]...by transforming together, into the simultaneity, both *Seyn* and beings."<sup>376</sup> Levinas goes on to point out Heidegger's banality without explicitly indicating his name: "[E]xisting does not exit. It is the existent that exists. And the fact of having recourse to what does not exist, in order to understand what does exist, hardly constitutes a revolution in philosophy."<sup>377</sup> For Levinas, a genuine revolution begins with the separation of Being from beings, the detachment of pure existence that does not exit from

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<sup>375</sup> TO, 45; TA, 24.

<sup>376</sup> BP, 14.

<sup>377</sup> TO, 46; TA, 25.

the existents that exist. Thus, Heidegger's banality consists in the fact that he thinks of what does not exist (Being) with reference to—rather than in its separation from—what does exist (beings): “Existing is always grasped in the existent...[and] existing is always possessed by someone.”<sup>378</sup> Although Heidegger profoundly explicates the ontological difference of Being from beings, he fails to think of pure existing or *il y a* in a purely verbal sense, antecedent to the ontological distinction between Being and beings and even to *Ereignis*, *Kehre*, *Austrag*, *Unterschied*, and *Es gibt* that sustain the very distinction.

From this banal perspective, the idea of *il y a* is not acceptable since it is absurd to think of Being without beings; hence, it is not the thing as such that can be thought [*das Sache selbst des Denken*]. However, Levinas's concept of *il y a* is not a mere phenomenon that is intentionally constituted by the transcendental Ego or ontologically grasped by Dasein; indeed, it precedes all subjects, all objects, and all phenomena. Levinas thus states: “I do not believe Heidegger can admit an existing without existents, which to him would seem absurd.”<sup>379</sup> But Levinas seems to detect an absurd facet of Being without beings in Heidegger's notion of thrownness [*Geworhenheit*]—with no further consideration of it within the overall context of *Being and Time*: “One must understand *Geworfenheit* as the ‘fact-of-being-thrown-in’...existence.”<sup>380</sup> In other words, Dasein is thrown into the world “as if the existent appeared only in an existence that precedes it, as if existence were independent of the existent.”<sup>381</sup> However, the ontological concept of thrownness always assume both Dasein *qua* the existent who is thrown into and that into which it is thrown. In Heidegger's language, Dasein's thrownness into its there indicates the fact that “Dasein is

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<sup>378</sup> TO, 45; TA, 24.

<sup>379</sup> TO, 45; TA, 24.

<sup>380</sup> TO, 45; TA, 25.

<sup>381</sup> TO, 45; TA, 25.

thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the there.”<sup>382</sup> For Heidegger, existence is not something independent of or separate from the existent; on the contrary, it signifies the way in which Dasein is thrown into the there as Being-in-the-world.<sup>383</sup> Therefore, the essential banality of Heidegger’s notion of the ontological difference consists in the fact that this difference knows nothing of a primordial separation between Being and beings or existence and existents.

Furthermore, Heidegger—in particular, Heidegger of *Being and Time*—does not pay much attention to existence “before and after” Dasein, as his ontological view of death that concerns only the totality [*Ganzheit*] of Dasein’s Being patently indicates. In an authentic [*eigentlich*] sense, the scope of the analytic of Dasein is confined to the totality of Dasein’s Being as the “primordial ‘limit-situation’ [*Grenzsituation*] of Being-toward-death,”<sup>384</sup> which delimits the ontological boundary of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. It is Dasein’s facticity [*Faktizität*] that denotes its in-between modes of the as-soon-as-it-is-thrown-into-there and the as-long-as-it-is-there. Thus, Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death considers neither before Dasein’s birth (not-yet-being-there) nor after its death (no-longer-being-there), but only the existence *of* Dasein, *i.e.*, the way of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world (being-there: *Da-sein*). The basic leitmotif of the ontological difference in terms of the distinctive and yet reciprocal relation between Being and beings persists throughout Heidegger’s entire thought, as his later interview in 1969 confirms again the simultaneity or synchronicity of Being and beings: “the fundamental thought of my thinking is precisely that Being, or the manifestation of Being, *needs* human beings and that, vice versa, human beings are only human beings if they are standing in the manifestation of Being.”<sup>385</sup> For

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<sup>382</sup> SZ, 135.

<sup>383</sup> Heidegger writes: “The very Being to which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call *existence*,” SZ, 12.

<sup>384</sup> SZ, 349.

<sup>385</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Martin Heidegger in Conversation,” in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, eds. G. Neske and E. Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 82.

Heidegger, it is absurd to think Being without beings in that there is no Being without Dasein, and *vice versa*. Consequently, the thinking-experiment abruptly stops in the confrontation of this absurdity since it never conceives of the separation of Being from beings or of existence from existents.

### **2-3-1. Imagination: Kant**

Given that Heidegger's thinking-experiment halts in front of this absurd endeavor to think Being without beings, the perplexing problem remains: how to approach Being without beings, existence without existents, or pure existing. Levinas abruptly begins to make a radical attempt, probably called an imaginary-experiment [*imaginaire-tentative*], which exposes the thinking-experiment to the bold risk of thinking what it cannot think: the *il y a*. Viewed from Heidegger's thinking of Being of beings, Levinas takes up an inconceivable venture to elaborate on the *il y a* which conveys the absurd characteristic of existence without existents. In the beginning of *Existence and Existents*, Levinas heralds "a profound need to leave the climate of Heidegger's philosophy...by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian."<sup>386</sup> In order to approach existence without existent, Levinas's imaginary-experiment requires the desperate departure from Heidegger's climate governed by the thinking of Being in terms of beings. However, this deviation from the thinking-experiment does not mean the return to any pre-Heideggerian philosophy that does not even think of the ontological difference; rather, it is the radical attempt to specify the impersonal, anonymous, and *an-archic il y a* that precedes the ontological difference and even the ultimate arche as the *Es gibt*. This imaginary-

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<sup>386</sup> EE, 4; DEE, 18.

experiment regarding the *il y a* is markedly and exclusively presented in the early texts, *Existence and Existent* and *Time and the Other*, as follows:

Let us imagine [*Imaginons*] the return of all beings, things and persons, to nothingness. It is impossible to place this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of this nothingness itself? Something would happen, if only night and silence of nothingness. The indeterminacy of “something is happening” is not the indeterminacy of a subject and does not refer to a substantive. Like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of a verb, it designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action itself that somehow has no author, which is anonymous. This impersonal, anonymous, and yet inextinguishable “consummation” of being, which murmurs in the depth of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *il y a*. The *il y a*, in its refusal to take a personal form, is “being in general.”<sup>387</sup>

Again, Levinas makes some similar remarks on the *il y a* in a more explicit manner:

Let us imagine [*Imaginons*] the return of all beings, things and persons, to nothingness. Will we encounter pure nothingness?<sup>388</sup> What remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not something, but the fact that *there is*. The absence of everything returns as a presence, as the place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void, or the murmur of silence. There is, after this destruction of things and beings, the impersonal “field of forces” of existing...The fact of existing imposes itself when there is no longer anything. And it is anonymous: there is neither anyone nor anything that takes this existence upon itself. It is impersonal like “it is raining” or “it is hot.” Existing returns no matter with what negation one dismisses it. There is, as the irremissibility of pure existing.<sup>389</sup>

Both passages open with the same sentence beginning with the same word, “*Imaginons*,” that gives access to the *il y a*. Although these passages, at first glance, seem to depict a strange and quixotic situation that one can merely imagine in one’s mind as in unrealistic or fantasy literature, what Levinas intends to do with imagination is basically not to do literature and art in general, but to do philosophy. Imagination is not simply a creative source of literary activities that exclusively

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<sup>387</sup> EE, 51-2; DEE, 81 (translation modified).

<sup>388</sup> This sentence is missing from the English translation.

<sup>389</sup> TO, 46-7; TA, 25-6 (translation modified).

belongs to the domain of literature. Levinas himself does not deny that his idea of the *il y a* based on imagination is not irrelevant to literature, as he finds in Edgar A. Poe's work the literary indication of death that is "not dead enough" which alludes to "a very acute feeling of what we call the *il y a*."<sup>390</sup> In the Preface (1978) later inserted to the second edition of *De l'existence à l'existent*, Levinas retrospectively observes that being in a purely verbal sense refers to "anonymous being [*être*] that any being [*étant*] cannot lay claim, being [*être*] without beings [*étants*] or without beings [*êtres*], an incessant 'commotion' to take up again Blanchot's metaphor of an impersonal *il y a* as 'it is raining' or 'it is dark.' This term is fundamentally distinct from Heidegger's term of the '*es gibt*'."<sup>391</sup> In this regard, the provocative theme of the *il y a* Levinas attempts to imagine instigates the controversial debate concerning the relation of philosophy to literature in Levinas.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Levinas, "*Il y a*," 148-49 (my translation). These pages are not incorporated into *De l'existence à l'existent*.

<sup>391</sup> DEE, 9. This Preface is not included in the English edition (henceforth my translation). For Levinas's admiration of Blanchot's notion of the *il y a*, see EE, 58, n. 1; DEE, 89, n. 1.

<sup>392</sup> While appreciating Levinas's idea of the *il y a*, Blanchot does not hesitate to say that literature is "the only rendering of the obsession of being," pure existing, or the *il y a*, so that it is a "recourse against which there is no recourse." Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 332. By stressing the difference between Levinas's philosophy and Blanchot's literature with regard to the *il y a*, Georges Bataille criticizes the former's philosophical description in favor of the latter's literary performance. He writes: "Levinas describes and Blanchot cries—as it were—the *il y a*." Georges Bataille, "From Existentialism to the Primacy of Economy," in Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 168. Bataille argues that Levinas's philosophical description defines the *il y a* as "an object, *by a formal generalization* (in other terms, by discourse) that which, in the literary text of Blanchot, is purely the cry of existence" (169). Therefore, Bataille concludes that Levinas's philosophical discourse speaks of the *il y a* but does not accomplish it. In a similar vein, Jill Robbins contends that Levinas's philosophical description of the *il y a* renders what Blanchot cries as the *il y a* "hollow and void." Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, 98. Through constating what Blanchot performs in the cry, "Levinas uncries (de-cries) what Blanchot cries as the *il y a*" (97). According to Robbins, what the *il y a* performs is the "unassimilability of literature to philosophy" (99). Against these critical assessments of Levinas's view of art and literature, which misconstrue what Levinas really means by art and literature, Cohen provides a faithful account of Levinas's view of art. According to Cohen, Levinas is not hostile to art itself but to its aestheticism and its hubris. Richard A. Cohen, "Levinas on Art and Aestheticism: Getting 'Reality and Its Shadow' Right," *Levinas Studies* 11 (2016), 149-94. In this context, Gerald L. Bruns points out that Levinas's analysis of art brings to light the "non-aesthetic" dimension of the work of art by arguing that "Levinasian aesthetics is an aesthetics of darkness rather than of light, of materiality as against spirit." Gerald L. Bruns, "The Concepts of art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley & Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 213-14. By compromising the tension between Levinas's philosophy and Blanchot's literature, Critchley recognizes in Levinas's philosophical elaboration of the *il y a* "the moment of

However, Levinas's primary interest never lies in developing theories of literature itself but in ethics, which recalls his constant hallmark that ethics is first philosophy not literature whatsoever. From the literary works, nonetheless, Levinas retrieves insights, examples, or motifs in order to elaborate on the *il y a* in the context of Western philosophy and Heidegger's philosophy in particular. In the Introduction to *Existence and Existents*, Levinas points out that this work is "in large measure inspired by Heidegger's philosophy where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship that a human being sustains with Being."<sup>393</sup> However, the fact that Levinas does not explicitly refer to the names of his philosophical precursors in the treatment of the *il y a*—as in the cases of the above passages that contain heavy-loaded, toned, and philosophical terminologies, such as imagination, nothing, and negation—readily eludes the fact that he does philosophy in the form of literature, and not *vice versa*. In order not to miss the philosophical significance of the *il y a* that provides the decisive key to recognizing Levinas's early view on death, the passages in question should be properly understood against the backdrop of the philosophical tradition—especially, Heidegger's philosophy and its critical confrontation with German idealism.

If Heidegger considers Being of beings by means of the thinking-experiment, which renders all beings thinkable with regard to Being, Levinas imagines what the thinking cannot think, *i.e.*, existence without existents, or *il y a* in a purely verbal sense. For Levinas, it is the power of imagination that suspends all that is thinkable with reference to Being; thus, the imaginary-experiment is the radical venture that disrupts the thinking of Being [*Seinsdenken*] by driving it to the point of imagining existence without existents. This interrupting character of imagination on

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literature," which renders possible "the deeper function that the *il y a* plays in Blanchot's work." Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 68, 73, respectively.

<sup>393</sup> EE, 4; DEE, 18 (translation slightly modified).

which Levinas focuses becomes more obvious in contrast with the Kantian faculty of imagination in which Heidegger finds Kant's peculiar achievement.<sup>394</sup> For Kant, transcendental imagination is the productive, formative, and synthetic root that underlies two stems of knowledge: sensation and understanding. "The principle of the necessary unity of the pure (productive) synthesis of the imagination, prior to apperception, is thus the ground of the possibility of all cognition, especially that of experience."<sup>395</sup> The transcendental apperception of the "I think," which founds the unity of knowledge in apperception, is rooted in the *a priori* imagination that projects and guides all the acts of representation. At the bottom of apperception of the "I think" that makes experience possible, therefore, the Kantian imagination is the *a priori* source that serves as the productive, projective, and synthetic role.

In his reading of Kant's concept of the productive imagination, Heidegger traces the latent rudiments of the projective temporality upon which his *magnum opus* amplifies: "The forming of imagination is in itself relative to *time*....The pure imagining forms its fabric [*Gebilde*] from out of itself, as in itself relative to time, must first of all form time."<sup>396</sup> According to Heidegger's view of the Kantian imagination, the "I think" does not exist in its own but bases itself on the productive imagination in relation to time as pure intuition, which does not simply refer to "what is intuited in pure intuiting" but rather to "the forming of intuiting of what it intuits in *one*."<sup>397</sup> It is the one that prefigures Dasein of *Being and Time*. One of Kant's contributions is his seminal recognition

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<sup>394</sup> It is important to note that, as far as Heidegger's view on Kant is concerned, Kant's achievement does not consist in the fact that the transcendental imagination leads to the established ground through inquiring into what lays the foundation, but in the paradoxical fact that "Kant falls back from the ground which he himself had laid." Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 150. If the transcendental imagination is the most basic ground, in this imagination as the laying of the foundation, "Kant saw the unknown; he had to shrink back" (118).

<sup>395</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 118. For a general account of the Kantian concept of the productive, synthetic imagination in the context of German idealism and romanticism, see Gerard Gentry, "Introduction to the Significances of the Imagination in Kant, Idealism, and Romanticism," in *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism*, eds., Gerard Gentry and Konstantin Pollack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-23.

<sup>396</sup> Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 123 (original italics removed and italics added).

<sup>397</sup> Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 123.



of the temporal character of imagination that possibly anticipates the temporality of Dasein, as Heidegger puts it: “the transcendental power of imagination allows time as sequence of nows to spring forth, and as this letting-spring-forth it is therefore original time.”<sup>398</sup> With a focus on this prudent anticipation, Richard Kearney makes a somewhat strong argument that “what Kant and the German idealist called transcendental imagination is in fact a prefiguration of Dasein.”<sup>399</sup> Although the Kantian imagination could not be itself an exact figuration of Dasein, Kearney singles out the most rudimentary “kinship” running through both the Kantian “I think” and the Heideggerian Dasein, that is, the projective and synthetic power of imagination; then, he concludes that “imagination becomes another name for Dasein—or surplus being.”<sup>400</sup>

Given that imagination has been understood as the productive and synthetic power possessed by a being, an existent, or Dasein, Levinas seeks to articulate pure existing without any existent by means of the imaginary-experiment, by which he imagines what the synthetic power of the Kantian imagination cannot imagine or what the thinking-experiment cannot think. Whereas Heidegger envisages the projective temporality of imagination by recuperating the productive, unifying, and synthetic power of the Kantian imagination, Levinas conceives of the disruption of this productive and peaceful power of imagination by retrieving the Heideggerian difference not as a mere distinction between Being and beings but as a fundamental separation. As Heidegger’s interpretation of the Kantian imagination indicates that the productive imagination is the fundamental basis for the temporal subjectivity of an existent—whether the “I think” or Dasein,

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<sup>398</sup> Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 123.

<sup>399</sup> Richard Kearney, “Surplus Being: The Kantian Legacy,” in *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.* ed. Babette E. Babich, (Dordrecht: Springer, 1995), 83. It is interesting to note that, according to Kearney, Heidegger goes back to Kant in order to go beyond Husserl’s essentialist phenomenology by retrieving the Kantian concept of the productive, projective imagination that offers the key to the temporal constitution of Dasein. Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>400</sup> Kearney, “Surplus Being,” 85.

the existence of the existent or Being of a being can be properly understood in terms of time. This is what the essential argument of *Being and Time*, as the title implies that Being is considered in terms of time. For Levinas, however, imagination is not a faculty or power that an existent has in favor of the peaceful, undisturbed constitution of the existent; rather, it is the suspending power that is indispensable for imagining the possibility of the separation between existence and the existents by disturbing the productive and synthetic function of imagination. This disturbing power of imagination releases both the Kantian imagination and Heidegger's thinking-experiment from their overloaded reflection on the ongoing attachment of Being to beings and opens them to the barest status of being or existence in a purely verbal sense.

In the performance of his imaginary-experiment, Levinas's description of *il y a* remains quite apocalyptic, as he states, "what remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not something, but the fact that there is [*il y a*]." <sup>401</sup> His apocalyptic voice with regard to the *il y a* is already found in the opening of *Existence and Existents*, such as "a world in pieces," "a world turned upside down," "the twilight of a world," and "an end of the world." <sup>402</sup> For Levinas, these expressions seem to be "banal," but what they express is "authentic" nonetheless. <sup>403</sup> On the one hand, these expressions are banal, mythological, or even misleading when the *il y a* is understood as an apocalyptic situation following the total destruction of the world, as if the complete annihilation of a world produced the emergence of the *il y a*, as if the *il y a* followed in the aftermath of the destruction of an existent world. However, this apocalyptic assumption of the preceding world entails a metaphysical or ontotheological question regarding an origin, cause, or *giver qua* an arche from which the world emerges. Is not the history of onto-theological metaphysics, for

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<sup>401</sup> TO, 46; TA, 25.

<sup>402</sup> EE, 7; DEE, 23.

<sup>403</sup> EE, 7; DEE, 23.

Levinas, the history of asking and answering this banal question in terms of causal pairs of cause-effect, creator-creature, giver-receiver, author-product, and so forth? If so, the *il y a* subsequent to the preceding world cannot remain purely impersonal and anonymous since it is still entangled with its author as the existent *par excellence* who might make the beginning or arche of the *il y a*.

On the other hand, these apocalyptic expressions disclose an authentic feature of the *il y a* when they convey an etymological sense, “stripped of mythological overtones,”<sup>404</sup> of apocalypse, *i.e.*, revealing, unveiling, or uncovering of the sheer fact of existing even before the advent of all existents and their world—it is the uncovering of the *precedent il y a* that has been covered by the *subsequent* world. In a genuine sense, the *il y a* does not refer to what follows after the destruction of the world but rather to what precedes the transcendental or ontological construction of the world: “it is antecedent to the world.”<sup>405</sup> The aim of performing the imaginary-experiment is to strip off all the ontological coverings in order to disclose the *an-archic* situation of the mere fact of the *il y a* antecedent to the arche of *Es gibt*. Prior to the beginning of the world in which there is an author who makes the very beginning, therefore, the anarchic dawn of the preceding *il y a* has neither the Heideggerian *Es* that gives the *il* nor an ultimate origin, root, or arche from which everything else appears; therefore, the imaginary-experiment Levinas attempts to design avoids metaphysical questions that the thinking-experiment eventually could not avoid.

Unlike the *Es* of *Es gibt* that Heidegger deprives of its enigma by baptizing it with a metaphysical source or ahistorical arche, the *il* of *il y a* preserves its anonymous enigma because the *il* has no origin, cause, author, or arche that inaugurates its beginning. The *arche* of the enigmatic *il y a* lies in its *anarchy*; it remains anarchic from the beginning so that it precedes all beginning in which existents and their world come into being. This does not mean that there is

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<sup>404</sup> EE, 7; DEE, 23.

<sup>405</sup> EE, 8; DEE, 23.

“something” that precedes the beginning but that it is merely “there is” that has no beginning at all: “The fact of existing imposes itself when there is no longer anything.”<sup>406</sup> There is “there is” beyond the end of Dasein’s Being or on the hither side of the totality of Being-in-the-world in Heidegger’s distinctive sense. In the “there is,” there *is* nothing substantive that takes its existence upon itself. When it comes to the *Seinsfrage*, Levinas, above all, does pay attention neither to the way of something’s Being (Heidegger I) nor to what gives Being of something (Heidegger II), but rather to the bare fact of being *qua* “there is” prior to “something,” into which Heidegger’s thinking could not venture. Antecedent to the Heideggerian *Es* as the ahistorical *arche* that renders the historicity of Being comprehensible, the Levinasian *il* lacks any *arche* to make sense of the very *il*; thus, the anarchic enigma of the *il y a* stops Heidegger’s thinking and starts Levinas’s imagining. What Levinas strives to *imagine* is not simply a literary, mythological, or apocalyptic destruction of the world but the apocalyptic unveiling of the mere *il y a* whose anonymous, enigmatic, and anarchic characteristics can be properly appreciated in contrast with the Kantian imagination and the Heideggerian *Es gibt*.

### 2-3-2. Nothing: Heidegger

After imagining the destruction of all things, Levinas immediately asks: “Will we encounter pure nothingness?”<sup>407</sup> “But what of this nothingness itself?”<sup>408</sup> The fact that there is no longer anything means that there is nothing, that is, nothingness itself. What the nothingness signifies is that there *is* nothing and nothing else: pure nothingness, which Levinas designates with the *il y a*. After the return of all beings to nothingness or before the advent of all beings, what *is*

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<sup>406</sup> EE, 53; DEE,

<sup>407</sup> OT, 46; TA, 25. This sentence is omitted in the English edition.

<sup>408</sup> EE, 51; DEE, 81.

still there is “there is,” pure nothingness, or “being [*être*] in general,” which is neither derived from nor grasped by any being [*étant*]. Levinas here seems to make a Hegelian gesture in the *logical* consideration that pure being and pure nothing are the same. For Hegel, pure being is *logically* thought to be pure nothing since they are the simplest categories that lack any distinction and determination so that they are pure and empty in their immediacy: “Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.”<sup>409</sup> The identity of being and nothing entails or embraces a self-contradiction in the sense that being is being itself and, at the same time, its own other, *i.e.*, nothing. Formal logic simply dismisses this contradiction since it does not deserve to be thought. However, the Hegelian logic based on the dialectical, conceptual, and speculative thinking acknowledges that the truth of the identity of being and nothing does not lie in the indeterminate immediacy but in the very contradiction, the ongoing impetus that negates, transcends, and sublates this abstract immediacy. Due to the contradiction that does not allow both being and nothing to leave in their abstract, immediate, or separate isolation, the thought of being is thus logically in tandem with that of nothing.

The interplay of the first two categories, that is, being and nothing, stimulated by the contradiction then requires a third category of “becoming,” a dialectical movement in which being and nothing are distinguished from each other and dissolved into each other in the determinate process of becoming: “Their truth is therefore this *movement* of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming*.”<sup>410</sup> Hegel’s point is that pure being and pure nothing prove logically to be the becoming, which Heidegger calls “the first being [*das erste Seiende*].”<sup>411</sup> However, this

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<sup>409</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>410</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 60.

<sup>411</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Hegel*, trans. Joseph Arel and Niels Feuerhahn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 14.

does not mean that the indeterminate immediacy of being and nothing precedes or gives birth to the determinate unity of the becoming as if the first *Seiende* came out of the antecedent *Sein* that makes or creates it. Rather, the becoming of the being already embraces within itself pure being and pure nothing as its own necessary moments to nourish, develop, and mature itself. For Hegel, thus, the concept [*Begriff*] of being is not merely a substance in itself but the subject for itself in that the concept is itself “what is alive,” that is, the spirit in the dialectical movement that posits itself as it is (the moment of affirmation; the in-itself), differentiates itself from itself by actualizing or determining itself in relation to the other (the moment of negation; the for-itself), and reconciles its identity and its relation to the other (the moment of the negation of negation; the in-and-for-itself). Hegel’s peculiar concept of sublation [*Aufhebung*] illustrates this triadic structure of the becoming movement in which the opposite categories of pure being and pure nothing negates their abstract independence, isolation, or separation and thus become the indispensable moments of the becoming of the being in the synthetic unity.

From the Hegelian perspective, Levinas’s concept of the *il y a*, allegedly described as pure being or pure nothingness, is not the concept [*Begriff*] since it is merely presupposed without further conceptualizing itself in and through the mediation of its other; hence, it remains abstract, immediate, and empty. However, the essential point Levinas tries to make here is the very indeterminate immediacy of the *il y a* even prior to pure being and pure nothing that “the first being” takes as its own moments. Properly speaking, the *il y a* is prior to the binary distinction between immediacy and mediation, indetermination and determination, abstraction and concreteness, distinction and unity, and being and nothing; it would be the paradoxical concept that resists all the logical categories to conceptualize, explicate, or describe it. When Levinas speaks of the *il y a* in the names of pure being and pure nothingness, he never follows the Hegelian

logic; contrarily, what these names intend to reveal is what remains anarchic and enigmatic to the Hegelian logic—not to mention to formal or positivist logic: the anarchic and enigmatic *il y a* antecedent to the synthetic unity of pure being and pure nothingness in the becoming of the being.

According to Heidegger's reading of Hegel, the becoming of the first being is the dialectical unity of Being and nothing so that the dialectical movement does not allow an abstract separation—if not a difference—between *Sein* and (*das erste*) *Seiende*. In his reading of Hegel's *Logic*, what draws Heidegger's critical attention is this "if not," that is, the ontological difference between Being and beings. In Hegel's claim that there is no logical difference between being and nothing, Heidegger recognizes that "what in *Being and Time* we called 'ontological difference' [*Differenz*]" or even "the all-grounding difference [*Unterschied*]" is still veiled in the sense that "Being (in the broad sense) is conceived of *with beings in mind*, as the beingness [*Seiendheit*] of beings."<sup>412</sup> By reducing or sublating indeterminate Being into a determinate beingness of beings or into "the being that is most in being [*das Seiendeste*],"<sup>413</sup> according to Heidegger, Hegel fails to think of *Sein* as such; in other words, thinking for Hegel is the dialectical process of determining beings, which provides the perspective within which pure Being and pure nothing are logically thought. Due to its failure to think of Being or its oblivion of Being, Heidegger claims, "The *Logic* too is still and indeed *wants* to be: *metaphysics*."<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Heidegger, *Hegel*, 16.

<sup>413</sup> Heidegger, *Hegel*, 17.

<sup>414</sup> Heidegger, *Hegel*, 16. Incidentally, Marion points out that Heidegger proposes the twofold nature of the nothing, which appears within both Being and beings, on the one hand, and is reduced into Being, on the other. Against Heidegger's view that the nothing exclusively belongs to Being, Marion, inspired by Dionysius who defines God as "beyond beings" and as "nothing," suggests a non-ontological or theological interpretation of nothingness as God far beyond Being and beings. Jean-Luc Marion, "Nothing and Nothing Else," in *The Ancients and the Moderns*, ed. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 183-95. However, Richard Polt claims that Marion oversimplifies Heidegger's ambiguous notion of nothing by confining it to Being. According to Polt, Heidegger does not always relate the nothing to Being but employs it to refer to various phenomena, such as "inauthenticity, uncanniness, death, guilt, meaninglessness, and the withdrawal of Being," all of which ultimately "awaken us to the temporal finitude that binds Dasein and Be-ing." Richard Polt, "The Question of Nothing," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 72-3.

Provided that the ontological difference remains obscure in the Hegelian logic, the main target of Heidegger's celebrated question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"<sup>415</sup> that opens *Introduction to Metaphysics* and closes "What is Metaphysics?" is probably Hegel. Nevertheless, it might be surprising that the beginning and the conclusion of Heidegger's argument seem to be basically Hegelian; in other words, Being and nothing are not beings so that they are the same. However, Heidegger argues that Being and nothing belong together not because they are indeterminate and immediate as Hegel holds, but because "Being itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of Dasein that is held out onto the nothing."<sup>416</sup> For Heidegger, Being—whether *Sein* or *Seyn*—is not a being and no thing; thus, Being is itself nothing, the nothing signifying the fact that the no-thingness of Being is differentiated from the beingness of beings. The nothing delimits [*begrenzt*] or circumscribes [*eingrenzt*] Being itself as a mode of the no-thingness in which Being finds itself not as any being but as no-thing: "Being finds its limit [*Grenze*] only at nothing."<sup>417</sup> In *Being and Time*, this limit of Being is exemplarily clarified in anxiety that discloses the temporal finitude of Dasein in its authentic totality [*Ganzheit*]. For Heidegger, anxiety allows Dasein access to the nothing which renders all beings indifferent, meaningless, and irrelevant, by extracting Dasein from all relationships with beings, and then leads it to its own, proper, or authentic Being. In anxiety, nothing alone matters to Dasein who, accordingly, comprehends its authentic Being as temporal, historical, and finite; therefore, the ontological constitution of Dasein as the temporal finitude depends on the dialectical interplay of Being and nothing, as Levinas puts it: "The dialectic of Being and nothing continues to dominate Heidegger's ontology."<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> IM, 1; PA, 96.

<sup>416</sup> PA, 94-5.

<sup>417</sup> IM, 89.

<sup>418</sup> EE, 4; DEE, 19 (translation slightly modified).



However, the fact that anxiety arisen from nothing lets Dasein confront its authentic Being by expelling all beings does not lead Heidegger to conceive of Being without beings.<sup>419</sup> On the contrary, the experience of anxiety makes sure that Being is the Being only in and through Dasein as “the exemplary being [*das exemplarische Seiende*]”<sup>420</sup> who faces the nothing as the possibility of the impossibility of its existence; thus, the nothing allows Dasein and Being to come to their own in such a way that Being is always the Being *of* Dasein. It is the Being of Dasein that amounts to the ontological difference, which Hegel fails to recognize when he interprets Being *as* a (first) being, that is, as the becoming of a being. Prior to the relation between Being and beings depicted by either “as” (Hegel) or “of” (Heidegger) in terms of the dialectic of Being and nothing, Levinas attempts to imagine being [*être*] *without* beings [*étants*] or pure existence, since Being and nothing are merely “the phases of a more general state of existence,”<sup>421</sup> which cannot be constituted by either Being or nothing. When Levinas asks “But what of this nothingness itself?” his answer should not be found in the dialectical interplay of Being and nothing, which works in and through a substantive being—whether it is the becoming as the first being (Hegel) or Dasein as the exemplary being (Heidegger). Rather, Levinas’s answer lies elsewhere than Being *as/of* beings; it is existence without existents, *i.e.*, the anonymous *il y a* as being in general devoid of any substantive connotation that remains indifferent and antecedent to the ontological difference.

### 2-3-3. Negation: Hegel

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<sup>419</sup> Marion even argues that anxiety dismisses all beings in order to refer to them as a whole. Dasein in anxiety refers to all beings in such a way that it dismisses them in their entirety; hence, the dismissal [*renvoi*] of all beings presupposes the reference [*renvoi*] to them as a whole. The ambiguous meaning of this *renvoi* confirms “the essential indetermination of the phenomenon of the Nothing.” Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 177.

<sup>420</sup> SZ, 7.

<sup>421</sup> EE, 5; DEE, 19.

Strictly speaking, what Levinas imagines by means of the imaginary-experiment is not the *il y a* as such, but the return [*retour*] of it: “The absence of everything returns as a presence.”<sup>422</sup> The *re*-turn of the *il y a* explains why the *il y a* is not the outcome of the destruction of all beings; indeed, there is already “there is” in its return, as Levinas maintains, “the event of being...returns in the heart of every negation.”<sup>423</sup> However, it is not the Hegelian return of the absolute being that negates its determinations in the self-differentiation and returns to itself in the self-reconciliation. For Hegel, negation is not simply the “abstract negation,”<sup>424</sup> that is, the complete destruction or removal of all determinations which entails the mere fact that pure being is tantamount to pure nothing in the indeterminate immediacy. Rather, it is the “absolute negation”<sup>425</sup> that includes the affirming process by negating what is negated in the self-returning. In a spiritual, speculative, dialectical, or conceptual [*begrifflich*] sense, negativity instigates the self-recovering movement where all that is negated is preserved as sublated moments in the self-reconciliation; thus, it is “the innermost source of all activity, of living and spiritual self-movement,”<sup>426</sup> which takes all these determinations and distinctions as the necessary moments for the self-development. The Hegelian negation as the negation of the negation is the subjective, not simply substantive, work in and for itself that Levinas characterizes as the bourgeois identification of being. However, Levinas argues: “The negation that would be absolute through negating all existents—even the existent who is the effectual thought of this very negation—cannot put an end to the ‘scene’ always opened to being, to being in a verbal sense.”<sup>427</sup> The return of the *il y a* is not the outcome of the Hegelian negation, always involved in the subjective movement; rather, it merely returns as the pure being in general

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<sup>422</sup> OT, 46; TA, 26.

<sup>423</sup> EE, 56; DEE, 86.

<sup>424</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 74.

<sup>425</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 379, 488.

<sup>426</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 745.

<sup>427</sup> DEE, 9.

on the hither side of all negations that might commence and terminate the scene of being, as Levinas states, “Existing returns no matter with what negation one dismisses it.”<sup>428</sup> Therefore, what the return of the *il y a* signifies is the anarchical fact that being in general ceaselessly re-turns beyond the reach of all-encompassing, substantive, or subjective power of negativity.

#### 2-4. Anarchic Experience of *Il y a*

When there is nothing, there is still there is; the *il y a* returns—“whatever be the power of negation applied to itself.”<sup>429</sup> When it comes to the return of the *il y a* that dissolves all beings, Levinas comes to face the fundamental limit of phenomenology because there is nothing in terms of experience; in other words, there is neither something that is experienced nor anyone who experiences. However, what Levinas attempts to describe through the imaginary-experiment is not “something” that belongs to “anyone”; it is not lived experience [*Erlebnis*] of what presents itself in cognitive processes<sup>430</sup> but rather what this lived experience covers up, the anarchic experience of the *il y a*. This is what Levinas later calls in *Totality and Infinity* a “forgotten experience.”<sup>431</sup> The impersonal, neutral, and anonymous experience of the *il y a* remains inarticulate because it is covered, hidden, and forgotten by the *Erlebnis*. The primordially of the anarchic experience of the *il y a* is dissimulated by the phenomenological, ontological constitution structured by “the subject-object distinction by which we approach existents,”<sup>432</sup> such as the cognitive distinction between

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<sup>428</sup> TO, 47; TA, 26.

<sup>429</sup> EE, 60; DEE, 90.

<sup>430</sup> Husserl’s discussion on the lived experience, see *Idea-I*, 3-5, 62-4. For Levinas’s interpretation of it in terms of intentionality, see *TIHP*, 37-51; *TIPH*, 65-85.

<sup>431</sup> *TI*, 28; *TeI*, xvii. Levinas writes here: “What counts is the idea of the overflowing of objectifying thought by a forgotten experience from which it lives. The break-up of the formal structure of thought (the noema of a noesis) into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustain it and restore its concrete signification, constitutes a deduction.” Referring to this passage, Philip Lawton interprets this forgotten experience as the “deduced experience” since, for Levinas, the event of being that the intentional structure obscures is not lived through, but only deduced. Philip Lawton, “Levinas’s Notion of the ‘There Is,’” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 37 (1975), 482.

<sup>432</sup> EE, 52; DEE, 82.

noema and noesis or the ontological difference between Being and beings. The return of the *il y a* is not a mere phenomenon that appears to consciousness, reflection, or thinking but a sort of a para-phenomenon that transcendental phenomenology and fundamental ontology readily forget. The para-phenomenality of the *il y a* provides a minimum or anarchic economy of being which preserves the primordially of the forgotten experience of the *il y a* from the phenomenological, ontological coverings of the lived experience.

Probably, Levinas undergoes a sort of the forgotten experience of the *il y a* that remains “never forgotten.” In the unforgettable moments during the internment camp that throws him into the barest, bleakest, and darkest situation with no exit, no hope, and no light, Levinas goes through or endures the tragic experience of the nocturnal being immobilized as the imprisonment, confinement, bondage, and detention, from which he could not escape. The forgotten experience Levinas never forgets is the horror of captivity in being: “the fatality of irremissibility of being.”<sup>433</sup> In the prison notebooks posthumously edited and published as *Œuvres complètes tome I: Carnets de captivité et autres inédits* (2009), Levinas sporadically sketches this forgotten experience of the *il y a* in terms of the night of being: “*Il y a* = night of being, etc.”<sup>434</sup>; “The sense of a nightmare. Immobile reality—absolute stranger. Night in broad daylight.”<sup>435</sup>; “In the black white vision—being is black. The absence of light—being.”<sup>436</sup> Such initial, private, and existential—not existentialist—reflections from the early notebooks prepare the way for the philosophical meditation on the “night of being” in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and Other*.

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<sup>433</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 87.

<sup>434</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I: Carnets de captivité et autres inédits* (Paris: Grasset, 2009), 103 (henceforth my translation), 103. For a general account of the historical background from which the prison notebooks emerge, see Howard Caygill, “Levinas’s Prison Notebooks,” *Radical Philosophy* 160, (2010): 27-35; Sarah Hammerschlag, “Levinas’s Prison Notebooks,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 21-34.

<sup>435</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 87.

<sup>436</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 84.

The forgotten experience of the *il y a* is not an experience of light, which already implies a subject-object distinction, *i.e.*, the distinction between that which illuminates and something that is illuminated. In the light, all beings take their own forms, through which they are given and become comprehensible: “That is the complete concept of *form*. A form is that by which a thing shows itself and is graspable, what is illuminated in it and apprehendable and what holds it together.”<sup>437</sup> The light is then a phenomenological condition for all beings and their meanings since it illuminates and makes sense of them; thus, the experience of the light belongs to the diurnal realms of comprehension, intelligibility, luminosity, and meaningfulness. For Levinas, however, the luminosity of the light sheds light on the surfaces of all beings to make them intelligible, visible, and graspable according to their forms while veiling, concealing, or covering up the originary event of being and so rendering it nocturnal, clandestine, and forgotten. Then, the pure nakedness of being as the *il y a* resides not in the diurnal space in which all beings obtain their forms but in the nocturnal space, *i.e.*, the night where all the forms of beings are deformed. When all forms are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night invades as the formless, anonymous, and enigmatic *il y a*, which evades the seamless inspection of the light; the nocturnality of the *il y a* remains impervious to the luminosity of the light.

The forgotten experience of the *il y a* is the anonymous experience of the night, as Levinas states: “the night is the very experience of the *il y a*, if the term experience were not inapplicable to a situation which involves the total exclusion of light.”<sup>438</sup> However, it is not “the night,” Hegel says, “in which all cows are black,”<sup>439</sup> which expresses his refutation of both Kant’s skepticism and Shelling’s naivety with regard to the absolute knowledge. For Hegel, the absolute is neither

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<sup>437</sup> EE, 39; DEE, 64.

<sup>438</sup> EE 52; DEE, 82.

<sup>439</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 9

simply impossible nor immediately posited in the intuition or feeling; rather, it is the ongoing product of the spirit in the dialectical process of self-positing, self-differentiating, and self-reconciling. Hegel's position here can be summed up as follows: "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject."<sup>440</sup> However, what Levinas means by the night is more radical—or more skeptical than Kant and more naïve than Schelling—in the sense that there is no longer substance, subject, or even any *own* in it. It is in the *other* night that Blanchot sees "one of Levinas's most fascinating propositions,"<sup>441</sup> that is, the *il y a*. When everything disappears in the "first night," according to Blanchot, the fact that "everything disappears" appears in the "other night."<sup>442</sup> The appearance of the disappearance does not mean the presence of presence containing all the forms, which refers back to the luminosity of the light, but the presence without presence, with no form and no light. What disappears in the first night reappears and re-turns in the other night—it is the formless and nocturnal *il y a* where everything disappears, and the disappearance appears. The *il y a* never completely disappears—for it is not a thing—but continuously returns as the presence of absence or the presence without presence. When the anarchic experience of the *il y a* vanishes into the *bright* darkness of the first night, this forgotten experience *re-emerges* from the *obscure* darkness of the other night.

The nocturnal *il y a* returns not as the Heideggerian *Es gibt*, which is the generous, giving, and so substantively metaphysical source, but rather as the formless, chaotic, anarchic, and

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<sup>440</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 10.

<sup>441</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Our clandestine Companion," trans. David A. Allison, in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>442</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University Nebraska Press, 1982), 163. For a parallel structure between Blanchot's other night and Levinas's *il y a*, see Jacques Rolland, "Getting out of Being by a New Path," in *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 26-7. Critchley describes the experience of the first night as the "sleep of Dasein," which makes it possible for Dasein to preserve possibilities for tomorrow, for the future. On the contrary, the experience of the other night is an insomnia that does not allow the evasion of sleep. The other night is thus "the spectral night of dreams, of phantoms, of ghosts," which is compatible with the nocturnal *il y a*. In the other night of the *il y a*, there is something stronger than death: "the simple facticity of being riveted to existence without an exit." Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, 36.

“anonymous rumbling of existence,”<sup>443</sup> that is, “the impersonal field of forces of existing.”<sup>444</sup> In this context, the forgotten experience of the night hovers on the edge of phenomenology since any illuminating attempt to make sense of it veils, conceals, and covers up the nocturnal space of the anonymous *il y a*. The nocturnal return of the *il y a* does not coincide with the phenomenological movement toward “the return to the things themselves,” since the formless, nocturnal *il y a* never returns in such a way that it simply hands itself to the panoramic vision of the light; rather, the return of the *il y a* shakes, disrupts, and overflows the phenomenological light. The nocturnal formlessness of the *il y a* discloses “this paradoxical existence” in the sense that it returns neither as a phenomenon transparently present to the panoramic scene nor as a non-phenomenon completely absent from this scene: “It is like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being.”<sup>445</sup> The paradoxical feature of the *il y a* characterizes the para-phenomenality of being that cannot be exhaustively described by the formal, dualist categories of presence and absence, being and nothing, phenomenon and noumenon, and so forth.

### 3. Anarchy of *Il y a* and the Non-modality of Death

#### 3-1. Shakespearean Meditation: Ontology or Hauntology?

At the moment in which Levinas encounters the limits of an *ortho*-dox phenomenology that cannot properly capture the *para*-phenomenality of the *il y a* and so fails to describe the anarchic experience, Levinas returns to literature, especially that of Shakespeare, where he discovers some literary ingredients that nourish and enrich the philosophical formulation of the *il y a*. Levinas

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<sup>443</sup> EE, 23; DEE, 43. Adriaan T. Peperzak describes the formlessness of the *il y a* as “the anonymity of a dark, chaotic, and directionless rumbling without any structure or shape” as opposed to Heidegger’s *Es gibt*, which is “a generous and illuminating origin.” Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 212. See also Peperzak, *To the Other*, 18.

<sup>444</sup> TO, 46; TA, 26.

<sup>445</sup> EE, 59; DEE, 90.

even says in the 1946-47 lectures, “But it sometimes seems to me that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare.”<sup>446</sup> Levinas’s declaration deliberately recalls the famous *Meditations on First Philosophy* by Descartes (1596-1650) who is roughly contemporary with Shakespeare (1564-1616). Levinas attempts to situate philosophy within the literary context of Shakespeare by calling into question the conception of the whole or *bourgeois* philosophy. For Levinas, the whole philosophy begins with ontology as “first philosophy,” which flourishes in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* and then culminates in *On Time and Being* where he delves further into the *Es gibt* as *Ereignis* underlying—or undermining—the fundamental ontology. In this vein, Cohen identifies “the greatest originality of Levinas’s new conception of philosophy”<sup>447</sup> in his claim that philosophy is a mediation of/on Shakespeare rather than a meditation of/on Plato, Descartes, or Heidegger. As Shakespeare’s Hamlet speaks to his friend Horatio who represents a rational scholar or philosopher, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”<sup>448</sup> Inspired by Shakespeare—if not by Levinas’s reading of Shakespeare—Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993) points out the typical facet of this rational scholar who lacks a literary taste regarding ghostly features: “There has never been a scholar who really, and as a scholar, deals with ghosts...[and] does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being (‘to be or not to be’ in the conventional reading).”<sup>449</sup> For Levinas, and as for

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<sup>446</sup> TO, 72; TA, 60.

<sup>447</sup> Richard A. Cohen, *Levinasian Meditations: Ethics, Philosophy, and Religion* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 161. Cohen eventually argues that philosophy as a meditation of Shakespeare leads to “philosophy beholden to the higher exigencies of an ethical ‘way’” (168). The ethical way will be considered in the next chapter.

<sup>448</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.5.168-69. Henceforth, I will refer to *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, Second Edition, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Jean E. Howard, et al. (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>449</sup> SM, 12. It would be an overstatement to say that Derrida is directly influenced by Levinas in his consideration of Shakespeare; in *Specters of Marxism*, he mentions the name of Levinas only once in passing (26). Nevertheless, there is a significant affinity between Levinas and Derrida when they focus on the spectral role of ghosts



Derrida, Horatio's philosophy, representing the whole or bourgeois philosophy, fails to account for something spectral that disrupts, blurs, and threatens the borderlines of these sharp distinctions. It is in the paradoxical or in-between feature of the ghostly characters played in Shakespeare's tragedies that Levinas finds a philosophical significance, which leads him to retrieve the forgotten experience of the *il y a* from the bourgeois philosophy.

In a genuine sense, for Levinas, philosophy awakened by the Shakespearean meditation begins with what the whole philosophy has managed to exorcise or what Derrida calls "a logic of the ghost" or "hauntology,"<sup>450</sup> which has been expelled from the philosophical domain. The history of the whole philosophy is the history of exorcism for the sake of identifying, determining, and grasping everything according to the ontological mode of whether it is presence or absence, being or nothing, life or death, and so forth. The business of ontology *qua* the first philosophy is to exorcize hauntology so that it cannot capture the "in-between" modes of the ghost that haunts between here and there, now and then, being and nothing, presence and absence, life and death, and heaven and earth, as Derrida states: "Ontology opposes hauntology only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration."<sup>451</sup> However, hauntology does not assert any proper place within ontology by robbing it of its own *topos* but takes place on the hither side of its bourgeois, authentic, and illuminated *topos* by rendering its preoccupation with exorcism ridiculous and futile. Just as the ghost enters and exits, comes and goes, again and again in the darkness of the night—

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in Shakespeare's plays. Derrida develops—if not simply follows—Levinas's treatment of ghostly figures without indicating the name of Levinas, as Levinas himself usually does when considering his precursors. I will refer to Derrida's work in order to clarify Levinas's succinct and sometimes vague account of the Shakespearean ghosts. However, my references to Derrida's work do not aim at verifying his interpretation of Shakespeare nor comparing it with Levinas's view, which are beyond the scope of this chapter, but only at elaborating on Shakespeare's literary motifs in aid of Levinas's philosophical formulation of the *il y a*.

<sup>450</sup> SM, 78, 10, respectively.

<sup>451</sup> SM, 202.

“Enter the Ghost, Exit the Ghost, Enter the Ghost, as before”<sup>452</sup>—hauntology irremissibly returns on the hither side of ontology and shakes, dethrones, and threatens its unconquerable *topos*. The Shakespearean meditation re-conjures up the ambiguous, nocturnal figures of ghosts, phantoms, and specters that have been conjured away by the illuminating exorcism of the whole philosophy. The originary experience of the *il y a* obscured by philosophy’s continuing preoccupation with ontology can re-emerge with the retrieval of what the whole philosophy exorcizes; thus, the Shakespearean mediation departs from ontology and begins with hauntology. For Levinas, one of the great achievements of Shakespeare’s literature is to provide an opportunity to remove the bright rays of the light, which have veiled the anarchic experience of the nocturnal *il y a*, and thereby to lay bare this forgotten existence by means of deploying the literary instruments of the ghostly characters.

However, Levinas would not be concerned with haunto-*logy* itself since it can be involved in a self-defeating gesture. Indeed, ghosts are not something to be logicalized, rationalized, or thematized; ironically, the logic of ghosts consists in the fact that they always exceed and betray that very logic. Unlike Derrida’s central project in *Specters of Marxism*, Levinas’s primary concern—at least in his early works, such as *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*—is neither with “the political,” “the economical,” nor “the technical”<sup>453</sup> regarding the spectrality of the ghosts by virtue of thematizing, theorizing, and objectifying them; instead, his focus is on why every *theoria* necessarily fails to speculate, penetrate into, or see through the nocturnal spectrality

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<sup>452</sup> SM, 11 (italics removed). “Exit the Ghost” always presupposes “Enter the Ghost” as before, and, at the same time, “Enter the Ghost” always presupposes “Exit the Ghost” as before. The ghost does not take/have its own, proper, or authentic place but takes place everywhere without taking any place; it simply haunts.

<sup>453</sup> In his reading of *Specters of Marxism*, Critchley singles out these themes, along with “the hypothesis,” “the context,” and “the messianic”; he then explicates them with regard to Derrida’s deconstructive method. Simon Critchley, “On Derrida’s Specters of Marxism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21.3 (1995), 1-30. This article is revised and published in Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London & New York, Verso, 2009), 143-82. Henceforth, I will refer to the latter.

of the ghosts that repeatedly slips into and away from the luminosity of the light. Levinas would ward off any *theoria* about the ghosts since it readily falls into the temptation to make sure of and make sense of them through shedding light on them; it would then entail a certain dogmatism into which hauntology also might lapse. Indeed, on the hither side of a certain and meaningful *topos* in broad daylight, the ghosts return with the obscure, chaotic, and meaningless darkness of the night. All *theoriae* about the ghosts are already exposed to an ineluctable danger of a dogmatic exorcism that drives them into the luminous realm of the light and, at last, deprives them of the very spectrality. This dogmatic danger might be detected in the “hypothesis” of *Specters of Marxism* when Critchley argues that hauntology is the transcendental “condition of possibility for ontology” and so has “*theoretical* priority” over ontology.<sup>454</sup>

The hypothetical significance of hauntology in *Specters of Marxism* is centered in the haunted subjectivity that the presence of every ego—such as the Cartesian ego, the Kantian “I think,” the phenomenological ego, Dasein, and so on—is already invaded and haunted by the spectrality of the ghost. Derrida notes, “Ego [*Moi*] = ghost [*fantôme*]. Therefore, ‘I am’ would mean ‘I am haunted’”<sup>455</sup>; thus, the essential consequence of hauntology can be expressed as “I am haunted, therefore I am.” However, Levinas conceives of the impersonal *il y a* which precedes the advent of “I,” of “I am,” or even of “I am haunted”—not to mention all above-mentioned egos. Nevertheless, Derrida’s initial motifs for hauntology are basically resonant with the “principal

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<sup>454</sup> Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, 147 (italics added). Derrida is aware of the danger of dogmatism. Far from avoiding this danger, he runs the risk of theorizing the ghosts in the name of hauntology by means of his deconstructive strategy that makes it possible for hauntology not to fall back into any dogmatism. I will return to this issue in different contexts.

<sup>455</sup> SM, 166. Derrida suggests that the peculiar mode of the subject haunted by the ghost can be expressed as a “living-on” [*sur-vie*] or “survival” [*survie*] whose “possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity” (xx). The haunted subject survives or lives over [*sur* or *über*] the binary oppositions of presence and absence, of being and nothing, and of life and death. The spectrality of the haunted subject is not derived from ontology; on the contrary, ontology presupposes “the possibility of spectral survival” (185).

theme” of *Existence and Existents* in which Levinas elaborates on the nocturnal, impersonal, and forgotten experience of the *il y a*: “But of itself Being refuses the personal form, how then are we to approach it?”<sup>456</sup> Levinas attempts to find a possible answer to this question in the literary motif of the spectral or would-be [*prétendu*] characters, such as witches, shadows, bubbles, and ghosts that are prevalent in Shakespeare’s tragedies. The spectral experience of the *il y a* already anticipates an experience of the “*Es spukt*” presented in *Specters of Marxism*. Derrida writes:

The German idiom [*Es spukt*] seems to name the ghostly return, but it names it in a verbal form. The latter does not say that there is some revenant, specter, or ghost; it does not say that there is some apparition, *der Spuk*, nor even that it appears, but that “it ghosts,” “it apparitions.” It is a *matter*, in the neutrality of this altogether impersonal verbal form, of neither someone nor something—whatever it is something or someone, of a [neutral] “one” that does not act.<sup>457</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the experience of the *Es spukt* shares the impersonal, neutral, and indefinite character, that is, “the impersonal ghostly returning of the ‘*es spukt*’”<sup>458</sup> with the anarchic experience of the return of the *il y a*. The nocturnal, formless, and anonymous *il y a* returns, invades, or haunts like a ghost, which is neither a being nor non-being. From the phenomenological perspective, it haunts beyond the distinction of a phenomenon and a non-phenomenon, of a presence and a non-presence, of an appearance and a non-appearance; it ceaselessly reappears at the limit of phenomenality by disrupting those binary distinctions. The

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<sup>456</sup> EE, 3; DEE, 17.

<sup>457</sup> SM, 216 (translation modified). With reference to Freud’s expression *Es spukt*, which recalls Heidegger’s *Es gibt* or *Das Ereignis ereignet*, Derrida expresses: “it haunts [*ça hante*], it ghosts [*ça revenante*], it specters [*ça spectre*]” (166, 169). Derrida uses the neutral form “*ça*” which is not a real subject but a pseudo one, the pseudo-subject that takes the place of subject but does not take the role of subject; thus, “*ça*” does not refer to a subjective performer of haunting, ghosting, or spectering. In this regard, the above expressions do not mean that there is a ghost [*ein Spuk*] that haunts, ghosts, or specters; strictly speaking, any (in)definite article—*ein* or *der*—cannot be applied to *Spuk* since it, despite its noun form, is in fact not a substantive noun that refers to *something* or *someone* (in)definite; rather, it conveys the purely verbal sense of “*spuken*” in the form of “*Spuk*.” As soon as the verbal “*spuken*” is subjectified, substantialized, or personalized as “*ein/der Spuk*,” the nocturnal, impersonal, and indefinite character of its spectrality vanishes into the light that gives its definite form to it. Whenever a noun form “*Spuk*” or ghost is used in Derrida’s text and in this dissertation, it is important to keep in mind that it always conveys a verbal sense.

<sup>458</sup> SM, 217.

ghostly figure never takes its own, lightened, or authentic [*eigentlich*] place since it has no proper place to take at all. In other words, it does not take this or that *topos* where it finds its secure place to stay; nor does it take place in a sort of utopia [*ou-topos*] where it never finds any place to take; rather, it comes and goes on the hither side of *topos* proper which is still there but remains clandestine, unidentifiable, and indefinite. Properly speaking, it takes every *topos* without dwelling in it in such a way that it may [*peut-être*] waver, linger, vacillate, and sur-vive [*sur-vivre*] the in-betweens of presence and absence, being and nothing, here and there, and life and death by interrupting and crossing over the sharp borderlines; then, it perhaps [*peut-être*] *is* (present and yet absent) and, simultaneously, *is not* (present and yet absent). The mode of the *peut-être* between *être* and *néant* provokes an ontological question to pinpoint its *topos*, as the tragedy of *Hamlet* begins with the celebrated question raised by a watchman, Barnardo, who is in charge of identifying anyone/anything that appears to take *topos*: “Who’s there?”<sup>459</sup> However, Barnardo could not have his question answered, since what approaches him is neither something nor someone that takes any determinate, definite place. What takes place here, there, and everywhere is the ghost of Hamlet’s father that paradoxically in no way takes any place; there is no *topos* proper to the ghost. The proper topology of the ghost consists in the fact that there is no spectral *topos* proper; therefore, the spectral topology undermines the ontological constitution of *topos* that the whole philosophy seeks to establish in various ways.

### **3-2. Horror of Being Not Dead Enough**

In the prison notebooks, Levinas already touches upon some paradoxical, ambiguous, or equivocal figures that play the ghostly role in Shakespeare’s tragedies: “Shakespearean tragedy is

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<sup>459</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.1 (italics added).

above all the contact of human and nothing, of nothing in its equivocation, in its diabolic form: the lie (*The Lear King*, *Othello*), the equivocation of the witches (*Macbeth*), the phantoms (*Hamlet*).<sup>460</sup> The ghostly figure is neither living nor dead; it is not dead enough to be thought as death while not living enough to be thought as life—less than living and more than dead. It is neither present nor absent; it is not present enough to be thought as presence while not absent enough to be thought as absence—less than present and more than absent. It *is*, therefore, neither being enough to be *thought* as *Sein* nor non-being enough to be *thought* as *Nichts*; at the limit of the *Seinsdenken*, paradoxically, it haunts as the living dead or the absent presence. The peculiar characteristic of the ghostly character consists in “the insinuation of nothing in being (or being in nothing),” *i.e.*, the spectral equivocality of being and nothing; Levinas thus states, “Shakespeare is the fabricator of nothing...who gives the appearances of being to nothing.”<sup>461</sup> It is the character Hamlet that suffers from the ghostly figure, the ghost of his father who is neither dead enough nor living enough, neither present enough nor absent enough, but only ceaselessly returns on the hither side of the dialectical interplay between a being and non-being, presence and absence, and *Sein* and *Nichts* like the incessant return of the presence of absence, of existence without any existent, of the anonymous *il y a*, and of the irremissible being [*être*] without any being [*étant*].

In *Macbeth*, the equivocal trait of the *il y a* insusceptible to the dialectic of being and nothing becomes more palpable in terms of the spectral *topos*. The ghostly figures here appear on and disappear from the stage in the guises of bubbles, shadows, or witches that vanish after delivering the prophetic message to Banquo and Macbeth.

Macbeth           [...] Say from whence  
                           You owe this strange intelligence, or why  
                           Upon this blasted heath you stop our way

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<sup>460</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 174.

<sup>461</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 174.

With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you.  
 [The] WITCHES *vanish*

Banquo      The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,  
 And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?

Macbeth      Into the air, and what seemed corporal  
 Melted as breath into the wind. Would they had stayed?<sup>462</sup>

The bubbles metaphorically refer to the ghostly figures of the witches who *might* be here, there, or anywhere, but not as beings or existents taking their own *topoi*. Just as the bubbles in the water neither belong to the water nor take their *topoi* within it into which they could in turn be condensed or liquefied and so lose their “bubbleness,” the ghostly figures in the earth neither belong to the earth nor take their *topoi* within it where they would find their own place to dwell and so to be fully buried and totally dead. When it comes to the ghostly figures, paradoxically, to take their proper place means to be fully buried in the proper place which does no longer allow their return, and thereby which deprives them of their spectrality by reducing, solidifying, and ossifying it into the proper place where they are properly buried with the proper funeral rite.<sup>463</sup> As the above conversation between Banquo and Macbeth shows, however, they still doubt where the witches were (here, there, or anywhere); they even wonder whether the witches are now (present or absent). Shakespeare remarkably writes here in italics “The WITCHES *vanish*” rather than “Exit the witches,” as he would normally do; the witches do not simply exit or leave the stage but cryptically

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<sup>462</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.3.73-82.

<sup>463</sup> It is interesting to note that in his Lacanian reading of *Hamlet*, Slavoj Žižek provides a psychoanalytic version of exorcism, which nullifies or drives out the spectrality of the ghost into the symbolic system. According to Žižek, the ghostly return of Hamlet’s father is a symbolic indication of a “disturbance” in the symbolic order; due to “the improper funeral rite,” the ghost of Hamlet’s father returns to settle symbolic accounts in the symbolization. A decent funeral rite makes it possible for the ghost to be fully buried by integrating this disturbance into the symbolic system, in which the ghost no longer returns as the living dead. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991), 23. However, this psychoanalytic account of the ghostly return presupposes an authentic *topos* proper to the ghost in the symbolic order and thus tames, domesticates, and neutralizes the disturbing spectrality of the ghost within the symbolic system. What Žižek’s psychoanalytic treatment of the ghostly return misses is the fact that if there is a symbolic order, the order of the ghost always consists in disordering, exceeding, or betraying this symbolic order. The ceaseless return of the ghost interrupts the symbolic system without being incorporated into it.

vanish without leaving any clue for their whereabouts. Banquo and Macbeth suffer from the besetting question of identifying the ghostly *topoi* which expect the unexpected return of the witches at any moment at any place. It is a baffling problem that comes from the spectral equivocality on the hither side of the dialectic of being and nothing, presence and absence, and life and death.

Macbeth's suffering from the spectral equivocality culminates in the horrifying experience of the formless apparition of Banquo's ghost.

Macbeth      What man dare, I dare.  
                  Approach thou like the ruggèd Russian bear,  
                  The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcean tiger;  
                  Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves.  
                  Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,  
                  And dare me to the desert with thy sword.  
                  If trembling I inhabit then, protest me  
                  The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow,  
                  Unreal mock'ry, hence!<sup>464</sup>

On Macbeth's soliloquy, Levinas observes that "the horror does not come from the danger,"<sup>465</sup> which might threaten to kill Macbeth. That is to say, Macbeth is not horrified by something that takes form, such as a man, Russian bear, rhinoceros, or tiger, against which he is willing to face with no fear; rather, what horrifies him is that which does not take any form, *i.e.*, the "horrible shadow" of Banquo's ghost: "Take any shape *but* that [Banquo's]." It is the formless shadow or "the shadow of being that horrifies Macbeth; being is profiled in nothing."<sup>466</sup> Even during the day under the sun, Banquo's ghost returns as the formless shadow in the insinuation of being in nothing—it is the spectral experience of the "Night in full daylight"<sup>467</sup> or, to use Blanchot's term,

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<sup>464</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 3.4.98-106.

<sup>465</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 87.

<sup>466</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 88 (translation modified).

<sup>467</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 87.



of the *other* night. Beyond the reach of the luminous flux of the light, the ghostly return of Banquo's shadow that ceaselessly chases Macbeth alludes to the horrible experience of the formless, anonymous, and nocturnal *il y a*. In this regard, the ghostly shadow is one of the "fissures" through which Levinas attempts to seek "a decisive experience of the 'no exit' from existence."<sup>468</sup> The fissure of the spectral shadow that the light in no way fills up with its scintillating rays is the horrible *topos* in which the perpetual drama of the impersonal, anonymous being with no exit takes place. The fissures of the nocturnal figures, such as the witches, bubbles, shadows, and ghosts, impervious to the luminosity of the light, disclose the fundamental feature of the Shakespearean tragedy: "the fatality of irremissible being."<sup>469</sup> This is where the significance of the Shakespearean meditation for Levinas's philosophical consideration of the *il y a* comes in, as Levinas states:

The horror of the night, as an experience of the *there is*, does not reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain. That is what is essential in this analysis. The pure nothing revealed by anxiety in Heidegger's analysis does not constitute the *there is*. There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothing, fear of being and not fear for being<sup>470</sup>; there is being prey to, delivered to something that is not a "something." When night is dissipated with the first rays of the sun, the horror of the night is no longer definable. The "something" appears to be "nothing." Horror carries out the condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with "no exit."<sup>471</sup>

In this crucial passage, Levinas does not simply oppose the fear of being to the fear for being—in a Heideggerian sense of the term, the horror of being [*être*] to the anxiety [*Angst*] for Being [*Sein*]. What Levinas intends to show here is the primordial or anarchical fact that there is the horror of being even prior to the anxiety for Being. According to Heidegger, anxiety brings Dasein to the pure nothingness of its existence in which it finds its most authentic Being: "So if what anxiety is

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<sup>468</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 87.

<sup>469</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 87.

<sup>470</sup> The original reads: "*peur d'être et non point pour l'être.*" Probably "*point*" is a typographical error for "*peur.*"

<sup>471</sup> EE, 57-8; DEE, 88.

about exposes the nothing—that is, the world as such—this means that *that about which anxiety is anxious is Being-in-the-world itself*.”<sup>472</sup> In the confrontation with the nothingness in which Dasein is individualized by turning away from its everyday involvement in the innerworldly objects and in the mundane world, Dasein is anxious about its own Being as Being-in-the-world. At the bottom of the pure nothingness, the anxiety for Being thus becomes explicit in the mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*]; existence exclusively belongs to Dasein by extracting itself from the anonymous they [*das Man*]. However, Levinas attempts to reveal what underlies Dasein’s understanding of its Being as Being-in-the-world—it is being, pure existing, existence without existents, or the *il y a* before the advent of Dasein and its world, that is, of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world: “Existence is not synonymous with the relationship with a world; it is antecedent to the world.”<sup>473</sup> Prior to anxiety that individualizes Dasein in its own Being, there is the horror of an impersonal or anonymous being, of “immortality, perpetuity of the drama of existence, necessity of forever taking on its burden.”<sup>474</sup> As Macbeth’s horrifying experience of the ghostly figures indicates, the horror of the *il y a* does not come from a danger of death but rather from the fatal tragedy of the perpetual burden of existence with no exit; therefore, it is the horror of not being dead enough.

### 3-3. “Tomorrow, Alas! Existence Will Have to Go on.”

It is the horror of being that the pure fact of existing appears as the irremissible burden without exit, issue, evasion, or end. What primordially horrifies is no longer death as an end [*Ende*], which can delimit or enclose [*begrenzen*] the totality [*Ganzheit*] of Dasein, as Heidegger states: “Death is, after all, only the ‘end’ of Dasein, and formally speaking, it is just *one* of the ends that

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<sup>472</sup> SZ, 187.

<sup>473</sup> EE, 8; DEE, 23.

<sup>474</sup> EE, 58; DEE, 88.

embraces the totality of Dasein. But the other ‘end’ is the ‘beginning,’ ‘birth.’ Only the being ‘between’ birth and death presents the total [*Ganze*] we are looking for.”<sup>475</sup> Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death concerns neither not-yet-being-there (before Dasein’s birth) nor no-longer-being-there (after its death) but only the being-there [*Da-sein*] between two ends, *i.e.*, its birth and death, which circumscribes the totality of Dasein. When it comes to the ontological analysis of Dasein, death is itself appropriated into a “phenomenon of life”<sup>476</sup> that Dasein understands as the most authentic [*eigenste*], non-relational [*unbezügliche*], insuperable [*unüberholbare*], indefinite [*unbestimmte*], and certain [*gewisse*] possibility.<sup>477</sup> By reducing death into a phenomenon of life, for Levinas, Heidegger’s ontological treatment of death is a certain way out of the irremissible burden of being. The ontological analysis of death that circumscribes the totality of Dasein seems to circumvent the perplexing problem of death itself since it is concerned only with the way of Dasein’s Being—the being-there—rather than with death *per se*.

What the horrifying experience of the *il y a* discloses is that death is not a mere phenomenon that Dasein can [*kann*] understand [*verstehen*], embrace [*umfassen*], and grasp [*ergreifen*] as its most authentic “possibility of the impossibility of existence,”<sup>478</sup> but rather a para-phenomenon that overflows Dasein’s understanding, grasping, and comprehension. It is the limitless [*unendlich*] situation where any possibility, including Dasein’s own death as the possibility *par excellence*, is no longer assumed. Does not Levinas’s peculiar concept of the *il y a* describe this limitlessness of the anarchic situation where there is neither beginning nor end, neither *arche* nor *telos*? In the anarchic *il y a*, there is no possibility of the impossibility of existence but only the irremissible persistence of the formless, impersonal, and anonymous existence that

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<sup>475</sup> SZ, 373.

<sup>476</sup> SZ, 246.

<sup>477</sup> SZ, 258-59.

<sup>478</sup> SZ, 262.

cannot be applied to modalities, such as possibility, contingency, and necessity, all of which are appropriate to describe a particular mode in which “something” exists. At the stage of the *il y a*, death can be attributed neither to possibility nor impossibility since *there is* nothing and nothing else.

Levinas finds in Phaedra’s cry the *non-modality* of death, to which neither possibility nor impossibility can be applied. Phaedra’s suffering from the inescapable burden of existence that even death cannot dissolve is epitomized in her destiny condemned to take the endless [*unendlich*], unlimited [*unbegrenzt*], and irremissible responsibility for being, which will survive [*sruvivre*] or outlive [*überleben*] the totality of her Being as Being-toward-death. Phaedra’s tragic destiny signifies that “death is thus never assumed.”<sup>479</sup>

The sky, the whole universe is full of my forefathers  
Where may I hide? Flee to infernal night.  
How? There my father holds the urn of doom.  
Destiny placed in his ruthless hands.<sup>480</sup>

Phaedra recognizes that her personal existence is already committed to participating in the entire universe where her forefathers grip her own destiny with their ruthless hands, which allow “an existence no longer in any way private.”<sup>481</sup> In doing so, Phaedra’s own existence loses “this private character and returns to an undifferentiated background,”<sup>482</sup> to pure existence, or to the anonymous *il y a*; there is no longer *topos* for a personal, private, or *jemeinig* existence. These lines show that Phaedra is not anxious about death as the possibility of the impossibility of her own existence but horrified by the unassumability of death through breaking free from the perpetual, anonymous

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<sup>479</sup> TO, 73; TA, 61.

<sup>480</sup> Jean Racine, *Phaedra*, trans. C. H. Sisson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.6.1276-79. First three lines are quoted in EE 58; DEE, 88 (translation modified).

<sup>481</sup> EE, 58; DEE, 88.

<sup>482</sup> EE, 56; DEE, 85-6.

existence: “Tomorrow, alas! One will still have to live.”<sup>483</sup> What horrifies Phaedra is no longer the finite destiny of her own existence—in Heidegger’s language, “the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [*Nicht-mehre-dasein-könnens*]”<sup>484</sup>—but rather the fatal destiny of still-have-to-be beyond the totality of her authentic Being. Phaedra’s cry displays that the horror of being outlives the anxiety for Being; she has to live on, and hence (her) being will last beyond even (her own) death. Death is no longer a solution to the burdensome existence; it is not a door to get out of being. Already in his prison notebooks, Levinas writes, “death is not as strong as being. Even if it finishes being, it does not exhaust all that being has done.”<sup>485</sup> In no way does death do away with what being has done and will do, that is, the irremissible persistence of the *il y a*.

No longer does Hamlet’s famous question of “to be or not to be”<sup>486</sup> matter; indeed, it cannot be resolved from the outset because it is not a matter of an either/or question. What matters here is the anarchical fact that being has no exit since it has neither beginning that might begin being nor end that could finish being. The beginning of being precedes all beginnings while its end outlasts all ends; thus, the arche of being lies in its anarchy. The anarchic dawn of Levinas’s conception of being consists in the mere fact that *there is* (prior to *Sein* and even to the *Es* that gives *Sein*); in other words, on the hither side of the totality of Being, there is still “there is.” This does not mean that the Levinasian *il y a* simply embraces the Heideggerian *Sein*. Rather, what the anarchic arche of the *il y a* signifies is that “there is” elsewhere than *Sein*, which cannot be subordinated, absorbed, or totalized into Being. It is the Shakespearean meditation that awakens the whole philosophy to the most brutal and anarchical dimension of being on the hither side of what has been called *Sein*. The Shakespearean meditation leads Levinas to pay attention to the

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<sup>483</sup> EE, 58; DEE, 88.

<sup>484</sup> SZ, 250.

<sup>485</sup> Levinas, *Œuvres complètes tome I*, 174.

<sup>486</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.58.

tragic and horrible fact that *être* has no exit so that it still has to go on. Prior to the “to be or not to be” question, the fundamental question lies in the horror of the irremissible *être* that constitutes “the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy.”<sup>487</sup> Consequently, Levinas’s own meditation on the Shakespearean mediation disrupts Heidegger’s ontological view of death and thereby prepares the way for his extended elaboration on the ethical meaning of death, on which the next chapter will further amplify.

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<sup>487</sup> EE, 57; DEE, 87.

## Chapter IV

### Duo prior to Solo: The Paradox of Phenomenology of Death

The foregoing chapter has examined Levinas's early consideration of the *il y a* against the backdrop of Heidegger's concept of the *Es gibt* in order to disclose a sheer dimension of *être* without any *étant*, which has been covered up by the ontological layers of *Sein*. Whereas the Heideggerian *Sein* is always already thought in terms of *Seiendes* and *Dasein* in particular, the Levinasian *être* conveys the purely verbal sense of "to be" with no reference to a substantive *étant*, which Levinas designates as the *il y a*, that is, existence without existents. It is the brutal nakedness of the *il y a* that underlies and, simultaneously, undermines the ongoing complicity of Being and beings, elaborated in terms of *Differenz* in the Heidegger I and of *Unterschied, Ereignis, Kehre, Austrag*, or *Es gibt* in the II. In his initial treatment of the *il y a*, Levinas struggles with the difficulty of articulating death since there is "there is" and nothing else; thus, death cannot be described by employing any modalities, which describe a mode of "something" that exists, *i.e.*, a *Seiende* or an *étant*. In this regard, the early Levinas does not accept Heidegger's ontological interpretation of death as the impossible possibility of existence, which presupposes *Dasein* who exists in the world and, accordingly, determines its mode of Being toward its own end. As seen in the foregoing chapter, instead, Levinas takes advantage of the literary works—especially those of Shakespeare—which provide him with the way of thinking—or more exactly, imagining—the pure depth of being without beings with regard to death. With the literary benefit of the Shakespearean meditation on the ghostly figures which ceaselessly return like the formless, anonymous, and anarchic *il y a*, Levinas recognizes that death cannot be an evasion or escape from the *il y a*, an exit, which might offer an answer to the "to be or not to be" question. In no way can death be any mythological,

theological, or metaphysical solution to that question. The Shakespearean insight leads the early Levinas to conclude that death is never assumable in the pure existence without existents; existence never dies, but only the existents do.

This chapter will take into consideration the fundamental transition from existence to existents, as the original title of Levinas's early work *De l'existence à l'existant* intimates. If Chapter Three deals with the former part, "From Existence" without the existents, this chapter takes account of the latter, "to Existents" out of existence, with a focus on his conception of hypostasis, that is, the advent of the existent emerging from existence. In the hypostasis, which is further developed into a separate, independent, or atheistic subject in his mature work *Totality and Infinity* (1961), the problem of death comes to the fore in opposition to Heidegger's ontological analysis of death. As seen in Chapter Two, Heidegger characterizes death as the most authentic [*eigenste*], non-relational [*unbezügliche*], insuperable [*unüberholbare*], indefinite [*unbestimmte*], and certain [*gewisse*] possibility<sup>488</sup>; thus, death is the ontological locus where Dasein grasps its authentic [*eigentlich*] Being as a whole [*Ganzheit*]. For Levinas, however, is it not the case that the heroism, sovereignty, or mastery of Dasein culminates in the ontological understanding of death as the possibility *par excellence*, which individualizes Dasein to the point of confronting its own Being out of its having fallen in with the anonymous they [*das Man*]? Is there any relation in this authentic totality where the bourgeois identity of the *moi* and the *soi* is exemplarily achieved, and where all relations with something other than itself collapse? Is this self-relation a relation in a genuine sense? Finally, is death always already a matter of mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] as if it were mine [*meine*]? All these questions urge Levinas to seek to look at elsewhere than the ontological

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<sup>488</sup> SZ, 258-59.



locus as death, which allows him to conceive of an ethical relation between beings prior to the reference of Being.

This chapter will claim that in death, Levinas recognizes an elsewhere than the ontological *topos*; in other words, death is the enigmatic locus of the alterity of the other. The significance of the theme of death for Levinas becomes obvious in his attempt to find a genuine relation in the *para*-phenomenon of death. For Levinas, death is not a mere phenomenon that can be transparently understood as the possibility of impossibility, by which a relation between the *moi* and the *soi* is reduced to the self-identity. Rather, death appears as the *para*-phenomenon that overflows all understanding, comprehension, and identification and thereby that interrupts the bourgeois identity of the *moi* and the *soi*. The *para*-phenomenon of death sustains a distance, interval, proximity, separation, or transcendence that “[unties] the tie between the *moi* and the *soi*,”<sup>489</sup> which will be expanded into the ethical relationship between the same and the other in *Totality and Infinity*. This chapter will show that it is in the enigma of death that Levinas discovers the radical alterity of the other, by which the ethical relationship between the same and the other is concretized without relapsing into the self-enclosed identity.

### **1. Hypostasis: The Advent of the Solo out of Zero**

Before considering the way in which an existent or a substantive being [*étant*] emerges from existence or the pure verbal being [*être*], it is important to note that little attention has been given to the problem of *why* hypostasis, or an ontological transformation from existence to an existent, takes place. This problem seems to have to do with the theological doctrines of creation, which account for or justify the various ways of the coming forth of all beings from God as an

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<sup>489</sup> TO, 62; TA, 44 (translation modified).

*arche* and, simultaneously, of their return to God as a *telos*. The theological doctrines of creation refer to the divine providence, which explains the ultimate dependence of the entire creature upon the Creator. Levinas rigorously rejects any onto-theological account of creation and plainly confesses: “Obviously I will not be able to explain *why* this [hypostasis] takes place. There is no physics in metaphysics.”<sup>490</sup> As seen in Chapter Three, Levinas avoids a why-question precisely because it is based on a metaphysical or ontotheological idea which seeks a cause, origin, or *arche* to make sense of why all beings come into being and thereby explains away the primordial enigma of the anarchical *il y a*. The beginning of the hypostatic act, by which an existent accomplishes its existence, has nothing to do with any ontotheological narratives of creation. Rather, its beginning lies in its enigmatic anarchy that has no metaphysical source, which might account for “why.” The only thing that Levinas can do here is, he immediately adds, “to show what the significance of hypostasis is.”<sup>491</sup> When it comes to hypostasis or the birth of an existent out of existence, Levinas does not offer any genetic, theological, or ontological explanation but rather a phenomenological account, which discloses the significance of hypostasis against the background of Heidegger’s peculiar notion of *ekstasis*. This section will demonstrate that the significance of hypostasis does not consist in establishing the solitude of the subject or of Dasein in the authentic totality of Being-toward-death, but in preparing the way for producing the ethical relationship of the subject with its other whose irreducible alterity is embedded in the enigma of death.

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<sup>490</sup> TO, 51; AT, 31. However, Levinas does not entirely neglect the problem of creation as such. In opposition to any onto-theological view of creation, Levinas’s focus lies on a phenomenological view of creation. For a discussion on Levinas’s critique of the onto-theological doctrines of creation, see Drew M. Dalton, “The Pains of Contraction: Understanding Creation in Levinas through Schelling,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 6.6 (2006), 215-240. For an excellent analysis of Levinas on creation with regard to “Levinas’s philosophy of Judaism,” see Michael Fagenblat, *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas’s Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). However, Edith Wyschogrod finds in Levinas’s idea of hypostasis a trace of metaphysics: “The shadow of the metaphysics of substance, of the notion of ‘matter’ antecedent to creation, lurks behind such an idea.” Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>491</sup> TO, 51; AT, 31.

## 1-1. Hypostasis on the Hither Side of *Ekstasis*

Prior to the advent of an existent that exists, there is merely “there is” that has neither beginning nor end, neither arche nor telos; it is a zero-zone from which an existent emerges by rupturing this anarchical situation of the *il y a*. Levinas states: “Consciousness is a rupture of the anonymous vigilance of the *il y a*; it is already hypostasis.”<sup>492</sup> Hypostasis is the name Levinas gives to the rupturing event, which signifies “the suspension of the anonymous *il y a*, the apparition of a private domain, of a noun.”<sup>493</sup> In the uprising of hypostasis, Levinas does not envisage an opposite situation of the *il y a*: an existent without existence in which there would be no longer any relationship—whether a difference or separation—between the two. On the contrary, Levinas designates hypostasis as the *instant* event in which the paradoxical relationship between existence and an existent is produced, as he states: “What is absolute in the relationship between existence and an existent, in an instant, consists in the mastery the existent exercises on existence, but also in the weight of existence on the existent.”<sup>494</sup> The instant of hypostasis denotes the sheer beginning of an act of existence that characterizes the primordial relationship between existence and an existent not as something given or givenness but as an accomplishment, which appears as an inescapable burden. In the instant of the hypostatic act, an existent accomplishes its existence by gathering itself against the anonymous *il y a*, to which it is continuously riveted, and, on that account, the accomplishment of existence is experienced as an irremissible burden that it has to

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<sup>492</sup> TO, 51; TA, 31.

<sup>493</sup> EE, 83; DEE, 120.

<sup>494</sup> EE, 76; DEE, 113. Richard A. Cohen describes this paradoxical status of the instant as an original “conquest,” escape from the anonymous *il y a*, being, or pure existence and as “fatigue,” being riveted to being. Thus, the paradox of the instant consists in the fact that the accomplishment of existence is no other than the burden or weight of existence the existent painfully endures. Richard A. Cohen, *The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 138.

undertake. Consequently, the event of hypostasis is the rupturing instant by which the existent breaks up the anonymous existence in the very accomplishment of existence.

For Levinas, hypostasis in a primordial sense is the *conscious* event by which an *étant* becomes a subject of the verb *être*: “to be conscious is to be torn away from the *il y a*, since the existence of a consciousness constitutes a subjectivity.”<sup>495</sup> However, this conscious event of hypostasis does not refer to a cognitive activity which marks the intentional, theoretical, and transcendental characteristics of consciousness in terms of a noetic-noematic correlation. According to Husserl, the Cartesian ego as the *res cogitans* still belongs to an empirical, mundane, or vulgar—rather than transcendental, intentional, or phenomenological—world; hence, it remains a “piece of the world”<sup>496</sup> and so fails to take fully itself as its own *cogitatum* in the transcendental reflection. Husserl thus argues: “The expression *ego cogito* must be expanded by one term. Every *cogito* contains a meaning: its *cogitatum*.”<sup>497</sup> In the transcendental reflection, the transcendental Ego as the *ego cogito cogitatum* becomes the transcendental reference of the *Sinngebung* according to which all things, including the Ego itself who thinks of them, take place and obtain their meanings in the transcendental realm. By contrast, Levinas finds a more fundamental dimension of consciousness in the Cartesian ego as the *res cogitans*, which Husserl rigorously attempts to reduce to the transcendental sphere. Prior to the transcendental constitution of the transcendental Ego, Levinas argues, the ego has to take its own place or hypostatize itself at this very moment [*en ce moment même*] and in this place [*ici*]. The profound insight of the Cartesian ego, epitomized as “I am *something* that thinks,”<sup>498</sup> continues in Levinas’s later work: “I spoke thus of the ‘hypostasis’

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<sup>495</sup> EE, 55; DEE, 85.

<sup>496</sup> CM, 26. See also Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 15. For Descartes’s own reference to the *res cogitans*, see René Descartes, *The Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies. A Latin-English Edition*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 36-37.

<sup>497</sup> Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 12. See also CM, 33.

<sup>498</sup> EE, 65; DEE, 99 (italics added).

of existents, that is, the passage going from *being* [*être*] to *something* [*quelque chose*], from the state of verb to the state of thing.<sup>499</sup> Consequently, hypostasis as the conscious event signifies that the *ego cogito* has to be posited as something [*res/chose*], that is, the *res cogitans* which underlies the *ego cogito cogitatum*.

The hypostatic act that ruptures the anonymous *il y a* is not clarified in its cognitive, intellectual, or intentional power of consciousness but rather in its power to sleep, which suspends and localizes the very consciousness. Levinas writes: “Consciousness appears to stand out against the *il y a* by its ability to forget and interrupt it, by its ability to sleep.”<sup>500</sup> Just as the gleam of the light comes out of the darkness of the night, “the scintillation of consciousness” emerges from its suspension, sleep, or what Levinas calls “the unconscious.”<sup>501</sup> In the hypostatic act that interrupts the insomniac night of the *il y a*, the subject becomes capable of sleep. The rupture of the *il y a* does not require a constant vigilance of consciousness but the power to sleep, *i.e.*, the localization of consciousness, which consists in the act of lying down, of taking position: “To lie down is precisely to limit existence to a place, to position.”<sup>502</sup> Due to the power to sleep, an existent accomplishes its existence in such a way that it delivers itself to a place by taking its position and thus becomes the master of the verb “to be.” It is in this position that consciousness comes into being with itself; thus, the act of taking position conveys a hypostatic “transmutation of a verb into a substantive.”<sup>503</sup> Position here is not a transcendental, ontological *topos* in which a being understands itself, comports itself with others, and exists in the world, but a hypostatic place by which a being becomes the substantive subject of the anonymous verb “to be” by exerting a

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<sup>499</sup> EI, 51; EeI, 42 (italics in original).

<sup>500</sup> EE, 64; DEE, 99. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas also states: “Consciousness is the power to sleep. This leak from plenum is the very paradox of consciousness.” TO, 51; TA, 30.

<sup>501</sup> EE, 64-6; EDD, 99-102.

<sup>502</sup> EE, 66; DEE, 102.

<sup>503</sup> EE, 102; DEE, 142. See also EE, 82-3; DEE, 119-20.

mastery over the fatality of being. The work of hypostasis leads up to the solitude of the subject in this very moment of taking position here, in such a way that the subject posits itself as a solitary presence as it is coiled up within its own position over against the anonymous *il y a*.

## **1-2. Position: *Ici et en ce moment même***

In terms of both here [*ici*] and the present, Levinas explicates the term position whose hypostatic characteristics become apparent in contrast with Heidegger's concept of *ekstasis*. On the one hand, here [*ici*] is not there [*da*]. To be conscious is to have a place, torn away from the anonymous *il y a*—it is to be an “*ici*” in which one lies down and falls asleep. The act of taking position is a hypostatic moment of folding back upon itself, which is the instant of contraction, retreat, or “‘polarization’ of *being in general*.”<sup>504</sup> Just as the *res cogitans* is already a *thing* that thinks, Levinas states, “thought, which instantaneously spreads into the world, retains the possibility of condensing or shrinking itself [*se ramasser*] into the *here*, from which it never detached itself.”<sup>505</sup> Prior to thinking, comprehending, or referring to the world, the *res cogitans* takes its position to be here, not there whatsoever. By contrast, Dasein, literally to-be-*da*, already implies the world as soon as it is thrown into the there, and as long as it is there: “it is thrown in such a way that it is the there as Being-in-the-world.”<sup>506</sup> Heidegger's concept of existence characterizes Dasein's peculiar way of being-there as Being-in-the-world. In opposition to the mode of the presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*] that is present objectively “out there,” existence [*Existenz* or *Eksistenz*] points to the mode of Dasein's way of being-there, that is, the ecstatic mode of “standing-out into the openness of the there.”<sup>507</sup> The ontological peculiarity of Dasein's Being

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<sup>504</sup> EE, 2; DEE, 16.

<sup>505</sup> EE, 66; DEE, 101 (translation modified).

<sup>506</sup> SZ, 136.

<sup>507</sup> SZ, 442.

as being-there amounts to its ecstatic mode of being outside of itself to stand out into the there, in which Dasein discloses itself. The disclosure of Dasein refers to the existential fact that the Being of Dasein is in every case to *be* its *da*. Thus, the *Da* of Dasein is not an *ici* in here or a *là* out there in the mode of *Vorhandenheit*, but an essential disclosure as a “to-be-the-*da*,” that is, Da-sein in the mode of *Existenz*.

However, Levinas here asks whether the *Existenz* is the original mode of being and argues as follows: “To the notion of existence [*Existenz*], where the emphasis is put on the first syllable, we are opposing the notion of a being [*être*] whose very advent is a folding back upon itself, a being [*être*] which, contrary to the ecstaticism of contemporary thought, is in a certain sense a substance.”<sup>508</sup> It is, of course, Heidegger who typically represents this ecstaticism when he conceives of existence as an ecstatic substance. By rejecting a naïve conception of a static substance beneath the changing flux of time, Heidegger asserts that “the ‘*substance*’ of human being...is rather *existence*,”<sup>509</sup> which characterizes the ontological condition of the constitution of Dasein’s Being. However, Levinas states: “The *here* of consciousness, the place of its sleep and of its escape into itself, is radically different from the *Da* implied in Heidegger’s *Dasein*. The latter already implies the world. The *here* we are starting with, the *here* of position, precedes every act of comprehension, every horizon and all time.”<sup>510</sup> Thus, a being has to take its *ici* where it curls itself up to sleep and hence hypostatizes itself even before stretching out onto the *da* in which it can comport, reveal, or disclose itself. On Levinas’s view, the essential disclosure of Dasein as Being-in-the-*da* requires *something* that is disclosed—whether ontically or ontologically,

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<sup>508</sup> EE, 81; DEE, 118. In this sentence, if “existence” refers to the Heideggerian notion of *Existenz*, “*être*” should be understood as an “*étant*” or “*existant*.” It is important to note that, unlike Heidegger who attentively employs the distinctive terms of *Sein* and *Seiende*, Levinas is not always sensitive to distinguishing between *être* and *étant*. For the ontological difference between beings and Being does not matter to Levinas in the first place.

<sup>509</sup> SZ, 117.

<sup>510</sup> EE, 68; DEE, 104 (translation modified).

authentically or inauthentically—because it is not an “abstract being, hovering in the air, lacks...a place.”<sup>511</sup> The hypostatic act of position takes place prior to or on the hither side of the ontological constitution of Being. In the Cartesian insight of the *res cogitans*, Levinas observes the fundamental sense of a *sub*-stance as a hypostatic substance beyond an ontic-ontological, authentic-inauthentic distinction; therefore, a being *under*-stands to take its position *ici* antecedent to *out*-stands to exist *da*.

On the other hand, the fact that position is the hypostatic *instant* of taking place to be *ici* already implies an intransitivity or evanescence of the present. The present is not (yet) time—it is not a transitive moment in a consistent, linear, or chronological passage from the past to the future. Rather, the present is the instant moment in which an existent accomplishes its existence by interrupting the anonymous *il y a*. As will be seen, time comes from the other and hence surpasses the solitary, monist, and solipsistic moment of the present.<sup>512</sup> In this initial stage, the interruption of the present is the intransitive instant of initiating a relationship between an existent and existence in the moment of taking position here. Levinas thus argues, “the present is pure beginning,”<sup>513</sup> because there is no metaphysical origin, cause, or *arche* that renders its beginning possible. The present as a pure instant has no beginning or birth but is itself a beginning and birth, as if its point of departure appears only in the instant of its arrival, as if the latter alone announces the former: “each instant is a beginning, a birth.”<sup>514</sup> This allegedly anachronistic feature of the beginning characterizes an essential paradox of the present, as Levinas states: “Starting from this withdrawal at the heart of the present, the present is effected, and an instant is taken up.”<sup>515</sup> It is at the very

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<sup>511</sup> EE, 66; DEE, 102.

<sup>512</sup> TO, 51-4; TA, 31-4.

<sup>513</sup> EE, 78; DEE, 115.

<sup>514</sup> EE, 75; DEE, 111.

<sup>515</sup> EE, 75; DEE, 112 (translation modified).



moment of its retreat, withdrawal, or evanescence that the present effectuates itself. The accomplishment of a being in the burden of being consists in an intransitivity or evanescence of the present, not in the presence of the present in the transitive flux of time.

By contrast, Heidegger's ontological-ecstatic analysis of time does not allow this intransitive, hypostatic, or evanescent moment of the present. According to Heidegger, the ecstatic temporality of time is the "horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being."<sup>516</sup> As the title of *Being and Time* insinuates, Heidegger investigates the meaning of Being in terms of time. In other words, the meaning of Being of beings is exemplarily clarified in the ecstatic temporality of Dasein's Being. By distinguishing three "ecstases"<sup>517</sup> of temporality, Heidegger claims that the ecstatic character of temporality constitutes a coherent, consistent, and constant unity of these ecstases, in which there is no longer room for an instantaneous moment. Heidegger writes: "The unity of the horizontal schemata of future, present, and having-been, is grounded in the ecstatic unity of temporality."<sup>518</sup> This ecstatic-horizontal unity does not mean that three ecstases come and go in a linear succession of time or history [*Historie*], but that they concomitantly happen [*geschehen*] in such a way that "the unity of the future...makes present in the process of having-been."<sup>519</sup> Due to the ecstatic character of temporality or what Heidegger calls "the ecstatic

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<sup>516</sup> SZ, 17.

<sup>517</sup> The ecstatic feature of time is characterized by three dimensions of time that Heidegger labels "*Zukunft*" (the future or to-come), "*Gewesenheit*" (the past or having-been), and "*Gegenwart*" (the present or making-present). As the term *Existenz* already indicates Dasein's ecstatic mode of Being, that is, a standing out of itself and into the there, Heidegger states, "*Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-oneself' in and for itself. Thus, we call the phenomena of future [Zukunft], having-been [Gewesenheit], and present [Gegenwart] the ecstases of temporality.*" SZ, 329. For a discussion on three ecstases, see White, *Time and Death*, 96-103; Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 124-26; Feron, *Phénoménologie de la mort*, 18-20; Critchley, "Originary Inauthenticity," in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, 125-26.

<sup>518</sup> SZ, 365. Levinas comments: "The original fact would be existence where past, present, and future would be caught up at once, and where the present does not have the privilege of harboring this existence." EE, 101; DEE, 141.

<sup>519</sup> SZ, 326.

*stretchedness* of historical temporality,”<sup>520</sup> three ecstases are seamlessly interweaved in the history [*Geschichte*] so that the ecstatic temporality of time does not permit the hypostatic instant of the present.

The problem with Heidegger’s account of temporality, according to Levinas, is that the ecstatic temporality of time remains still abstract and fails to capture the concrete, instant, and hypostatic upsurge of the existent accomplished in the present, that is, in *ici et en ce moment même*. For Heidegger, the present is defined in terms of *ekstasis* by which it is integrated into the temporal movement of existence, and thus it cannot be understood without reference to the past (having-been) and the future (to-come). By contrast, Levinas describes the present in terms of hypostasis, the instant moment by suspending the anonymous being without any reference whatsoever to the past and the future. Heidegger’s ecstatic view of temporality neutralizes this hypostatic *moment* into the ecstatic *movement* in which “there is not that instant *par excellence*, which is the present.”<sup>521</sup> At the moment of positing hypostasis, the present derives its being neither from the past (memory, reminiscence, or heritage) nor from the future (anticipation or projection); rather, “the present refers only to itself, starts with itself.”<sup>522</sup> The intransitive moment of the present remains antecedent or resistant to—rather than constitutive of or conducive to—the continuous flux of time and to the ecstatic temporality of time in particular. The position as the basis of the solitude of the subject is produced in the very instant of hypostasis beyond or on the hither side of the ecstatic-horizonal structure of temporality: “The present is an ignorance of history.”<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> SZ, 409. The original reads: “*die ekstatische Erstrecktheit der geschichtlichen Zeitlichkeit.*” Heidegger states elsewhere: “Temporality is, as the primary outside-itself stretchedness itself...the character of the continuity and spannedness of time in a common sense has its origin in the primordial stretchedness of temporality itself as ecstatic.” Heidegger, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, 270 (translation modified).

<sup>521</sup> EE, 74; DEE, 111.

<sup>522</sup> EE, 71; DEE, 107. Levinas writes: “Positing hypostasis as a present is still not to introduce time into being” (TO, 52; TA, 32).

<sup>523</sup> EE, 71; DEE, 107.

Consequently, the hypostatic instant of the present, in which a being accomplishes its being and enters into a relationship to this being at this very moment [*en ce moment même*] of taking place here [*ici*], knows nothing of time and history.

Levinas suggests that a more crucial problem, which is entrenched in the ecstatic temporality of time, emerges when Heidegger grants the ontological priority of the future over other ecstases. Given that the ecstatic temporalization of time characterizes the coherent unity of three ecstases, which does not permit any instant moment, the ecstatic temporality of time comes to pass on the basis of the future. In section 65 of *Being and Time* in particular, Heidegger discusses the ontological primacy of the future, which culminates in his account of Dasein's authentic mode of Being as Being-toward-death: "the future has a priority in the ecstatic unity of primordial and authentic temporality."<sup>524</sup> This formulation highlights both the essential unity of three ecstases and the priority of the future over others. On the one hand, although three dimensions of temporality are exhaustively intertwined in the temporalization of time, Heidegger says, "temporality temporalizes itself primordially out of the future."<sup>525</sup> If Dasein were not thrown into the limit of its own temporal finitude [*Endlichkeit*], if Dasein, ontologically not epistemologically, knew nothing of death, and finally if its Being were characterized as infinite [*unendlich*] rather than as finite [*endlich*], any futural possibility would no longer matter to Dasein itself. Death as the limit or end [*End*] makes the future matter to Dasein.<sup>526</sup> The dimension of the future is itself the originary horizon, which renders possible any understanding of Being at all, and thus within which

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<sup>524</sup> SZ, 329.

<sup>525</sup> SZ, 331. The original reads: "*Zeitlichkeit zeitigt sich ursprünglich aus der Zukunft.*" Critchley depicts the primacy of the future as follows: "it is the anticipatory experience of being-toward-death that makes possible the *Gewesenheit* of the past and the *Augenblick* of the present." Critchley, "Originary Inauthenticity," 126. William Blattner even argues that the priority of the future explains "the nonsequentiality of the past and the present." William Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 118.

<sup>526</sup> For an analysis of Dasein's futurity with regard to death, see Iain Thomson, "Can I Die?: Derrida on Heidegger on Death," *Philosophy Today* 43 (1999), 32-33.

Dasein exemplarily discloses its authentic Being as Being-toward-death. According to Charles Guignon, therefore, the primacy of the future characterizes “Dasein’s authentic historicity.”<sup>527</sup>

On the other hand, the privilege of the future in Heidegger’s analysis of Being-toward-death, Chanter asserts, is intended to “redound to the account of Dasein’s finite temporality as a whole.”<sup>528</sup> As seen in Chapter Two, however, the finitude of Dasein’s authentic Being in its totality [*Ganzheit*] becomes explicit in Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of Being-toward-death as the possibility of the impossibility. If the priority of the future is to redound to Heidegger’s account of the ecstatic unity of ecstases, then, this unity is to rebound upon his ontological analysis of death, by which the authentic Being of Dasein as a whole is clarified. In this context, Jacques Taminiaux epitomizes the decisive polarity in terms of temporality between *ekstasis* and hypostasis as follows: “Finally, whereas the Heideggerian *ekstasis* is grounded in a process of temporalization which is focused upon the future of the end and deprives the present of all privilege, the point in Levinas is to grasp the hypostasis as an event which occurs thanks to ‘the very *stance* of an instant’.”<sup>529</sup> However, this contrast remains, in a certain sense, facile or even misleading since, when it comes to death, Heidegger does not belittle the present in favor of the future, as will be seen. More importantly, Taminiaux’s simple contrast readily overlooks the pivotal point Levinas attempts to make in his critical interrogation of Heidegger’s temporality. Levinas’s complaint does not merely come from the fact that Heidegger’s emphasis on the future in the temporal-ecstatic unity downplays all the privilege of the present, as if Levinas would reject the priority of the future in order to restore the original privilege of the present—as if, Taminiaux states again, “Levinas

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<sup>527</sup> Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 226. See also Iain Thomson, “Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death,” *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 14 (2009), 38, n. 13.

<sup>528</sup> Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 111. See also Françoise Dastur, “The Ekstatico-horizonal Constitution of Temporality,” in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. Christopher Macann (New York: Routledge, 1996), 158-70.

<sup>529</sup> Jacques Taminiaux, “The Early Levinas’s Reply to Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23 (1997), 34.

deliberately resists Heidegger's emphasis on the priority of the future."<sup>530</sup> On the contrary, Levinas asks here whether Heidegger's view of the future obliterates its irreducible futurity by subordinating it into an *outstretching* presence in the guise of the ecstatic temporalization. The fundamental problem, on Levinas's view, lies in Heidegger's ecstatic view of the temporality of time—whether its focus is on the priority of the future or on the unity of ecstases—that reduces the hypostatic instant of the present into the ecstatic movement of time and, on that account, misleads a genuine sense of time and death altogether. As will be seen, the significance of hypostasis, which the ecstatic temporality of time neutralizes and hence fails to capture, leads up to the enigma of death where Levinas finds an alterity of the other who comes with time.

### **1-3. The Enigma of Death beyond Ecstatic Temporality**

Just as Levinas begins to elaborate on time against the background of Heidegger's ontology, many discussions of Levinas's view on time are presented in relation to Heidegger's ontological interpretation of time. Colin Davis, for example, points out that Heidegger not only offers "the powerful lens," through which Levinas himself reads critically Husserl's intellectualism, but also shows him a "way of understanding Being and beings as originally... engaged in time and history."<sup>531</sup> Indeed, there are some commentators who attend to the similarities or affinities regarding time between the thoughts of Heidegger and Levinas. Feron argues, "the Levinasian analysis of time enters into *Sein und Zeit* with such an acuity, with an exemplary rigorousness, with such a depth that it can be no longer a question of a simple antagonism between two

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<sup>530</sup> Taminioux, "The Early Levinas's Reply to Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology," 36.

<sup>531</sup> Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1999), 14-5. Edith Wyschogrod even writes that Levinas discerns in the work of Heidegger "more than a recovery of authentic temporality, of primordial relations to the world that lies outside the sphere of cognition and reflective consciousness"—it is an affective or what Levinas calls "pathetic" element that resists intellectualist, theoretical, or transcendental speculation. Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 200), 13.

thoughts.”<sup>532</sup> With a focus on Heidegger’s later conception of time and finitude, to which Levinas rarely pays attention, Emilia Angelova also attempts to discover a “closer affinity between Heidegger and Levinas than Levinas might admit.”<sup>533</sup> In this vein, Tina Chanter proposes, “Levinas’s thoughts on time will remain inaccessible unless they are understood as having emerged out of what was, at least initially, his wholesome immersion in Heidegger’s critique of the traditional metaphysical view of time in *Being and Time*.”<sup>534</sup> Iain Thomson, as a serious and faithful interpreter of Heidegger, observes how profoundly Heidegger inspires Levinas’s understanding of time and death, and then labels Levinas as a “post-Heideggerian thinker,” who is “working critically against the background and within the perspective opened by Heidegger.”<sup>535</sup> Nevertheless, there could be an apparent danger that marginalizes, as Richard A. Cohen insists, Levinas’s core thesis on “veritable time,” which consists in “the rupture of contemporaneity” between the other’s time and my time when Heidegger’s influence on Levinas is overestimated.<sup>536</sup>

Although it cannot be denied that Heidegger certainly motivates Levinas’s consideration of time, as well as there could be parallel structures apropos of time between two thinkers, this section will show that Levinas’s peculiar conception of time is formulated in opposition to Heidegger’s, and the opposition becomes more explicit in his interrogation of Heidegger’s thanatology. Despite his debt to Heidegger, Levinas’s central claim about death, which runs

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<sup>532</sup> Feron, *Phénoménologie de la mort*, 16-7. He continues to seek the parallel structures of time between two thinkers: past (the always-already of the thrownness and the immemorial past of the absolute Other), present (being-in-the-world-with-another and an ipseity in the proximity of another), and future (projection as being-ahead-of-itself and substitution of myself beyond myself for another), 18-20.

<sup>533</sup> Emilia Angelova, “Time’s Disquiet and Unrest: The Affinity between Heidegger and Levinas,” in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, 86.

<sup>534</sup> Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 1.

<sup>535</sup> Thomson, “Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death,” 27.

<sup>536</sup> Cohen, *Elevations*, 146-47. Cohen here depicts Levinas’s veritable time as “ethical intersubjective time” based on “the unequalled directedness of face-to-face encounter” (133). Hence, veritable time is neither objective nor subjective but intersubjective and occurs not simultaneously or synchronically but disjointedly or diachronically. In a similar vein, Yael Lin opposes Levinas’s intersubjective time to Heidegger’s individual time. Yael Lin, *The Intersubjectivity of Time: Levinas and Infinite Responsibility* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2013), 3, 54-6.

through his consistent suspicion against the ontological-existential view of time, cannot prevent him from attempting to leave the Heideggerian climate and the ontological perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to Levinas's critical engagement of Heidegger's understanding of time in terms of death, apart from trivial or superficial affinities between the two that ward off access to the kernel of Levinas's consideration of time and death.

The opening of *Time and the Other* begins by alluding to Levinas's seminal idea of time as opposed to Heidegger's ontological view of ecstatic temporality: "time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but...the very relationship of the subject with the other."<sup>537</sup> Whereas Heidegger presents time as the ontological achievement of the heroic and solitary Dasein whose existential mode of Being remains oriented toward death as the possibility of the impossibility, Levinas insists that time has not yet been introduced to the solitude of the subject. It is important for Levinas to first establish the intransitive, separate solitude that paves the way for being opened up by the enigma of death in which a true dimension of time is enshrined. Before moving on to discussing Levinas's interpretation of time in terms of death, it is worthwhile to consider exactly what Heidegger means by death as the "possibility" of the impossibility since, as Derrida points out in his reading of *Being and Time*, "a certain thinking of the *possible* is at the heart of the existential analysis of death."<sup>538</sup> Accordingly, the elucidation of this possibility will demonstrate how Heidegger obliterates the enigma of death, which in fact Levinas attempts to retrieve from the ontological and architectonic constitution of the ecstatic temporality.

For Heidegger, death is not a mere impossibility of existence or a cessation of being, but the possibility of the impossibility of existence, of nothingness, or of no-longer-being-able-to-be-

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<sup>537</sup> OT, 39; TA, 17.

<sup>538</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 62.

there; it is “the possibility of the very impossibility of Dasein.”<sup>539</sup> In a lecture delivered in 1946 at a conference of the Club *Maintenant* in which Levinas participated, Jean Wahl misleadingly presented Heidegger’s view of death by converting a simple, yet subtle formula of “the possibility of the impossibility” into “the impossibility of all possibility.”<sup>540</sup> Wahl stated that the moment of death “will come when there will be no more possibilities,”<sup>541</sup> as if it would be *at* the moment that all possibilities are no longer possible and hence remain impossible. “At the terminus,” he continued, “there is always death as the impossibility of possibility.”<sup>542</sup> However, this is exactly what Heidegger rejects. For Heidegger, death as the end of Dasein’s Being marks neither a mere terminus of Dasein’s Being as Being-*at*-the-end nor the moment *at* which all possibilities have been actualized or consumed in the completion of its Being. Rather, it characterizes the authentic mode of Dasein’s Being as Being-*toward*-the-end, so that Dasein is always already toward its own end. Hence, death is not the possible impossibility in which all possibilities are no longer available, but the impossible possibility that makes all other possibilities possible. In a discussion following Wahl’s lecture, Levinas clarified this point as follows: “Which permits possibility ever to remain possibility, so much so that the moment at which it is exhausted is: death.”<sup>543</sup> For Heidegger, and

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<sup>539</sup> SZ, 250. The original reads: “*die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit.*” Although both Macquarrie & Robinson and Stambaugh translate “*schlechthinnigen*” as “absolute,” which is an ambiguous and heavy-loaded terminology. As will be seen, moreover, the term “absolute [*absolus*]” will obtain its peculiar or etymological connotation in the analysis of the Cartesian idea of the infinity. In order not to mislead Heidegger’s use of possibility, the German term “*schlechthinnigen*” should be understood as “as such,” “very,” or “par excellence,” which conveys the authenticity and totality of Dasein’s Being. In Chapter Two, I have detailed Dasein’s Being in its authenticity and totality with regard to death.

<sup>540</sup> Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 14. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas comments: “Death in Heidegger is not, as Jean Wahl says, ‘the impossibility of possibility,’ but ‘the possibility of impossibility.’ This apparently Byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance,” TO, 70, n. 43; TA, 92, n. 5.

<sup>541</sup> Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, 14.

<sup>542</sup> Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, 18.

<sup>543</sup> Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, 52. It is interesting to note that Levinas later in *Totality and Infinity* proposes his view of death as the impossibility of the possibility, as Wahl interprets Heidegger’s view of death. But unlike Wahl who interprets Heidegger’s understanding of death, Levinas does not merely interpret it but presents his own view of death against the backdrop of Heidegger’s. I will come back to this issue later.



as Levinas rightly interprets him, death for Dasein remains the most authentic possibility from the beginning to the end, which circumscribes the totality of Dasein's *Existenz*.

According to Heidegger, death remains the possibility [*Möglichkeit*] *par excellence* so that it does not concern the Being of Dasein *in part*, as if it would *sometimes* or *in some cases* matter to Dasein and thus remain contingent or incidental to Dasein's Being. This is what Heidegger means by "categorical" possibility, which is applied to *Vorhandenheit* and not to Dasein's *Existenz*. When it comes to possibility as death, the totality of Dasein's Being is in every case at stake, and hence the possibility is imminent and immanent to Dasein. This immanent possibility belongs to an "existential" possibility, which accounts for the fact that "Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility."<sup>544</sup> That is to say, Dasein is always its own possibility—rather than actuality—to be able to be there [*da*] rather than to be merely out there. By appealing to this existential possibility, Derrida identifies two meanings that "co-exist in *die Möglichkeit*": "the sense of the virtuality of or of imminence of the future" and "the sense of ability."<sup>545</sup> Heidegger himself states: "Dasein's own able-to-be [*Seinkönnen*] becomes authentic and transparent in the understanding Being-toward-death as its most authentic possibility [*Möglichkeit*]."<sup>546</sup> The existential possibility *qua* death thus signifies the interplay of *Möglichsein* and *Seinkönnen*, which characterizes the ecstatic Being of Dasein in such a way that Dasein as the being-possible [*Möglichsein*] is in every case an able-to-be [*Seinkönnen*].

Dasein in its ecstatic mode of Being understands its death not as an impossibility to be no-longer-being-out-there, but as its most authentic possibility to be no-longer-able-to-be-there. Heidegger thus notes: "With death, Dasein...is *completely* thrown back upon its most authentic

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<sup>544</sup> SZ, 143. Heidegger here distinguishes an existential possibility that constitutes Dasein's Being from an empty, logical possibility, and from a categorical possibility of *Vorhandenheit*.

<sup>545</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 62.

<sup>546</sup> SZ, 307.

able-to-be.”<sup>547</sup> In other words, Dasein is itself the being-possible to be able-to-be-out-of-itself and to be able-to-be-ahead-of-itself to the point of anticipating the impossibility of its own existence by means of projecting itself toward nothingness, its end, death, or future to come. “Dasein is futural in a primordial sense,”<sup>548</sup> because it essentially remains being-possible in its able-to-be: “As being-possible [*Möglichsein*], Dasein...*is* existentially that which it is *not yet* in its able-to-be [*Seinkönnen*].”<sup>549</sup> Dasein takes a sheer impossibility of its existence as its own existential possibility to be able to be what it is not yet by anticipating its no-longer-able-to-be-there [*Vorlaufen*] and then “choose its hero”<sup>550</sup> who gains the complete mastery of its authentic Being [*Entschlossenheit*]. Due to the anticipatory resolution [*vorlaufenden Entschlossenheit*],<sup>551</sup> which explains a sort of transition or modification from inauthenticity to authenticity, this existential possibility of the very impossibility of existence is the impossible possibility *par excellence* that renders all other possibilities possible rather than the possible impossibility in which they all collapse. Thus, death breaks down all the inauthentic possibilities of Dasein to break Dasein itself from the “anonymous they.” Death does not break down Dasein itself but individualizes it. It is the heroism, sovereignty, or mastery of Dasein who is able to forerun even into the nothingness of

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<sup>547</sup> SZ, 250.

<sup>548</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, 265.

<sup>549</sup> SZ, 145.

<sup>550</sup> SZ, 385.

<sup>551</sup> SZ, 323. Thomson describes anticipatory resolution as a “revolutionary movement” by which Dasein “involuntarily” loses the world and then “voluntarily” turns back to it; it is a “movement in which the grip of the world upon us is broken in order that we may thereby gain (or regain) our grip on this world.” Thomson, “Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death,” 29. More fundamentally, this revolutionary movement is based on the *Existenz* of Dasein; Dasein is out of itself in order to return to itself. For Dasein, ontologically, the world is not an objective world out there but its own world. As soon as Dasein loses its world, it also loses itself, and *vice versa*. The fact that Dasein is or exists means that Dasein is always already in tandem with the world: Being-in-the-world. Ironically, the revolutionary movement turns out to be a conservative or solipsistic movement, which makes it possible for Dasein to remain with itself in favor of its “self-fulfillment in terms of becoming authentic” (28). There is nothing *other* than itself. For Levinas, Dasein needs itself but never *desires* other than itself. This is why Levinas attempts to leave the ontological climate opened by Heidegger. To cite Pascal’s aphorism, if Dasein says, “That is my place in the sun,” Levinas would respond, “That is how the usurpation of the whole world began.” This aphorism is one of the epigraphs appeared in *Otherwise than Being*. As will be seen, Levinas claims that my being unjustly takes the other’s place so that my freedom cannot justify my being, but the other alone can pardon it.

its own existence and hence takes death to be the existential possibility that renders its Being authentic [*eigentlich*] and whole [*ganz*]. The ontological achievement of Dasein culminates in the futurity of death as the existential possibility, which makes the future (to-come) matter to Dasein itself in every case and thereby marks the authentic totality of its own Being as the ecstatic mode of Being-toward-death.

Provided that Heidegger's analysis of death as the existential possibility relies on the futurity of Dasein, which leads to the architectonic constitution of Dasein's authentic Being as a whole, Levinas is critical of Heidegger's temporality not for granting the priority to the future but for failing to delve into the radical dimension of the futurity itself. Although Heidegger's account of Being-toward-death seems to focus on the future to come, this future is anticipated—albeit not actualized—as if the future would be already always *ek-sistentially* present, due to Dasein's peculiar mode of *Existenz* based on the interplay of *Möglichsein* and *Seinkönnen*. Whenever Heidegger speaks of the futurity of death, on Levinas's view, he never means the future as such but reiterates the present by making the future present: "Anticipation of the future and projection of the future...are but the present of the future and not the authentic future."<sup>552</sup> The heroic Dasein never tolerates the irreducible abyss between the future of death and the present in the sense that it appropriates even its no-longer-existence or nothingness into its own Being. It is, therefore, of no surprise to find that there is no conflict between the primacy of the future and the unity of ecstases in Heidegger's temporality. It is also the encroachment of the present on the future whose futurity is essentially neutralized, contemporized, and totalized in the sturdy architecture of the

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<sup>552</sup> TO, 76-7; TA, 64. What Levinas intends to argue here is not that the future of death is actualized or fulfilled in the present—just as the ripeness of the fruit represents its fulfillment—but that Dasein's peculiar mode of *Existenz* deprives the future of the enigmatic futurity and never allows an unsurpassable fissure in the ecstatic flow of time.

ecstatic temporality of time. Insofar as the future is anticipated, projected, grasped, and known whatsoever, it is dissolved into the totalizing synchronization of the present losing its futurity. Levinas argues against Heidegger, “This future of death determines the future for us, the future insofar as it is not present.”<sup>553</sup> This formulation, of course, recalls the Epicurean paradox, as Levinas states in the following:

This is why death is never a present. This is a truism. The ancient adage designed to dissipate the fear of death—‘If you are, it is not; if it is, you are not’—without doubt misunderstands the entire paradox of death, for it effaces our relationship with death, which is a unique relationship with the future. But at least the adage insists on the eternal futurity of death. The fact that it deserts every present is not due to our evasion of death and to an unpardonable diversion at the supreme hour, but to the fact that death is *ungraspable*, that it marks the end of the subject’s virility and heroism.<sup>554</sup>

This passage unambiguously displays Levinas’s ambivalent stance toward Epicurus’s view on death and, accordingly, toward Heidegger’s understanding of death. Although Epicurus already anticipated the futurity of death that is never present, he failed to recognize its meaning by simply dismissing it as meaningless and irrelevant. Reversely, in spite of the fact that Heidegger appreciates the (ontological) meaning of death, which is remarkably clarified in the virility, mastery, and heroism of Dasein, on Levinas’s view, his existential view of temporality could not capture the futurity of death by means of reducing it into the ecstatic unity of time. Levinas protests against Heidegger on the matter of whether the ontological analysis can exhaust the signification of death and argues that the authentic sense of death does not consist in the ontological accomplishment of the heroic Dasein. Rather, Levinas attempts to find the radical aspect of the authentic futurity in what the ontological architecture of the ecstatic temporality dissimulates—it

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<sup>553</sup> TO, 80; TA, 72.

<sup>554</sup> TO, 71-2; TA, 59.

is an unknowable, unfathomable, or ungraspable enigma of death. Death is unknowable, but it is not merely unknowable, because it exceeds all grasping and comprehension in which the subject exerts its mastery. Accordingly, in the enigma of death, “the subject loses its very mastery as a subject”<sup>555</sup> and thereby no longer remains a being-possible in its ability-to-be. The radicality of the future allows Levinas to catch sight of the mystery of death, which never comes out of Dasein’s possibility in the resoluteness of its futural projection but comes to it outside its possibility by undoing all possibilities. What the radical futurity of the future discloses is the enigmatic mystery of death, which Heidegger reduces into the heroic mastery of death.

For Levinas, the enigma of death vanishes in the dialectic of Being and nothingness that constantly runs through the ecstatic heroism of Dasein. In his early text written in 1940, “Ontology within the Temporal,”<sup>556</sup> Levinas already points out the solitude of Dasein in terms of the dialectic of Being and nothingness as follows: “In original time, or in Being-towards-death, as the condition of all Being, the person discovers the nothingness upon which it stands, which also signifies that it rests upon nothing other than itself.”<sup>557</sup> The heroic Dasein in the mode of *Existenz* is able to be out of itself to the extent that it projects its existence into nothingness and returns to itself with an authentic understanding of its own Being as a whole. The hero leaves itself in order to return to itself; ultimately, it is at home with itself [*chez soi*] in the course of leaving and taking itself again. As Being-toward-death, ironically enough, Dasein finds itself as Being-at-home-with-itself: “That relation with Being is the truly original interiority.”<sup>558</sup> In the dialectic of Being and nothingness

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<sup>555</sup> TO, 74; TA, 62.

<sup>556</sup> The early text “L’ontologie dans le temporel” is based on Levinas’s lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1940 and published later in *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. The English edition *Discovering Existence with Husserl* does not include this text (henceforth my translation). Taminaux claims that this text is not only “the most perspicacious introduction to *Being and Time*” but also “the firm, though discrete, anticipation of the criticism” fully developed in *Totality and Infinity*. Taminaux, “The Early Levinas’s Reply to Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology,” 29.

<sup>557</sup> DEHH, 128.

<sup>558</sup> DEHH, 128.

that governs the entire passage or modification from the inauthentic Being to the authentic one, death transparently appears to Dasein as always existentially present. However, beyond or on the hither side of this dialectic that entails the ontological solitude of the heroic Dasein and that allows nothing exterior to its solitary Being, Levinas asserts, death still remains ungraspable, unknowable, and enigmatic since it is in no way assumed in the guise either of the future of the present (anticipation and projection into nothingness) or of the present of the future (the being-possible and the ability-to-be what it is not yet).

Indeed, death never fully arrives as presence in the present, over which the subject holds sway in its solitude, but asymptotically approaches in proximity or nearness in which the subject loses its mastery, power, or sovereignty. The subject here undergoes “the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears. Absolutely unknowable means foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible.”<sup>559</sup> To the asymptotic approach of death, the subject is exposed, with no capacity to understand, grasp, or anticipate its own nothingness, so that it remains vulnerable, powerless, defenseless, and susceptible: “It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and passive. Death is in this sense the limit of idealism.”<sup>560</sup> This is why Levinas gives his special attention to Shakespeare who already mediated upon an impenetrable depth of death beyond the dialectic opposition of Being and nothingness, as he clearly notes, “*Hamlet* is precisely a lengthy testimony to this impossibility of assuming death. Nothingness is impossible.”<sup>561</sup> Levinas thus goes on to claim: “What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer able to be able [*nous ne pouvons plus pouvoir*].”<sup>562</sup> When Heidegger recognizes in this certain moment of death the most virile, masterful, and heroic power

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<sup>559</sup> TO, 71; TA, 58.

<sup>560</sup> TO, 71; TA, 58.

<sup>561</sup> TO, 73; TA, 61.

<sup>562</sup> TO, 74; TA, 62.

of Dasein—the hero who is able to stretch out, snatch, and, at last, embrace even that moment (nothingness) within its Being as its most authentic possibility—what he fails to recognize is the very significance of death. It is the unreachable, unfathomable, and unseizable “proximity of death”<sup>563</sup> that saves not only the futurity of death from the synchronization of the ecstatic temporality but also, for that reason, its enigma from the dialectical trap of Being and nothingness.

The asymptotic approach of death never concurs with the solitude of the subject, constituted by hypostasis at this very moment of taking position *ici*. Hence, the persistent proximity of death signals the end of the mastery, that is, of the sovereign solitude of the subject. This end does not refer to a Heideggerian end as the existential possibility that qualifies or authorizes the authentic solitude of Dasein but to “the limit of the possible”<sup>564</sup> that displaces or dethrones the very solitude; it is the moment of *de*-positing the position of the subject whose solitude is essentially “out of joint” from the outset. Although both the Heideggerian *ekstasis* and the Levinasian hypostasis seem to share their attention to the constitution or accomplishment of an ontological solitude, as Taminiaux rightly claims, “loneliness is not the ultimate feature of the hypostasis.”<sup>565</sup> Levinas thus writes, “To be an ego [*moi*] is not only to be for itself [*soi*]; it is also be with itself [*soi*],”<sup>566</sup> and “this other than me [*moi*] accompanies the ego [*moi*] like a shadow.”<sup>567</sup> That is to say, the ego [*moi*] neither totally escapes from itself [*soi*] nor remains at home with itself [*chez soi*], but chases or haunts itself [*soi*] in its out-of-jointedness with itself [*soi*]. What the hypostasis ultimately signifies is the fact that the solitude of the subject is already out of joint, fractured, disfigured, deformed, unhinged, deposed, or schizophrenic—it is rather a “dual solitude”

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<sup>563</sup> TO, 69; TA, 56.

<sup>564</sup> TO, 70; TA, 58.

<sup>565</sup> Taminiaux, “The Early Levinas’s Reply to Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology,” 48.

<sup>566</sup> EE, 89; DEE, 128.

<sup>567</sup> EE, 90; DEE, 128.

that debunks an inflated, masterful, and conceited identity of the *moi* and the *soi* based upon a bourgeois narcissism and that “awakens the nostalgia for escape.”<sup>568</sup> In spite of the fact that the subject “certainly recedes from itself, this stepping back is not a liberation. It is as if one had given slack rope to a prisoner without untying him.”<sup>569</sup> The tie of the *moi* to the *soi* is loosened, but not untied. In the approach of death, however, the subject, who remains disjointed, fractured, or dispositioned, finds itself in “relationship with what does not come from itself,”<sup>570</sup> so that it confronts that which it cannot enclose in its isolated, authentic, and solipsistic solitude. It is the radical futurity of death in proximity that discloses a deep-rooted—and yet veiled by the ecstatic temporality of the heroic Dasein who in fact remains the same [*même*], confined to the ontological prison—structure of the *de*-position or disjointedness of the subject. Therefore, the enigma of death releases the solitary Dasein from the ecstatic-ontological fetter by means of opening it toward a relationship with that which comes from elsewhere than an ontological *topos*, *i.e.*, what is absolutely other.

In the enigma of death, the subject encounters the other whose alterity introduces a genuine dimension of time into the subject. In opposition to Heidegger’s temporality of time as the horizon of Being of Dasein, Levinas argues that time does not occur in the relationship between Dasein and Being but comes from the relationship between the subject and its other. As seen above, Heidegger believes that time is the transcendental horizon of Being and that the meaning of Being is clarified in the ecstatic temporality of Dasein; the authentic time is understood in terms of the *ecstasis* of Dasein. In respect to the ecstatic conception of time provided by Heidegger, Levinas states, “The subject in question was always a solitary subject. The ego all alone, the monad, already

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<sup>568</sup> EE, 90; DEE, 128.

<sup>569</sup> EE, 89; DEE, 127 (translation modified).

<sup>570</sup> TO, 70; TA, 56.



had time.”<sup>571</sup> However, Levinas claims that the solitary monad imprisoned in the windowless present cannot traverse time because this monad cannot escape from itself [*soi*], and in its incapability to escape from itself, it also cannot escape from its ecstatic presence: “The present refers only to itself, but this reference, which should have dazzled it with freedom, imprisons it in an identification.”<sup>572</sup> There is no exit, issue, escape, or way out of being in its windowless presence. Levinas thus asks whether Heidegger’s ontology and his ontological analysis of death in particular remain within the metaphysics of presence that Heidegger himself attempts to overcome.

For Levinas, freedom does not proceed from an “effort to be”<sup>573</sup> or responsibility for one’s own, solitary, or authentic Being, which is nothing but a breathlessness or suffocation: “A free being alone is responsible, that is, already not free.”<sup>574</sup> Levinas thus claims, “Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom.”<sup>575</sup> It is only through the other, absolutely other than the solitary ego, who stands in the face-to-face with this ego that a true dimension of freedom with regard to time is introduced on the hither side of the stretchedness of the ecstatic temporality. Through the encounter with the other, the ego finds itself in relationship to what it cannot stretch out, to the absolute otherness that ruptures the ecstatic presence of the solitary ego and thereby liberates, relieves, and frees it from its ontological shackle of the ecstatic temporality where it gets out of itself in order to return to itself in its identification. In this context, the other is neither an obstacle to an effort to be (free) nor a secondary or contingent means for salvation, which preserves itself in the selfish hope; rather, it is very salvation that “can only come from elsewhere while everything in the subject is here [*ici*].”<sup>576</sup> It is the prerequisite condition for freedom with the *proviso* that the other alone

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<sup>571</sup> EE, 96; DEE, 134.

<sup>572</sup> EE, 78; DEE, 115.

<sup>573</sup> EE, 78; DEE, 115.

<sup>574</sup> EE, 79; DEE, 115.

<sup>575</sup> TO, 70; TA, 57.

<sup>576</sup> EE, 96; DEE, 135.

makes the ego free, not only because the ego itself cannot be free on its own, but also because their times never take place “at the same time.” It is the diachronic distance, proximity, or separation that sustains the alterity of the other as the locus of escape, freedom, and salvation. Western philosophy and Heidegger’s ontology in particular fail to account for the peculiar conception of freedom in terms of time that consists in “having one’s being *pardoned* by the very alterity of the other.”<sup>577</sup> Heidegger’s projective, ecstatic theory of time cannot take into consideration Levinas’s core idea of time, “the rupture of contemporaneity,” by which “veritable time” begins.<sup>578</sup> The other brings the veritable time to the ego by rupturing the ontological confinement of the ecstatic presence, and hence “the condition of time lies in the relationship between humans,”<sup>579</sup> that is, in the face-to-face encounter with the other. Without encountering the other, neither freedom nor time can be produced; the other alone saves the ego. Therefore, the veritable time takes place in a diachronical manner when the solitude of the ego is deposed by the other whose alterity essentially remains refractory to the ecstatic temporalization.

As seen so far, Heidegger’s treatment of death is too dexterous to capture an enigmatic character of death since, for Levinas, death remains impervious to an allegedly adroit weapon of the dialectic of Being and nothingness. In this context, Peperzak states that death, like the other, is not a noema or a theme that can be grasped by a representation, thematization, or comprehension; it cannot take any place within “unfolding of my possibilities.”<sup>580</sup> When interrogating Heidegger’s view of death as the existential possibility of the impossibility, Derrida is quite right in saying that “the existential analysis of death of *Dasein* will have to make of this *possibility* its theme.”<sup>581</sup> It is

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<sup>577</sup> EE, 97; DEE, 136.

<sup>578</sup> Cohen, *Elevations*, 147.

<sup>579</sup> TO, 79; TA, 69.

<sup>580</sup> Peperzak, *To the Other*, 134.

<sup>581</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, 63.

not only because the entire process of the fundamental ontology of Dasein culminates in the theme of death as the most authentic possibility for Dasein itself, but also, more fundamentally, because the ontological-existential thematization of death illustrates how death appears to Dasein as a transparent phenomenon. To be sure, Heidegger himself makes death a theme by taking advantage of the dialectic of Being and nothingness and rigorously attempts to disclose the ontological constitution of Dasein in the authentic totality of Being. In the doxical thematization of death, Heidegger clearly exhibits how transparently death appears to Dasein as the phenomenon *par excellence* to be existentially comprehended, grasped, and seized by Dasein alone in isolation from the anonymous they.

The fundamental ontology of Dasein leads to the existential analysis of death, which shows that death appears to Dasein not as a “one-shot” event, abruptly happening to Dasein itself, but as a “phenomenon of life”<sup>582</sup> to be existentially understood by Dasein in its authentic totality. This does not mean that the phenomenon of death is a noematic phenomenon or what Marion calls a “flat phenomenon” to be theoretically understood, but an existential one embedded in “the *depth* of the Heideggerian phenomenon” to be ontologically understood.<sup>583</sup> Although Levinas does not deny that there is a deeper dimension of the Heideggerian phenomenon, he also does not reject the fact that Heidegger, in a certain sense, especially when it comes to the theme of/as death, repeats a *naïveté* of the flat phenomenology which makes death appear to Dasein as the flat phenomenon. Accordingly, Heidegger’s phenomenological-doxical thematization of death ends up dissimulating the enigma of death into the architectonic totality of the heroic Dasein’s Being. Levinas’s challenge against Heidegger results not from the failure of his phenomenological thematization of death but, on the contrary, from his deft fulfillment to thematize a phenomenon of death through rendering

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<sup>582</sup> SZ, 246.

<sup>583</sup> Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 62.

possible what cannot be possible and hence thematizing what cannot be thematized. Already in his early text *Time and the Other*, the paradox of Levinas's phenomenology of death, which concerns the puzzling problem of how to thematize what cannot be thematized, to phenomenologize what cannot be phenomenologized, is inchoately noticed.

In the enigmatic mystery of death that Heidegger reduces to the heroic mastery of death, Levinas finds the alterity of the other, which is in no way reduced, totalized, or thematized into the ontological architecture. The approach of death in proximity overflows and suspends the subject's heroic capacity to project its Being into nothingness and, in turn, to appropriate this nothingness into its Being in the authentic totality; it heralds the rupture of the solitude of the subject. Levinas thus states: "My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it."<sup>584</sup> Instead, what the approach of death confirms is the *deposition* of the solitude that gives rise to a multitude or "plurality [that] insinuates itself into the very existing of the existent which until this point was jealously assumed by the subject alone."<sup>585</sup> The relationship with death indicates that existence is no longer a matter of a solo, as illustrated in Heidegger's existential analysis of death in terms of the solitary and heroic Dasein in the mode of *Existenz*, but rather of a multitude—or basically, of a duo—which is concretized in the ethical relationship between the same and other where Levinas finds the most fundamental structure of existence and time: "Being is produced as multiple and as split into same and other; this is its ultimate structure. It is society, and hence it is time."<sup>586</sup> In order to describe this ultimate structure, Levinas expects in *Existence and Existents* a new language other than a monological, solipsistic, and ontological language that fails to describe time, death, and the other altogether: "The dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other, that

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<sup>584</sup> TO, 74; TA, 63.

<sup>585</sup> TO, 75; TA, 63.

<sup>586</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

is, a dialogue which in turn has to be studied in terms other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject.”<sup>587</sup> Ontological language might succeed in describing the solitude of Dasein’s Being apropos of time and death, as Heidegger’s ontological analysis of Dasein exhaustively exhibits the ontological meaning of death. However, Levinas argues that ontological language necessarily fails to capture the mystery of death, since it is not proper to describe the relationship with the other where the enigmatic signification of death is embedded. What the enigmatic mystery of death signifies is the fact that the solitude is not the final word—it is the signification of death that the solitary, solipsistic, or self-same relation of the subject cannot accomplish. In the approach of death, the solitude of the subject is *de*-posited as if the initial position is already a *de*-position, which anticipates an *ethical* relationship between the same and the other that Levinas later elaborates by deploying ethical terms, such as responsibility, expiation, persecution, or substitution. It will be the primary task of the next section to show that the ontological-existential analysis of death cannot exhaust the signification of death itself in the sense that, prior to the ontological meaning of death, the ethical meaning of death takes place in the duo-relationship on the hither side of the solo-relationship.

## 2. Being Fractured: Posterior Duo Prior to Anterior Solo

It is worthwhile to note that Levinas has used “ethics” or “ethical” since the early 1950s to describe the face-to-face relationship in terms of “the ethical order” on which the spiritual life of Judaism is based.<sup>588</sup> It is in the 1951 essay “Is Ontology Fundamental?” that the ethical signification of the other comes to the fore for the first time in explicit opposition to the

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<sup>587</sup> EE, 96; DEE, 134-35.

<sup>588</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). This volume contains short essays that touch upon the ethical relationship. See especially “Place and Utopia” written in 1950 and “Ethics and Spirit” in 1952.

fundamental ontology of Heidegger. The primary task of this text is to demonstrate that the fundamental ontology remains not fundamental enough in the sense that there is a more fundamental relation irreducible to the ontological relation where all beings are primordially understood within the horizon of Being. For Levinas, a genuine relation cannot be found in the ontological-solo relationship between Being and a being but rather in the ethical-duo relationship between beings with no reference to or prior to “the *openness* of Being.”<sup>589</sup> This fundamental relationship cannot be possible “except for the other”<sup>590</sup> whose alterity exceeds and overflows the ontological horizon of Being—whatever it is considered throughout Heidegger’s texts under different names, such as *aletheia*, *Wahrheit*, *Lichtung*, *Erschlossenheit*, *Offenbarkeit*, or *Gelassenheit*. Levinas’s critique of Heidegger’s ontology forms the initial preparation for the elaboration of the ethical relationship between the same and the other, which is fully elaborated in *Totality and Infinity*.

## 2-1. The Cartesian Idea of the Infinite

In order to discover a fundamental, genuine, and ethical relation, Levinas returns to the Cartesian meditation on the ego as the *res cogitans*. The Cartesian formula “I am something that thinks” motivates Levinas’s consideration of the idea of the infinite concretized into the ethical relation, as he states in *Totality and Infinity*: “We have seen in it [the idea of infinity] the ethical relation.”<sup>591</sup> When it comes to Levinas’s analysis of the formal structure of the idea of the infinite that remains inaccessible to totality, Being, or ontology, Robert Bernasconi contends that it is Descartes who “gave Levinas his own voice with which to show what Husserl and Heidegger

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<sup>589</sup> EN, 4; E, 16.

<sup>590</sup> EN, 5; E, 17.

<sup>591</sup> TI, 211; TeI, 186.

and...the whole tradition of Western ontology from Parmenides on failed to recognize and preserve.”<sup>592</sup> Unlike Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology that radically reduces the *res cogitans* to the *ego cogito cogitatum*, Levinas’s phenomenology retrieves what Husserlian phenomenology reduces, that is, “I am *something* that thinks,” in terms of hypostasis. Moreover, Heidegger’s notion of *ekstasis* still follows a Husserlian path, especially when it comes to his thematization of death. This path can be depicted as Odysseus’s long journey after which he returns home to Ithaca and reassumes his place as a rightful king of his Kingdom. Likewise, the ego—whether the pure Ego or heroic Dasein—leaves itself in order to return to itself with a transcendental or authentic status; it transcends itself in order to regain itself. This transcendental or ontological adventure is motivated by acute nostalgia for the proper home [*chez-soi*], as if there was, is, and will be the authentic *topos* proper to the solipsistic ego. Thus, the ego never loses itself and its *topos* where it dwells; even death does not really matter to itself since it is already at its own disposal.

However, the Cartesian ego is not simply something [*res*] that posits itself here and now but also something that thinks [*res cogitans*]: “I am something that *thinks*.” Descartes’s profound insight into the thinking ego leads Levinas to recognize in the idea of the infinite the formal structure embedded in the ethical relationship, as if my solitude is already opened toward the alterity of the other, as if my being already takes, occupies, and trespasses the *topos* of the other. Like Abraham’s venturing out to an unexplored, unknown land without any return to his homeland, there is no longer any proper or authentic home to which I go back, in which I remains with myself.

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<sup>592</sup> Robert Bernasconi, “The Silent Anarchic World of the Evil Genius,” in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum, The First Ten Years*, eds. J. C Sallis, G. Moneta, and J. Taminiaux (Dordrecht: Springer, 1988), 257. As a corrective to overrating Descartes’s exclusive impact on Levinas, of which Bernasconi also is well aware, it is important to note that Levinas himself refers to, apart from Descartes, several thinkers who conceive of that which beyond being. See László Tengelyi, “Experience of infinity in Levinas,” *Levinas Studies* 4 (2009): 111-112.

Far from suffering from the nostalgia for my own *topos*, I unremittingly desire for the other who comes from elsewhere unbeknown to me. Although Descartes's idea of the infinite leads to the proof of God's existence, Levinas attempts to uncover in the idea of the infinite an ethical significance inscribed in the face of the other who commands "Thou shalt not kill." The primary task of this section is to elaborate on "I am something that *thinks*" with a Cartesian inspiration of the idea of the infinite and then account for the ethical signification of death, which underlies and, simultaneously, undermines Heidegger's ontological analysis of death.

In the 1957 essay, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity,"<sup>593</sup> before the publication of *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas formulates the formal structure of the ethical relation by means of exploring Descartes's idea of the infinite. This text opens with revisiting the problem of how philosophy seeks truth in terms of a relation between the thinker and what is thought. "In the truth, a thinker maintains a relationship with a reality distinct from him, other than him—'absolutely other'."<sup>594</sup> To think is an audacious adventure toward an alterity; in other words, it presupposes a distance between the subject that thinks and the object to be thought. To think, thus, is to transcend the thinker who thinks toward other than itself, *i.e.*, the object, and transcendence is secured in the very distance, which maintains the entire process of thinking. In thinking of even myself, I first objectify myself, take it as an object to be thought, and represent it in terms of propositions, just as the Kantian "I think" is already inscribed in all representations concerning an object, the world, God, or whatsoever to be thought. Due to the distance in me, I am not only the subject as a thinker who thinks but also the object to be thought. I am the subject that thinks insofar

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<sup>593</sup> This text is first published in French in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 26 (1957): 241-53. It is reprinted in DEHH, 229-47. It is translated and collected in Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 47-59. For an exegetical introduction to this text, see Peperzak, *To the Other*, 38-72. According to Peperzak, this seminal essay is the "seed" from which Levinas's mature texts, especially *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being*, spring (38).

<sup>594</sup> CPP, 47; DEHH, 229.



as I am the object to be thought, and *vice versa*, so that the thinking or philosophical odyssey seems to overcome a naïve or natural dualism of the subject and the object, of idealism and realism, and to achieve its truth in which the thinker remains at home with itself. For Levinas, however, the overcoming of dualism basically relies on “subjectivism more objective than all objectivity”<sup>595</sup> and thus leads to a dialectical fusion or union in which both subjectivity (immanence or interiority) and objectivity (transcendence or exteriority) are sublated in the speculative or dialectical movement of the Absolute Spirit (Hegel) in and for itself that resolves a distance sustaining the separation between the two. The *telos* of the Spirit is no other than its return *via* mediation to its *arche*, and nothing remains inaccessible, exterior, foreign, or other to it; therefore, “the Ego [*Moi*] remains the Same [*Même*]!”<sup>596</sup>

Levinas diagnoses in philosophical thinking a narcissistic odyssey of self-knowledge whose truth consists in the “*reduction of the other to the same*,”<sup>597</sup> that is, the identification of the same; then he asks whether the thinker has ever encountered absolutely and infinitely other than itself. In doing so, philosophy entertains itself with virile, lofty, and heroic pretensions without doing its own job: “Autonomy, the philosophy which aims to ensure the freedom, or the identity, of beings, presupposes that freedom itself is sure of itself, is justified without recourse to anything further, is complacent with in itself, like Narcissus.”<sup>598</sup> Heidegger’s ecstatic temporality exemplarily shows this narcissistic pretention in the sense that the heroic Dasein makes all of time its own time by bringing the past, the present, and the future together into the ecstatic unity, which constitutes the history of its own Being with no recourse to anything other than itself. Levinas thus claims: “the Ego remains the Same by making of disparate and diverse events a history—its

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<sup>595</sup> CPP, 118; DEHH, 184.

<sup>596</sup> CPP, 48; DEHH, 230.

<sup>597</sup> CPP, 48; DEHH, 230.

<sup>598</sup> CPP, 49; DEHH, 230.

history.”<sup>599</sup> From the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas attempts to redeem what Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein in its finitude of the authentic Being fails to consider, in the sense that “Heideggerian philosophy precisely marks the apogee of a thought in which the finite does not refer to the infinite.”<sup>600</sup> Due to its lack of consideration of the infinite, Heidegger’s philosophy ends up “affirming a tradition in which the same dominates the other, in which freedom, even the freedom that is identical with reason, precedes justice.”<sup>601</sup> The radical profundity of Descartes’s meditation on the idea of the infinite that attracts Levinas’s attention lies in the fact that the ego no longer remains the same in the course of thinking; in other words, the ego finds itself placed in a primordial relationship with infinitely other than itself, the absolutely other whose alterity remains resistant to the totalizing identity of the same.

Against the background of Husserlian conception of intentionality that characterizes the fundamental feature of consciousness in terms of an adequation or correlation between an intentional act (noesis) and its correlated object (noema), Levinas goes further into what the intentional structure of the noema-noesis presupposes and yet dissimulates—it is a non-adequation, non-correlation or disjointedness that Levinas recognizes in the Cartesian idea of the infinite. In other words, when the ego thinks of the infinite, it “from the first *thinks more than it thinks*.”<sup>602</sup> The infinite that the idea thinks of it is not adequate to the very idea since the infinite itself

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<sup>599</sup> CPP, 48; DEHH, 230. In a similar vein, Peperzak claims that Western philosophy remains onto-theological when it considers a being an “origin, support, end, and horizon of the existing universe: as ground of all grounds, it existed because of its own essence, autarch and self-sufficient, it did not need other beings but rather made them exist by giving them being.” Peperzak, *To the Other*, 35. This is why Levinas criticizes Western philosophy for failing to capture—properly speaking, for dissimulating or covering up—the ultimate structure of being split into same and other.

<sup>600</sup> CPP, 52; DEHH, 236. Wyschogrod argues that Descartes’s analysis of the idea of the infinite provides Levinas with “the means for a break with ontology.” Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 99.

<sup>601</sup> CPP, 53; DEHH, 237.

<sup>602</sup> CPP, 54; DEHH, 239. In this context, Peperzak points out that the idea of the infinite is an “intention” and a “thought” whose “noema does not ‘fulfill’ the noesis of which it is the correlate.” Peperzak, *To the Other*, 58. Unlike an orthodox phenomenology of Husserl, the fulfillment of intention apropos of the infinite does not consist in the correlation or adequation between noesis and noema because the content of the infinite always overflows the very idea that thinks of it.

surpasses the idea that thinks. Due to this non-adequateness, the alterity of the infinite is never abolished. The idea of the infinite marks the paradoxical attempt to think of what it cannot think; indeed, a thought is out of joint with itself in the idea of the infinity. The content of what is thought cannot be exhausted by the very thought since the *ideatum* cannot be comprehended or grasped by the idea. When it comes to the idea of the infinite, indeed, the *cogitatum* exceeds the *cogito* itself: “the idea of the infinite is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea.”<sup>603</sup> The idea of the infinite signifies an exceptional relation which cannot be equivalent to a corresponding relationship between a subject and an object, in which the latter is integrated, sublated, or reduced into the former, and, accordingly, the distance between the two is no other than a synthetizing impetus for the identification of the same. Basically, an intentional relation can be characterized as the returning movement of the ego; it is the same [*même*] gesture that never allows anything exterior, transcendent, and other to itself. However, the relation with the infinite does not lead to the return of the ego to itself but to opening itself toward what it cannot contain, embrace, and grasp, toward the irreducible exteriority of the absolutely other. The encounter with the other cannot be inscribed in the register of need, which proceeds from the ego to fill out its voids; rather, it is the unsatiable movement of desire for the other without a return to itself: “A thought that thinks more than it thinks is a desire.”<sup>604</sup>

In no way does Levinas overlook the fact that this excessive characteristic of intentionality is already found in Husserl’s reading of Descartes. In the 1959 text entitled “The Ruin of Representation,” Levinas points out Husserl’s *implicit* dimension of intentionality that engenders

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<sup>603</sup> CPP, 54; DEHH, 238. Stephan Strasser states that Levinas’s basic motif of the Cartesian idea of the infinite violates the fundamental law of a classical phenomenology that noema [*Gemeinte*] of noesis [*Meinen*] corresponds to the *cogitatum* of the *cogito*. On the basis of this violation, the first hallmark of the infinite consists in the fact that the infinite itself remains separated from the ego who thinks of it. Stephan Strasser, *Jenseits von Sein und Zeit: Eine Einführung in Emmanuel Levinas’ Philosophie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 8.

<sup>604</sup> CPP, 56; DEHH, 242.

the ruin of classical representationalism with reference to *Cartesian Meditations*: “Every ego as consciousness, is, in a broad sense, the ‘meaning’ of the thing that it intends, but that ‘meaning’ *exceeds*, at each instant, that which at that every instant, is given as ‘explicitly intended.’ It exceeds it....*This exceeding of the intention in the intention itself*, which is inherent in all consciousness, must be considered as essential to that consciousness.”<sup>605</sup> The representationalist notion of intentionality is understood in terms of an exact correlation between the explicitly intentional subject and the explicitly intended object, which does not permit any implicit or excessive meaning other than the explicitly intended meaning *qua* a representational product of this exact correlation: “The object is at every instant *exactly* what the subject currently thinks it to be.”<sup>606</sup> Husserl becomes more radical in probing into the implicit dimension of intentionality, which designates a relation between the intentional subject and the intended object, but “a relation essentially bearing within itself an implicit meaning.”<sup>607</sup> In addition to the explicitly intended meaning that the ego explicitly intends, there remains an implicit or excessive meaning, since the intention exceeds itself in itself: “We are beyond idealism and realism, since being is neither inside nor outside thought, but thought itself is outside itself.”<sup>608</sup> However, Levinas becomes even more radical by making this implicit meaning explicit, or more properly, by considering what the explicit dimension of intentionality presupposes—it is an essential excess that conditions the very intentionality. In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, therefore, Levinas speaks of “the break-up of the formal

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<sup>605</sup> DEH, 115; DEHH, 180. For the reference of Husserl’s own, see CM, 46.

<sup>606</sup> DEH, 115; DEHH, 180 (italics added). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas depicts the intentionality of representation as “a total adequation of the thinker with what is thought” (TI, 123; TeI, 96). For a discussion of the intentionality of enjoyment as opposed to the intentionality of representation, see Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 70-1; Raoul Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being: A Guide to Totality and Infinity*, trans. Daniel Wyche (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 55-65.

<sup>607</sup> DEH, 115; DEHH, 180.

<sup>608</sup> DEH, 120; DEHH, 187.

structure—the noema of a noesis—into events which this structure dissimulates, but which sustains it, and restore its concrete significance.”<sup>609</sup>

Properly understood, Levinas claims, “intentionality bears within itself the innumerable horizons of its implications and thinks of infinitely more ‘things [*choses*]’ than of the object upon which it is fixed.”<sup>610</sup> In his own reading of Descartes’s *Meditations*, Levinas comes to recognize one of these “things”: the idea of the infinite which nevertheless is indeed not a thing to be thought but an incomprehensible surplus overflowing all thought. At the limit of thinking, the idea itself is a paradoxical attempt to think of what it cannot think. Rather, the idea of the infinite as an excess is a thought which “I [*Moi*]” cannot think but which is thought in “me [*moi*].” Whenever I think of the infinite, I discover myself not as the thinker who thinks of it but as what is thought by what I think, as if I were no longer the subject who thinks of the object but rather the object to be thought by something wholly other than myself, as if the subjective or substantive *Moi* aiming at what it intends to think of were to be thought of as an objective or accusative *moi* interpellated by that at which the *Moi* aims. In the idea of the infinite, thus, the subject no longer remains a purely intentional subject who thinks; simultaneously, the object no longer remains a purely intended object to be thought. In this regard, intentionality properly understood by Levinas means that all consciousness is consciousness of something, but on the essential proviso that “*every object calls forth and as it were gives rise to the consciousness through which its being shines and, in doing so, appears.*”<sup>611</sup> However, this does not mean that Levinas envisages a *reversed* intentionality by which the intentional subject becomes an intended object while the intended object becomes an intentional subject, as if the correlation between the two entailed again an inverted version of a

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<sup>609</sup> TI, 28; TeI, xvii. The same idea is formulated toward the end of this work: “One of the principal theses of this work is that the noesis-noema structure is not the primordial structure of intentionality,” TI, 294; TeI; 271.

<sup>610</sup> DEH, 116; DEEH, 181.

<sup>611</sup> DEH, 119; DEHH, 186.

dialectical fusion that might rest on objectivism more subjective than all subjectivity. Rather, the Cartesian model of the idea of the infinite anticipates the original way of being, that is, the preoccupation with another being by means of an “inversion of its very exercise of being, which suspends its spontaneous movement of existing.”<sup>612</sup>

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas delves further into the fundamental structure of being in terms of the idea of the infinite, which is concretized in the relationship between the same and the other: “Being is produced as multiple and as split into same and other; this is its ultimate structure.”<sup>613</sup> In the opening sections, Levinas first diagnoses a narcissistic gesture of philosophy that dissimulates this ultimate structure of *être* by means of the comprehension of *Sein*, the Being that serves as a third term by which all beings take their forms, give themselves to the panoramic vision, and become intelligible. In the comprehension of Being that neutralizes all beings into the ontological—or same [*même*] according to Levinas—level where the relation among them no longer matters, the difference between Being and beings alone matters. Levinas thus argues, “Western philosophy has most often an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle or neutral term that ensures the comprehension of Being.”<sup>614</sup> Philosophy as ontology presupposes the spontaneity of the same and, simultaneously, “promotes freedom—the freedom that is the identification of the same.”<sup>615</sup> For Levinas, therefore, the narcissistic character of philosophy stems from its preoccupation with the free spontaneity of the same which reduces the fundamental structure of being separate as same and other into the comprehension of Being.

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<sup>612</sup> TI, 63; TeI, 34.

<sup>613</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

<sup>614</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 13.

<sup>615</sup> TI, 42; TeI, 13.

Levinas goes on to claim that philosophy's failure to capture the fundamental dimension of being does not result from failing to do its job but rather from betraying itself. While rigorously doing its own job, philosophy has no idea about what it is doing, as Levinas states, "knowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin."<sup>616</sup> Unless philosophy knows nothing of what makes its knowing possible, it will remain dogmatic rather than critical or philosophical. Philosophy betrays itself to the point of being lost in the arbitrary exercise of freedom without calling into question its origin, an autonomous spontaneity in which philosophy is sustained, verified, and justified by itself alone. However, Levinas argues, "To philosophize is to trace freedom back to what lies before it, to disclose the investiture that liberates freedom from the arbitrary."<sup>617</sup> In this regard, philosophy becomes essentially critical only when "It discovers the dogmatism and naïve arbitrariness of its spontaneity, and calls into question the freedom of the exercise of ontology."<sup>618</sup> The essential hallmark of critical, not dogmatic, philosophy, as Levinas understands it, lies in the fact that in order to do its job in a right way, philosophy must begin with what Levinas calls "metaphysics" or ethics of the other, which calls into question the ontological egoism of the same. It is in the critical moment that philosophy becomes what truly it is: ethics as first philosophy.

A calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts, and my possession, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. And as critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> TI, 82; TeI, 54.

<sup>617</sup> TI, 84-5; TeI, 57.

<sup>618</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 13.

<sup>619</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 13.

It is clear from this important passage that ethics or metaphysics is not a mere antonym for ontology, as if Levinas attempted to replace the latter with the former. Ethics does not simply go an opposite way in which ontology reduces the other into the same, as if it tried to reduce the latter into the former. Furthermore, ethics is not simply a reaction to ontology in order to remedy the illness of all the varieties of what Levinas calls totality. The *raison d'être* of ethics for Levinas does not lie in inventing another dogmatism in place of ontology but in unveiling what ontology dissimulates, the ultimate structure of being split into same and other. Levinas thus asserts: “Prior to the disclosure of Being in general as the basis of knowledge and as the meaning of Being, the relation with an existent that expresses itself pre-exists. Prior to the plane of ontology, the ethical plane pre-exists.”<sup>620</sup> In no way does ethics conceive of the annihilation of the solitude of the same in favor of the sovereign alterity of the other. Indeed, a considerable portion of *Totality and Infinity*—and the Section II entitled “Interiority and Economy” in particular—is dedicated to developing the solitude of the subject in terms of psychism, egoism, sensibility, enjoyment, and dwelling, which is the necessary condition for the constitution of the thinking ego who has the idea of the infinite. In her brief analysis of the general structure found in *Totality and Infinity*, Leora Batnitzky does not accept the view that Levinas is one of the postmodern thinkers insofar as

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<sup>620</sup> TI, 201; TeI, 175 (translation significantly modified). Derrida depicts Levinas’s ethics as an “Ethics without law and concept” or “Ethics of Ethics” and states: “This is not an objection: let us not forget that Levinas does not seek to propose laws or moral rules, does not seek to determine a morality, but rather the essence of the ethical relation in general.” WD, 111; ED, 164. Oona Eisenstadt also suggests that Levinas provides an “alternative ethics” based on the face-to-face relation and goes on to argue that this alternative ethics is “not designated as a band-aid for contemporary problems. It is always already there in human experience.” Oona Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text: The Premodern Sources of Levinas’s Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 9-10. See also Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Through Being to the Anarchy of Transcendence: A commentary on the First Chapter of Otherwise than Being,” in *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 74-9. In this context, Levinas’s ethics remains faithful to the basic principle of phenomenology: “We will go back to the ‘things themselves’ [*Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zurückgehen*], LI-I, 168. In order to return to the things themselves, it is important for Levinas to first uncover the ontological coverings accumulated in the pure depth of being.



“postmodern philosophy takes as its villain the subject of Descartes’s cogito.”<sup>621</sup> Instead, she emphasizes the sincerity of the Cartesian notion of sensibility that much inspires Levinas’s deliberation of the sensible subject, in which she finds “Descartes’s so-called modern subject”<sup>622</sup> as an independent, separate, and atheistic subject. Batnitzky goes on to argue that “Levinas’s ego is not a thinking self but a self that senses itself as uniquely separated from being,” and thereby that the central argument presented in *Totality and Infinity* is not a claim about “the self’s obligation to the other” but about the “separable, independent subject,” out of which his ethics grows.<sup>623</sup>

In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas himself states that “this book then presents itself as a defense of subjectivity.”<sup>624</sup> However, the overriding purpose of this defense lies neither in returning to the Heideggerian notion of the ecstatic solitude of Dasein nor in repeating Levinas’s own early consideration of the hypostatic solitude of the subject, but in penetrating into the ultimate dimension of being [*être*] produced as split into the same and the other. This ultimate depth of being separated, fractured, and out-of-jointed underlines the solitude of the subject, as if the hypostatic position of the subject is already *de*-positioned from the outset. In “Violence and Metaphysic,” Derrida’s polemical interpretation of *Totality and Infinity* seems to miss this fundamental dimension of being that Levinas tries to disclose, due to its confusion between *Sein* and *être*, which are not equivalent for Levinas himself. When Levinas criticizes Heidegger’s notion of *Sein* in order to delve further into the ultimate structure of *être*, Derrida counters Levinas’s

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<sup>621</sup> Leora Batnitzky, “Encountering the Modern Subject in Levinas,” *Yale French Studies* 104 (2004), 6.

<sup>622</sup> Batnitzky, “Encountering the Modern Subject in Levinas,” 7.

<sup>623</sup> Batnitzky, “Encountering the Modern Subject in Levinas,” 12-3, 7-8, respectively. By contrast, Hilary Putman depicts Levinas as a “moral perfectionist” arguing that Levinas’s central task is to describe “the fundamental obligation to the other.” Levinas’s ethics is not concerned with a moral code of behavior or detailed moral rules but with the “fundamental obligation,” without which any moral theories or rules cannot be justified and have no value. Hilary Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 36-7.

<sup>624</sup> TI, 26; TeI, xiv.

concept of *être* from the perspective of the Heideggerian *Sein*. Derrida's presumable confusion between *Sein* (of *Seienden*) and *être* (without *étants*) basically shows that he seems to remain within the (pre-)Heideggerian climate, which Levinas attempts to leave. The Heideggerian notion of *Sein* refers to the Being of beings and Dasein in particular, which serves to "[place] ethics under the heel of ontology,"<sup>625</sup> whereas Levinas does not conceive of such a third, middle, or neutral term that sheds light on beings and lets them be. Despite this different connotation between *Sein* of beings and *être* without beings, Derrida argues that the thought or comprehension of Being "conditions the *respect* for the other *as what it is*: other."<sup>626</sup> However, Levinas calls into question the condition as Being that might respect the other by asking what justifies this condition. Levinas probably finds his answer in the Cartesian idea of the infinite: beyond or on the hither side of *Sein*, *être* at its ultimate dimension is already separated into same and other, and the concrete relation between the two is produced without any recourse to a mediation, such as an ontological *Sein* or theological God. Levinas thus immediately adds: "it [this book] will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity."<sup>627</sup> In this context, the Cartesian idea of the infinite provides Levinas with "the *formal design* of the structure it outlines,"<sup>628</sup> on the basis of which he builds up the defense of subjectivity in terms of the face-to-face relationship. Unless Levinas's adoption of Descartes's idea of the infinite is considered, his main project presented in *Totality and Infinity*

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<sup>625</sup> WD, 135; ED, 198. Apart from whether Derrida's polemical reading of Levinas can be justified, his reading is too powerful and insightful to neglect it. Derrida's critical reading of Levinas's text does not lead to a dogmatic rejection of Levinas's text but to an ethical gesture, which makes it work properly without falling into any ethical dogmatism. Far from being a trenchant critic who simply rejects Levinas's ethical project, Derrida seems to be Levinasian more than Levinas himself by calling him into question. Hence, Derrida's powerful reading illustrates that ethics can be ethics only when it remains *critical* of itself rather than dogmatic. I will return to Derrida's deconstructive reading of Levinas in the next chapter.

<sup>626</sup> WD, 138; ED, 202.

<sup>627</sup> TI, 26; TeI, xiv.

<sup>628</sup> CPP, 53; DEHH, 238.

cannot be properly appreciated. After explicating some conditions for representation including sensibility, enjoyment, and dwelling, Chanter goes against Batnitzky by pointing out another condition which must be taken into account in the reading of *Totality and Infinity*: “The idea of infinity conditions everything that is said in *Totality and Infinity*.”<sup>629</sup> Levinas retains the formal structure of the Cartesian idea of the infinite in order to reveal the ultimate structure of being as split into the same and the other, as he writes, “Descartes, better than an idealist or a realist, discovers a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority, which nevertheless does not do violence to interiority.”<sup>630</sup>

## 2.2. The Anterior Posteriority of the Other

In the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas recognizes an anachronic or anarchic logic of “after the fact” or what he calls “the posteriority of the anterior,”<sup>631</sup> which contributes to advocating his defense of subjectivity. According to this absurd logic, the anterior perception of the infinite seems to follow the posterior perception of the finite, as if the former *were* posterior to the latter. In fact, the Cartesian ego finds itself as imperfect and finite only *after* its recognition that it has been given or “implanted” in itself the “innate idea,”<sup>632</sup> by which the ego is aware of

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<sup>629</sup> Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 66.

<sup>630</sup> TI, 211; TeI, 186-87.

<sup>631</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25. For a discussion of the posteriority of the anterior in terms of the originary deformatization of time, see Fabio Ciaramelli, “The Posteriority of the Anterior,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20.2-21.1 (1997): 409-425.

<sup>632</sup> Descartes writes, “I have noticed certain laws which God has so established in nature, and of which he has implanted such notions in our minds, that after adequate reflection we cannot doubt that they are exactly observed in everything which exists or occurs in the world.” René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume I*, trans. John Cottingham *et al*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 131. In the *Meditations*, Descartes distinguishes the “innate” ideas implanted by God from those that are “adventitious” obtained *via* the senses and those that are “invented” by us. Descartes, *The Meditations on First Philosophy*, 53. It is the basic premise of Descartes’s account of science that clear and distinct knowledge can be constructed only on the basis of the innate recourses of the human mind. “Thus, I see plainly that the certainty of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him,” 99.

God as perfect and infinite. Levinas thus states: “A being *receiving* the idea of Infinity, *receiving* since it cannot derive it from itself, is a being taught in a non-maieutic fashion.”<sup>633</sup> For Descartes, the source of finitude of the finite cannot originate from its own (Being) but from the infinite (God) who has no source for its existence but is itself the very source, cause, origin, or arche of existence. Levinas here refers to Descartes’s *Meditations*:

I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted and desired—that is, lacked something—and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?<sup>634</sup>

In the ontological account of the idea of the infinite, Descartes conceives of the finite ego in relation to the infinite God. In this relation, the ego appears as the effect dependent upon its cause of being, that is, God as a *necessary* being who alone does not depend on anything other than itself for its own existence: “So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.”<sup>635</sup> To be sure, Levinas detects a theological or “pre-modern” trace in Descartes’s modern ontology: the ultimate dependence of all beings as created upon God as the creator. “The *cogito* in Descartes rests on the other who is God and who has put the idea of infinity in the soul.”<sup>636</sup> In

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<sup>633</sup> TI, 204; TeI, 178.

<sup>634</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations on First Philosophy*, 65. See also TI, 210-11; TeI, 186.

<sup>635</sup> Descartes, *The Meditations on First Philosophy*, 63. Descartes here states: “So there remains only the idea of God; and I must consider whether there is anything in the idea which could not have originated in myself. By the word ‘God,’ I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligible, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists. All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone.”

<sup>636</sup> TI, 86; TeI, 58. It is clear from this ontological argument on the basis of the idea of the infinite that Descartes still belongs to an ontotheological tradition, as Heidegger precisely points out in the Introduction to *Being and Time*: “The *res cogitans* is ontologically determined as *ens*, and for medieval ontology the meaning of the Being of the *ens* is established in the understanding of it as *ens creatum*. As the *ens infinitum*, God is the *ens increatum*” (SZ, 25). Due to his neglect of the ontological meaning of Being, Heidegger immediately adds, “Descartes is ‘dependent’ upon medieval scholasticism and uses its terminology” (SZ, 26). Levinas shares with Heidegger in the critical stance

other words, the finite being is dependent on the divine relation with God, without which it remains incoherent and unjustified, whereas God absolves itself from this relation by receding into its hidden excess which cannot be exhaustively comprehended or grasped by the finite idea. Levinas thus claims: “The idea of the infinite is not for me an object. The ontological argument lies in the mutation of this ‘object’ into being, into independence with regard to me; God is the other.”<sup>637</sup> However, the ontological argument would miss a concrete or positive structure of the idea of the infinite, as Levinas immediately adds: “If to think consists in referring to an object, we must suppose that the thought of the infinite is not a thought. What is it positively? Descartes does not raise the question.”<sup>638</sup> Levinas delves further into what the Cartesian version of the ontological argument does not tackle, that is, the positive structure of the idea of the infinite concretized in the ethical relationship between the same and the other: “The ‘resistance’ of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical.”<sup>639</sup> In this context, the divine relation between the finite being and the infinite being that Descartes envisages in the formal idea of the infinite remains unilateral or one-sided. This unilaterality of the divine relation wards off “the production of infinity [that] calls for separation”<sup>640</sup> not only because the finite and the infinite remain not enough separate from each other, but also because they do not sufficiently absolve themselves from the divine relation.

If Descartes provides an onto-theological account of the idea of the infinite, which leads to the proof of God’s existence, Levinas gives a phenomenological account of the idea of the infinite, which takes a concrete form in the ethical relation between the same and the other without

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toward Descartes’s argument that the infinite God is the onto-theological ground, origin, or arche of finite beings, but distances himself from both Descartes and Heidegger by arguing that they fail to tackle the ultimate structure of being separate into same and other.

<sup>637</sup> TI, 211; TeI, 186.

<sup>638</sup> TI, 211; TeI, 186.

<sup>639</sup> TI, 197; TeI, 171.

<sup>640</sup> TI, 292; TeI, 268.

neglecting the anachronic logic of “after the fact.” Just as the Cartesian ego finds itself as finite and imperfect after the fact that it understands God as infinite and perfect, Levinas claims, “the present of the *cogito*, despite the support it discovers for itself *after the fact* in the absolute that transcends it, maintains itself all by itself.”<sup>641</sup> The separate subject discovers itself in its spontaneous solitude only *after the fact* in its relationship with the infinitely other who contests its solipsistic subjectivity. If the solitude of this subject is ontologically an anterior condition for any relation to other than itself, the ethical relation with the other phenomenologically *pre*-conditions the anterior condition for the solitude: “the *After* or the *Effect* conditions the *Before* or the *Cause*: the *Before* appears and is only welcomed.”<sup>642</sup> In the concrete encounter with the other, the same finds itself *already* placed in the traumatic relation with that which is no longer at its disposal, the infinitely other who comes to the same by calling into question its arbitrary exercise of freedom. It is the ethical resistance by the other to the same, not the free spontaneity of the same, that initiates the ethical relationship between the two.

According to the anachronistic logic of “after the fact,” the subject does not first find itself in its spontaneous solitude and *then* enters into the relation with the other, but retroactively or anachronistically finds itself after the fact in its relation to the other. Peperzak rightly states: “The original state is not that of an ego enjoying its isolation before it would meet others; from the beginning, and without escape, the Same sees itself related and linked to the Other from which it is separated, and it is unable to escape from this relationship.”<sup>643</sup> Phenomenologically speaking, subjectivity is not produced by the identification of the subject, but, on the contrary, by its concrete

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<sup>641</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.

<sup>642</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.

<sup>643</sup> Peperzak, *To the Other*, 53. Levinas himself writes: “I cannot disentangle myself from society with the Other, even when I consider the Being of the existent he is. Already the comprehension of Being is said to the existent, who again arises behind the theme in which he is presented. This “saying to the Other”—this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an *existent*—precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics,” TI, 47-8; TeI, 18

relation with the other absolutely other than itself, who awakes it from its self-enclosed, self-same, and solipsistic captivity. What confirms the subjectivity of the subject is neither its arbitrary practice of being nor the comprehension of Being but the ethical relation with the other. This is Levinas's anachronistic conception of subjectivity at the fundamental level that he defends in *Totality and Infinity*. Chanter precisely points out the Cartesian motivation found in Levinas's consideration of subjectivity: "Levinas's understanding of the temporality by which the subject finds itself after the fact in relation to the Other is Descartes's idea of infinity."<sup>644</sup> The ultimate structure of being, concretized in the ethical relation between the same and the other, does not constitute any form of totality, which invalidates all separations, but divulges the breach or rupture of the totality. What ethics seeks to disclose is precisely what ontology neutralizes, dissimulates, and covers up—it is the sincerity and depth of being as fractured, plural, or, basically, dualistic, not as monistic, solipsistic, or same [*même*].

The Cartesian model of the idea of the infinite informs the original way of welcoming the other—properly speaking, of being welcomed by the other—which expresses the metaphysical desire for the infinitely other who comes *too early* to the same before the latter welcomes the former. "I must have been in relation with something I do not live from. This event is the relation with the Other who welcomes me in the Home."<sup>645</sup> The too-early advent of the other does not establish any fixed, conclusive relation that maintains the *status quo* into which the same is thrown. The anachronic order of the ethical relation already implies an anarchic *arche* of the other, which cannot be synchronized into the presence of the same, just as the cause of the thinking subject is both "older than itself" and "still to come."<sup>646</sup> The alterity of the other, who has no source, cause,

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<sup>644</sup> Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, 68.

<sup>645</sup> TI, 170; TeI, 145.

<sup>646</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.

origin, or *arche*, appears as an incomprehensible, unrepresentable, asymmetrical, and anarchic source of the finitude of the same by calling into question the latter's freedom and autonomy. The welcoming relationship between the same and the other does not refer to a peaceful, undisturbed, intimate, or harmonious I-Thou relation, which might constitute or contribute to the totality of Being, as if the duo separate as same and other were totalized into a higher, formal, and synthetic unity. By contrast, Levinas writes, "The welcoming of the Other is *ipso facto* the consciousness of my own injustice—the shame that freedom feels for itself."<sup>647</sup> Thus, the ethical relation is not a mutual, reciprocal, or symmetrical relation where the same finds its own spontaneity by reducing the alterity of the other into its identity that ensures the comprehension of Being. It is the comprehension of Being that obscures the concrete structure of being split into same and other; accordingly, "the shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deaden."<sup>648</sup> On the hither side of the comprehension of Being, however, the concrete, naked, formless, and anarchic face of the other, impervious to the ontological light of Being, puts into question the same, and in this face-to-face relation, the other presents itself to the same by announcing that freedom cannot be justified by itself. Ethics concerns itself with the fundamental structure of being concretized in the relationship between the same and the other, in which the other calls into question the freedom of the same while the same finds its freedom to be arbitrary, violent, and unjust.

### **2.3. Religion as *rapport sans rapport*: The Holy Versus the Sacred**

This section will claim that although the Cartesian idea of the infinite shows the way of welcoming the other, it cannot exhaust the hallmark of the ethical relation between the same and the other, which culminates in Levinas's paradoxical conception of religion. The relation between

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<sup>647</sup> TI, 86; TeI, 58-9.

<sup>648</sup> TI, 42; TeI, 12.



the idea that thinks and the infinite to be thought cannot be determined by an adequation, correspondence, or satisfaction. There always remains an *asymptotic* surplus—it is the more in the less, the other in the same, or the infinite in the finite that characterizes the formal structure of the idea of the infinite. By appealing to this formal structure, Levinas discerns the concrete dimension of the idea of the infinite in the ethical relationship between the same and the other. When Descartes’s formal account of the idea of the infinite gives rise to the ontological proof of God’s existence, Levinas claims that “The ambiguity of Descartes’s first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation.”<sup>649</sup> Descartes’s ambiguity of the paradoxical relation, sustained by the separation between the thinking being as finite (the cogito) and the known being as infinite (God), engenders in turn Levinas’s own ambiguous stance toward Descartes. In other words, Levinas rejects Descartes’s ontological proof of God’s existence, which accounts of the divine relation between the finite or imperfect humanity and the infinite or perfect divinity, whereas he appreciates what this ontological proof relies on, that is, the anachronistic logic of “after the fact.” The overarching task of this section is to show that it is the anarchic logic of “the posteriority of the anterior” that phenomenologically clarifies the ethical, religious, and *absolute* relationship between the same and the other. For Levinas, the Cartesian argument remains under the shadow of a onto-theological tradition, so that it cannot capture the *absolute* character of separation, which works at two distinct levels.

On the one hand, separation or *absolutio* is an essential characteristic of each *relatum*, which constitutes a relation. As seen above, however, the Cartesian or divine relation between the *cogito* and God remains one-sided in the sense that the former *relatum* is still theistic and so

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<sup>649</sup> TI, 48; TeI, 19.

dependent upon or relative to the latter *relatum*; the separation of the former is not sufficiently produced since it still depends on the latter as its epistemological and ontological guarantor. Levinas thus argues against Descartes, “The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and God, radical and necessary, is produced in being itself.”<sup>650</sup> Each *relatum* that constitutes a relation should remain separate from each other, so that they absolve themselves [*s’absolvent*] from what they constitute, without being conflated, integrated, or *aufgehoben* into a totalizing union where their separations vanish. In the totalizing or pseudo-relation, the *relatum* is nothing more than a solipsistic being who encounters itself and nothing else; it remains the same [*même*] in its suffocation, imprisonment, and enchainment.

On the other hand, the *relata* that found a relation should be separated from what they found since each separation of the *relata* is found only *after the fact* in relation to the relation they found; it is, Levinas states, “a relation in which the terms *absolve* themselves [*s’absolvent*] from the relation, remain absolute [*absolus*] within the relation.”<sup>651</sup> In this two-fold relation, separation is thus produced, but this production is not found unless every *relatum* absolves itself from what it establishes. In order to maintain any relation between the same and the other, they remain *absolute* without being totalized into a pseudo-relation in which their absolutions dissolve: “The same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation, remain absolutely.”<sup>652</sup> Thus, the ethical relation refers to the *absolute* and non-totalizing relationship with the other *absolutely* other than the same, *i.e.*, the absolutely other who absolves itself not only from the same but also from the relation with the same. This relation is exactly what Levinas means by religion: “We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established

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<sup>650</sup> TI, 48; TeI, 19.

<sup>651</sup> TI, 64; TeI, 36.

<sup>652</sup> TI, 102; TeI, 75.

between the same and the other without constituting a totality.”<sup>653</sup> In spite of the fact that Levinas never produces an articulation of the notion of religion in a detailed or systematic way but only sporadically mentions it throughout his oeuvre, the crux of religion in his ethical thought can be epitomized as his paradoxical expression “*rapport sans rapport*.”<sup>654</sup> The ethical relationship between the same and the other is itself religion or a “relation without relation” whose religiosity does not consist in a mystical participation, dialectical reconciliation, or sacredness but in the absolute separation, distance, or “holiness [*sainteté*].”<sup>655</sup> Thus, a *nom* “religion” is not a mere noun or name that envisions a fixed, self-enclosed, or totalizing identity of what the name names. Levinas states: “The ethical relation is defined, in contrast with every relation with the sacred, by excluding every signification it would take on *unbeknown* to one who maintains that relation.”<sup>656</sup> In this absolute relationship or what Derrida even calls a “non-relationship,”<sup>657</sup> separation takes on its ethical, metaphysical, and thus *religious* signification of the holiness, which ruptures any pagan form of totality based on a participation, fusion, absorption, dependence, synthesis, or union among the *relata*.

The rupture of totality cannot be accomplished by a pseudo-relation based on a simple opposition where all the *relata* remain the same (difference), but by the production of separation in the absolute relation in which they remain atheistic and so absolute. “Only an atheist being can relate itself to the Other and already *absolve* itself from this relation,” Levinas claims, “[and finally]

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<sup>653</sup> TI, 40; TeI, 10.

<sup>654</sup> TI, 80, 295; TeI, 52, 271.

<sup>655</sup> TI, 195; TeI, 169. See also TI, 291; TeI, 267. In his later interview with François Poirié, Levinas states: “The word ethics is Greek. More often, especially now, I think about holiness, about the holiness of the face of the other or the holiness in relation to oneself in a comportment which encounters the face as face, where the obligation with respect to the other is imposed before all obligation.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Interview with François Poirié,” trans. Jill Robins, Marcus Coelen, and Thomas Loebel, in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 49.

<sup>656</sup> TI, 79; TeI, 52.

<sup>657</sup> FK, 99.

welcome the absolute purified of the violence of the sacred.”<sup>658</sup> For Levinas, preoccupation with the sacred gives rise to a fanatic enchantment or pagan idolization, not because it is atheistic, but, contrarily, because it is not atheistic enough due to its neglect of the significance of this Hebrew word “*kidouch*,” that is, separation, distance, or *absolutio*. Derrida here recognizes that the French term “*sainteté*” employed by Levinas is the translation of a Hebrew word “*kidouch*.”<sup>659</sup> Apropos of an *absolute* [*absolus*] implication of *sainteté* or *kidouch* on the hither side of a simple polarity between the negation and the affirmation of God, Levinas re-defines atheism as “separation so complete that the separated being maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated.”<sup>660</sup> In the experience of the sacred, there is no relation at all since the separated being does not remain atheistic or *absolus* in relation to a relation it finds and thus dissolves into a fanatic union—it is an airproof enchainment into which all beings are

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<sup>658</sup> TI, 77; TeI, 49.

<sup>659</sup> FK, 54, n. 8. Derrida here refers to Levinas’s Talmudic commentaries published as Emmanuel Levinas, *Du sacré au saint: Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977). These texts are translated and published as Emmanuel Levinas, “From the Sacred and the Holy: Five New Talmudic Readings,” in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 91-197. In the Preface to “From the Sacred and the Holy,” Levinas writes: “We wished in these readings to bring out the catharsis or demythification of the religious that Jewish wisdom performs. It does this in opposition to the interpretation of myths—ancient and modern—through recourse to other myths, often more obscure and more cruel, albeit more widespread, and which, by this fact, pass for being more profound sacred, or universal. The oral Torah speaks ‘in spirit and in truth,’ even when it seems to do violence to the verses and letters of the written Torah. From the Torah it extracts *ethical meaning as the ultimate intelligibility of the human* and even of the cosmic. This is why we have entitled this present book *From the Sacred to the Holy*,” 92-3. In his eulogy to Levinas, Derrida also informs that Levinas once told him in a personal conversation as follows: “You know, one often speaks of ethics of ethics to describe what I do, but what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy,” AEE, 4; AEL, 15. It is Derrida himself who understands Levinas’s ethics as “Ethics of Ethics.” WD, 111; ED, 164. Incidentally, Michel B. Smith makes a distinction between the sacred tied to a place, enrootedness, and immanence and the holy related to people, diaspora, and transcendence. Michel B. Smith, *Toward the Outside: Concepts and Themes in Emmanuel Levinas* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 75.

<sup>660</sup> TI, 58; TeI, 29. For Levinas, paradoxically, Judaism is an *atheistic* monotheism insofar as its teaching “consists in understanding this holiness or saintliness [*sainteté*] of God in a sense that stands in sharp contrast to the numinous meaning of this term....Judaism has disenchanting [*désensorcelé*] the world, contesting the notion that religions apparently evolved out of enthusiasm and the Sacred,” Emmanuel Levinas, “A Religion for Adults,” in DF, 14; DL, 32 (translation modified). For an extended discussion on Levinas’s distinction between the sacred and the holy, see John Caruana, “Not Ethics, Not Ethics Alone, But the Holy: Levinas on Ethics and Holiness,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 34:4 (2006): 561-583. In this article, Caruana shows that Levinas’s idea of the holy is opposed to the views on the sacred presented by Emile Durkheim, Georges Bataille, and Mircea Eliade, and then argues that the holy is a kind of an “antidote to the ethical evasiveness that the sacred encourages” (570).

suffocated. Levinas asserts, “The numinous annuls the links between persons by making beings participate, albeit ecstatically, in a dream not brought about willingly by them, an order in which they lose themselves [*s’abîment*].”<sup>661</sup> In this context, Derrida makes a quite Levinasian argument: “the hypersanctification of this non-relation or of this transcendence would come about by way of desacralization rather than through secularization or laicization...perhaps even by way of a certain ‘atheism’.”<sup>662</sup> From the ethical, metaphysical, and religious perspective of Levinas’s thought, atheism eventually marks the breach of all the varieties of what theology calls God, what ontology calls Being, and what Levinas calls totality. In a genuine sense, the ethical, metaphysical, and religious relation “respects the total Transcendence of the other without being bewitched by it.”<sup>663</sup> It is the radical paradox of Levinas’s idea of the religious relation or relation without relation whose relationality consists in its separation, absolution, distance, or holiness; consequently, a true atheist alone can be truly religious.

In no way is the paradoxical *rapport* as religion a relation with the sacred, that is, a synchronic-symmetrical *rapprochement* in which the same stands by the other at the same time [*en même temps*] and in the same place [*au même endroit*]. This *rapprochement* takes place in the same plane in which the same makes the other same; thus, it reverts to a pseudo-relation found upon a self-indulgence, satisfaction, contention, complacency, and *repos en paix*, totally indifferent to the diachronic-asymmetrical coming, calling, suffering, and death of the Other. In the metaphysical, ethical, and religious relation, however, the same and the other never meet at the same time in the same place since the other always comes over too early against the same by calling into question the same place. The idea of the infinite is the first evidence of the too-early

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<sup>661</sup> DF, 14; DL, 32 (translation modified).

<sup>662</sup> FK, 99. From this Levinasian view of atheism, Derrida draws a quite Levinasian conclusion that the holiness or *kidouch* designates “disenchantment as the *very resource of the religious*.” (99).

<sup>663</sup> TI, 78; TeI, 50.

arrival of the other who comes from absolutely other than the same place; in other words, the absolutely and infinitely other has already thought of me [*moi*] in an accusative form before I [*Moi*] in a subjective form thinks of the other. In my gaze that aims at the other, the very other already “looks at *moi* and accuses *moi* in the face of the Other.”<sup>664</sup> In the idea of the infinite, the sober, separate, and atheistic I finds the substantive *Moi* that thinks of the other only after finding itself as an accusative *moi* that is thought by the other absolutely other than the *moi-même*. The other speaks to the *moi* before the *Moi* gives its word to it. The promise that the *Moi* gives to the other is already inscribed in the responsibility undertaken by the *moi* for the other. The too-early, anachronic, and so anarchic advent of the other appears to reveal and accuse [*accuser*] my arbitrary freedom and its injustice. Levinas states: “the other absolutely other—the Other—does not limit the freedom of the same; calling it to responsibility, it founds it and justifies it.”<sup>665</sup> If the separate, independent, or solipsistic *Moi* is always occupied with itself, the other wholly other than itself already preoccupies, obsesses, and accuses it as the accusative *moi*. Hence, the *Moi* neither begins nor ends the ethical relation with the other; even death is no solution to this ineradicable relation. The face of the other cannot be measured, calculated, or sublated by the *Moi* in terms of a transcendental, ontological, or dialectical mediation; rather, it is the very ethical call expressed in the face of the other that straightforwardly [*droite*] reveals itself to the *moi* and accuses the *moi* with its first word “Thou shalt not kill.”<sup>666</sup>

### 3. The First Word of the Other: “Thou Shalt Not Kill”

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<sup>664</sup> TI, 244; TeI, 222.

<sup>665</sup> TI, 197; TeI, 171.

<sup>666</sup> TI, 199; TeI, 173. In this first word, Eisenstadt observes a two-fold meaning of an asymmetric feature of the ethical relation: “the asymmetry of identity” and “the asymmetry of responsibility.” Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text*, 21-6. I will develop this point in the next section in terms of an economy of death.

As seen in the first section, the early Levinas recognizes the alterity of the other in the ungraspable mystery of death, which Heidegger reduces to the heroic mastery of death. For Heidegger, death is the transparent event for Dasein, who understands it as its own existential possibility of the sheer impossibility by which the ontological meaning of death is clarified. Death thus determines the finite solitude in its authentic totality where Dasein discovers itself as the Same [*Même*], as Cristian Ciocan puts it, “What is constituted by death is the authentic, the identical, totality, or the Same in Levinas’s term.”<sup>667</sup> In opposition to Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death, the early Levinas in *Time and the Other* argues that death is the enigmatic event that cannot be captured by the doxical thematization, spiritual conceptualization, or intentional representation. Thus, the mystery of death impervious to the comprehension of Being does not confirm the solipsistic Being of Dasein in its most authentic possibility but, on the contrary, ruptures, interrupts, and breaches it beyond or on the hither side of all the possibility. The mature Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* goes further into the ultimate structure of *être* produced as split into same and other and uncovers the ontological canopy, which dissimulates this ultimate depth of *être* by veiling it up with *Sein*. At its most fundamental dimension, *être* understood by Levinas is not a Heideggerian *Sein* whose authentic totality can be achieved in the solitude of Dasein as Being-toward-death; from the beginning, it is already fractured, split, and separated into same and other. Provided that the ultimate dimension of being is concretized in the relation between the same and the other, death becomes a matter of a duo prior to that of a solo; in other words, it is no longer a matter of ontology but rather of ethics, of religion in the first place. If the early Levinas formulates his view of death against the backdrop of Heidegger in order to disclose the enigmatic mystery in which he recognizes the alterity of the other, the mature Levinas delves further into a

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<sup>667</sup> Cristian Ciocan, “Les repères d’une symétrie renversée: La phénoménologie de la mort entre Heidegger et Lévinas,” *Emmanuel Levinas 100* (2007), 255 (henceforth my translation).

primordial phenomenon of murder that opens up “the scale of human relations.”<sup>668</sup> For Levinas, the ethical signification of death takes place in these human relations, which Heidegger’s ontological analysis simply dismisses as an ontic matter that impedes access to the ontological, existential, and authentic sense of death. No longer can death be understood in a neutral, indifferent, or ontological way in which it manifests itself as a mere phenomenon that appears to the solipsistic Dasein alone; rather, the problem of death intensifies to the extent that my death turns into the death of the other in terms of violence, hostility, aggression, and murder. It is in murder as “the absolute violence” that Levinas recognizes “the essence of death,”<sup>669</sup> from which the ethical significance of death emerges.

### **3-1. Murder in the Economy of Death**

The first death would be murder; Cain killed before he died. Cain gave death to Abel while Abel took it from Cain. The essential characteristic of murder consists in a unilateral, asymmetric exchange of giving and taking death. Murder takes place in the asymmetric *economy* of death that operates between the same and the other, one of which unilaterally gives death to another while the latter unilaterally takes it from the former without any compensation for the death. For nothing replaces death; it is neither reversible nor repeatable. It cannot take place twice since it is a dead-end game that never allows another game to undo it; there is no exit, no escape, and no evasion in the one-shot event. Murder is not an evasion from being, nor “a passage into nothingness,” nor “a passage to another existence, continuing in a new setting.”<sup>670</sup> It seems to simply aim at annihilation.

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<sup>668</sup> TI, 236; TeI, 213.

<sup>669</sup> TI, 233-34; TeI, 210-11. Ciocan explicates a sort of transition of Levinas’s focus on death from *Time and the Other* to *Totality and Infinity*: “The alterity of the proper death, analyzed in *Time and the Other*,...is doubled in *Totality and Infinity* by the hostile affectivity that the other human exercises on my proper death in the threatening climate of murder: murdering alterity.” Ciocan, “Les repères d’une symétrie renversée,” 264.

<sup>670</sup> TI, 232; TeI, 208.



The two-fold implication of murder in terms of a giving-and-taking of death exceptionally and symmetrically converges in suicide or murdering oneself, in which the one who gives death is the very who takes it. Suicide would be the facile, painless panacea that terminates this dead-end game. When I am suffering to the degree that my being riveted to myself appears as the unbearable, immeasurable, or insufferable burden, murdering myself shows up as a possible escape from this extreme suffering by giving and taking my death. In suffering at its peak, suicide might appear to me as a salvation, which puts an end to the unbearable weight of my existence. In this extremely desperate suffering, ironically, I obtain all the capacity to make an exit on my own to the extent that I am able to give death to me and take it from me; therefore, suicide or killing myself no longer matters to me since death itself is at my disposal. Suicide as the exceptional event characterizes the symmetric and same [*même*] economy of death in which the exchange of giving and taking occurs in myself [*moi-même*] at the same time [*en même temps*].

According to Derrida's reading of the Heideggerian version of the economy of death, the exceptional trait of suicide is authentically banalized by the mineness of death. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida reinterprets Heidegger's ontological analysis of death in terms of sacrifice. For Heidegger, sacrifice—dying for the other or, more generally, the death of the other—is ontologically meaningless and even impossible in the sense that no one can die in the exact place of the other: "Such dying for...can never mean that the other has thus had his death in the least taken away."<sup>671</sup> I can, of course, die for the other in its place, but my dying never takes its death away from it. I can sacrifice myself for the other "*in some definite affair or cause* [in einer bestimmten Sache],"<sup>672</sup> but my sacrifice cannot deprive the other of its own death. Ontologically understood, Dasein alone takes death upon itself in every case, as soon as it is thrown into there, and as long as it is there.

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<sup>671</sup> SZ, 240.

<sup>672</sup> SZ, 240.

Heidegger writes, “No one can take the other’s dying away from him.”<sup>673</sup> In this mineness of death, Derrida recognizes that “One has to give it to oneself by taking it upon itself, for it can only be mine alone, irreplaceably.”<sup>674</sup> No one else can either give death to me or take it from me: “death is in every case mine.”<sup>675</sup> In the midst of giving and taking death, Dasein transparently understands death as its most authentic possibility, which individualizes Dasein itself to the point of accomplishing the ontological solitude in its authentic totality. What the mineness of death signifies is the fact that the gift or giving [*donner*] of death is the same as the taking of it; the giving-and-taking of death takes place within the symmetric and same economy. In this same economy of death as in the case of suicide, death no longer matters to Dasein since it is already mine [*meine*]; the heroic Dasein becomes the master of death. There is no room for the other(s) in the same economy of death.

It would not be exaggerating to say that Levinas relates suicide to Dasein’s death, as Bergo points out in her recent work. By arguing the sensibility underlining the ethical ground of the other in the same, which “phenomenalizes as an affect—*anxiety*,...as a persistent passion,” Bergo contends that this anxiety is clearly distinguished from “Heidegger’s *Angst* ‘unto death,’ which for Levinas engulfs us in a narcissistic suffering or tempts us to suicide.”<sup>676</sup> For Heidegger himself, however, the experience of suicide is *ontologically* absurd since death itself is not something that Dasein actualizes by committing suicide but the possibility *par excellence* that cannot be actualized, insofar as it *is* there. Ontologically understood, death is probably the possibility of giving and

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<sup>673</sup> SZ, 240.

<sup>674</sup> GD, 45.

<sup>675</sup> SZ, 240.

<sup>676</sup> Bettina Bergo, *Anxiety: A Philosophical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 31. Here Bergo definitely refers to Levinas’s later work, *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence*, in which Levinas writes: “But anxiety as being-for-death is also the hope to reach the deep of non-being. The possibility of deliverance (and the temptation to suicide) arises in death anxiety: like nothingness, death is an openness into which, along with a being, the anxiety over its definition is engulfed.” OBBE, 195, n.10; AEAE, 137, n.10.

taking, but, as Derrida rightly puts it, “Death would be the name of what suspends every *experience* of giving and taking.”<sup>677</sup> Nevertheless, the parallel structure found in both suicide and Dasein’s death becomes evident when they remain within the narcissistic and same economy of death, which symmetrically operates in the solitude of the solipsistic subject. For Levinas, the same economy of death conceals the ultimate structure of being and, for that reason, betrays the essence of death as murder by making it the symmetric event in which the giver and the taker remain the Same [*Même*].

From Levinas’s perspective, murder as the essence of death is not something that I can give and take in my solitude. Unlike suicide or Dasein’s death in the symmetric economy of death, the genuine, ethical, or religious sense of murder, although it still remains within the economy of giving and taking, emerges from the ultimate dimension of being as split into the same and the other prior to my solitude. The solitude of my death cannot make the other disappear since the other has already been there, is still there, and will be there; the “there” from which the other comes is neither a *da* nor an *ici* but “elsewhere” than any of these. Given the ethical situation in which my solitude is already de-positated and so faced with the alterity of the other, my death is already under the *other* economy of death, absolutely unbeknown to me. The other who comes from elsewhere never indifferently comes to me; it is not always my congenial, likable, or hospitable friend who welcomes me but also an unknown, dangerous, or hostile enemy who comes to murder me. As Levinas states, “The Other, inseparable from the very event of transcendence, is situated in the region from which death, *possibly* murder, comes.”<sup>678</sup> I have no idea of whether the other

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<sup>677</sup> GD, 45 (italics removed and added). This sentence is omitted from the first edition of the English version, to which I refer in this dissertation, but appears in the second edition. See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 45; Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 68.

<sup>678</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 210 (italics added).

welcomes or murders me since the alterity of the infinitely and absolutely other exceeds my idea of it; otherwise, the alterity of the other, either my friend or my foe, is measured by and finally reduced into my self-knowledge, representation, or comprehension. The hostile threat of the other does not issue from its fatal violence to kill me for sure but from what I cannot anticipate, project, or assume—it is “the very *unforeseeableness* of [its] reaction”<sup>679</sup> that makes me restless, unsettled, and non-indifferent by suspending, shaking, or undermining my selfsame identity.

The approach of the absolutely other traumatizes, astonishes, and staggers me to the extent that it deprives me of my mastery over death in which I find myself in my authentic totality. My death does not come from myself in the narcissistic economy of death where I remain the same by giving and taking death as my most authentic possibility; otherwise, death would be then the solipsistic locus in which I exert my power, mastery, and sovereignty. Levinas states: “But the possible is immediately inverted into Power and Domination. In the new that springs from it the subject recognizes himself. He finds himself again in it, masters it.”<sup>680</sup> In this regard, suicide like Dasein’s death is the exceptional moment of a self-negation where the giver who gives death to the taker takes again what it gives; thus, the giver and the taker are the Same [*Même*]. The gift of death remains within the symmetric and same economy of death. However, murder as the essence of death does not belong to the symmetric economy of death since the giver who gives death does not take again what it gives; it gives it to the other absolutely other than itself. Rather, my death comes from the absolutely other whose gift of death remains within the asymmetric economy, that is, the other economy of death that disrupts the same economy of death over which I hold sway. Due to the asymmetric economy of death, it is the absolutely other who alone gives death to me,

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<sup>679</sup> TI, 199; TeI, 173.

<sup>680</sup> TI, 275; TeI, 252.

and not *vice versa*. Consequently, death truly matters to me since it is not mine, out of my hand: “death threatens me from beyond.”<sup>681</sup>

The asymmetric economy of death signifies that I am not only a vulnerable victim of the critical menace of the other but also a hostile enemy who can kill the other, as Levinas writes: “The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.”<sup>682</sup> In his early text entitled “Ethics and Spirit” (1952), Levinas already touched upon this point, arguing that the face of the other is “an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed....The Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill.”<sup>683</sup> I cannot wish to murder animals, angels, or ghosts but only the one who has a face that speaks to me and commands me not to murder. It is interesting to note that just as Heidegger differentiates dying from perishing or demising, John Llewelyn makes a distinction, with a nuanced—stripped off ontological connotations—tone, between murdering and exterminating: “a being [that] I exterminate or destroy, is not one I can want to murder or kill.”<sup>684</sup> However, this does not mean that my temptation to murder brings about the interdiction in order to ward off further murdering, as if without my initial intention to kill there would be no interdiction, as if Cain’s murdering gave rise to one of the Ten Commandments. Properly speaking, the posterior temptation makes sense of the *raison d’être* of the anterior commandment, as if my temptation *were* the cause of the first word of the other. The interdiction of the other does not follow, Levinas claims, “after the event, but looks at me from the very depths of the eyes I want to extinguish.”<sup>685</sup> Even prior to any initiative to kill the other at whom the subjective or substantive *Moi* aims, the eyes of the other already look at the

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<sup>681</sup> TI, 234; TeI, 210.

<sup>682</sup> TI, 198; TeI, 173.

<sup>683</sup> DF, 8; DL, 22.

<sup>684</sup> John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 102.

<sup>685</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 209.

accusative *moi* and speak to it “Thou shalt not kill” by which the *Moi* finds its freedom arbitrary, unjust, and murderous rather than innocent, intact, and just. It is as if I already did, even though I have never committed murder.

However, the primordial interdiction of the face does not simply mean the impossibility of murdering; rather, it presupposes the possible transgression of what it interdicts. Levinas even says, “in fact the interdiction already dwells in this possibility.”<sup>686</sup> In reality, murder is not, of course, impossible as in the case of suicide, for it is still under the economy of death in terms of giving and taking. In fact, the murdering still prevalent in our reality undoubtedly discloses the ethical exigency inscribed in the face of the other as “more primordial than everything that takes place in [us].”<sup>687</sup> Cain is the first one who violated the interdiction by giving death to Abel. In murdering his brother, what Cain failed to see is the profound depth of the face, that is, the most vulnerable, unprotected, and naked locus of Abel, by reducing it into a plastic form of a visage through which he would see, and over which he would hold sway. Cain slew Abel but could not annihilate his face whose infinity exceeds and paralyzes Cain’s power and mastery over death, so that Able had already looked at Cain with “the eye that in the tomb shall look at Cain,”<sup>688</sup> even before being murdered. In Levinas’s view, whenever I wish to annihilate the other, the other denies me not a greater power that I cannot overcome with my power but the “ethical resistance”<sup>689</sup> that calls into question my power as such and unveils its murderous violence. Levinas thus notes, “The movement of annihilation in murder is therefore a purely relative annihilation.”<sup>690</sup> The murdering of the other is not a total annihilation but the very attestation of the arbitrary, unjustified, and

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<sup>686</sup> TI, 232-33; TeI, 209.

<sup>687</sup> TI, 87; TeI, 59.

<sup>688</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 209.

<sup>689</sup> TI, 199; TeI, 173.

<sup>690</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 209.

violent exercise of freedom. In this relative annihilation, my power is frustrated and exposed to the ethical call, which leads to the Pascaline insight that my being is itself already the usurpation of the world. As Levinas puts it, “I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer”<sup>691</sup> even though I could not even kill anyone, including myself. In this regard, the murder of Cain betrays the essence of death, which consists in the impossibility of murdering in spite of the fact that Cain slew Abel: “the impossibility of killing is not real, but moral.”<sup>692</sup> Cain really murdered Abel, but ethically failed to murder him. Murder always aims at the face but already misses it, as Levinas states, “Murder exercises a power over what escapes power.”<sup>693</sup> Paradoxically, the essence of death enshrined in murder lies in the inevitable failure of murdering the other, which is primordially inscribed in the first word of the other: “Thou shalt not kill.”

### 3-2. Time against Death

The asymmetric economy of death signifies that it is the absolutely other alone who not only gives me [*moi*] death but also to whom I [*Moi*] cannot give death in my spontaneity. Hence, death is not the possibility over which I hold sway by anticipating the nothingness of my own existence, of my no-longer-able-to-be-there, but rather the limit of the possibility in which I am no longer able to be able or have no longer power, mastery, or sovereignty. In the asymmetric economy of death, I [*Moi*] am no longer toward death as my most authentic possibility, but the enigmatic, unknowable, and mysterious death is toward me [*moi*] on the hither side of any possibility: “In the being for death of fear, I am not faced with nothingness, but faced with what is *against me*, as though murder, rather than one of the occasions of dying, were inseparable from

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<sup>691</sup> TI, 84; TeI, 56.

<sup>692</sup> DF, 10; DL, 26.

<sup>693</sup> TI, 198; TeI, 172.

the essence of death.”<sup>694</sup> The true menace of death does not spring from its deadly violence that kills me at a certain moment but from its unknowability, unforeseeability, or unassumability, which cannot be synchronized into my time in terms of either memory/reminiscence or projection/anticipation. I cannot even assume what is against me since it asymptotically comes to me and approaches me with secrecy; the last moment is hidden from me [*ultima latet*].<sup>695</sup> My death comes from “elsewhere” than the ontological *topos* in which I can exercise my power; it is out of my control. The gift of death in the asymmetric economy of death does not mean that the other gives death to me immediately and so annihilates me for good, but that the other liberates me from my solipsistic (dis)closure or imprisonment at the heart of myself [*moi-même*]. In the asymmetric economy of death, what the other gives is exactly what I take, that is, my time to respond. It is my time granted by the other that “separates me from my death dwindles and dwindles without end, involves a sort of last interval that my consciousness cannot traverse.”<sup>696</sup> Before my death, I still have time to be against death, against the last moment—albeit unbeknown to me; it is an interval, postponement, or delay that allows me to be ethical, religious, and responsible.

However, my time as a postponement of death should not be confused with an inauthentic time or the time of the anonymous they [*das Man*], as Chanter might hold. According to Heidegger, death does not matter to the *Man* since it is delayed to the infinite future; it is not mine [*meine*] and not right now for the *Man*. After clearing the way of an inauthentic understanding of Being-toward-death that the *Man* misconstrues, Chanter argues that this inauthentic understanding of death is “not ‘inauthentic’ according to Levinas,” and even claims that “for Levinas it is part of

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<sup>694</sup> TI, 234; TeI, 210.

<sup>695</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 209-10.

<sup>696</sup> TI, 235; TeI, 211.



the essence of death to be always infinitely future.”<sup>697</sup> However, Levinas does not subscribe to Heidegger’s distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic understanding of death in terms of the comprehension of *Sein*, which conceals the ultimate structure of *être*. Moreover, the essence of death does not consist in a mere postponement of death to the infinite future. Levinas would agree with Heidegger that the *Man* “always has more time up to the end,”<sup>698</sup> so that death does not matter to it. The criticism that Levinas levels against the time of the *Man* is that the *Man* still has more time to delay its death to the infinite future, but has no sense of responsibility for the other, not even for its own Being. The *Man*’s “to still have time” gives rise to the lack of responsibility and so the indifference to its own death whereas my time “to be against death” leads to the exigency of my response to the ethical call of the other. Against my death, against my last moment, I still have time to be not for myself but rather for the other who calls for my response. What individualizes me is not my death but rather my response to and my responsibility for the other, who makes me restless and non-indifferent and, therefore, solicits my irreducible, insatiable, and irreplaceable responsibility.

In the asymmetric economy of death, the essence of death takes on its ethical signification: the inescapable exigency of the ethical command inscribed in the expression of the face “Thou shalt not kill.” Prior to my anticipatory resolution that I am toward death in my responsibility for my solipsistic Being, I am against death in my responsibility for the other. Death truly matters to me since “Death, source of all myths, is *present* only in the Other,”<sup>699</sup> who summons me to my response, to my responsibility. Death is out of reach, out of hand; indeed, it matters to me insofar as it is not mine. The face of the other as the holy locus of the original language calls for my

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<sup>697</sup> Tina Chanter, “The Question of Death: The Time of the I and the Time of the Other,” *Irish Philosophical Journal* 4 (1987), 102.

<sup>698</sup> SZ, 425.

<sup>699</sup> TI, 179; TeI, 154.

response “It’s me here [*Me voici*]”<sup>700</sup> and commands the *moi* to take responsibility for the other. In the face-to-face relationship, I discover myself as the accusative *moi* who fears murder in my responsibility for the other, prior to as the substantive *Moi* who is anxious of death in its own responsibility for the authentic Being: “anxiety of death is inverted into fear of committing murder.”<sup>701</sup> The ethical signification of death emerges from the inverted movement of being from the being-for-itself to the being-for-the-other. For Levinas, to be mortal is to still have time to respond, to be for the other, to be moral, and to be religious. It is my first response, “*Me voici*,” that delivers the *moi* to the other: the primordial exposure to the other on the hither side of the (dis)closure of Being.

### 3.3. The Failure of Phenomenology of Death

As seen so far, death is not the ontological locus of the solitude of Dasein but the ethical locus of the alterity of the other; it is neither something nor nothing that I can give and take in my spontaneous freedom. Just as Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death or thanato-*logy* neutralizes the mystery of death into the mastery of death, any doxical thematization of death deprives the alterity of death by making it a pure, flat, or transparent phenomenon. Levinas’s ethics calls into question the Heideggerian version of thanatology because death as such cannot be logicalized, thematized, or grasped; otherwise, “Ethics, where the same takes the irreducible Other into account, would belong to opinion [*doxa*].”<sup>702</sup> Death as the enigmatic locus of the alterity of the other might

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<sup>700</sup> In order to preserve an accusative form, I will translate “*Me voici*” as “It’s me here” rather than as “Here I am.” It is important to remember that the one who makes oneself available to the other is not the substantive *Moi* but the accusative *moi*. What “*me voici*” signifies is the fact that I voluntarily or autonomously am not giving myself to the other but already accused of being given. As will be seen in the next chapter, the French “*me voici*” undermines Derrida’s critique of Levinas’s ethical language for its lack of the passage of Being or “to be.” The English translation, either “Here I am” or “It’s me here,” would neutralize this Levinasian response to Derrida’s critique. I will return to this issue concerning Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Levinas in the next chapter.

<sup>701</sup> TI, 244; TeI, 222.

<sup>702</sup> TI, 47; TeI, 17-8.

not be a proper subject matter for phenomenology since it never manifests itself as a theme, object, or phenomenon. Thus, death escapes from all doxical thematization and all phenomenological description so that phenomenology fails to thematize death and to make sense of it. In this vein, “phenomenology of death” seems to be oxymoronic since death rejects phenomenology. Ironically, the successful achievement of phenomenology of death betrays not only death itself but also phenomenology all together.

For Levinas, phenomenology of death is exemplarily achieved by Heidegger’s ontological-doxical thanatology through thematizing what cannot be thematized. By means of this doxical thematization, the ontological meaning of death is unconcealed in the “*Sein*-topped” architecture. However, what is still concealed in this unconcealment is what is more primordial and urgent, that is, the very ethical meaning of death. In order to unveil the ethical signification of death, phenomenology should fail to thematize death. This does not mean that phenomenology should not thematize what cannot be thematized, *i.e.*, death; rather, it has to thematize it but fails to do so. Paradoxically, phenomenology justifies its *raison d’être* in its failure. Only the miscarriage of the phenomenological project exposes why death is neither a mere phenomenon nor a pure non-phenomenon. Indeed, death is neither a pure phenomenon which can be grasped by doxical thematizations and whose meaning is exhausted in its manifestation, nor a pure non-phenomenon, which remains irrelevant and meaningless to the phenomenological investigation. The failure of phenomenology is the unavoidable price Levinas has to pay in his attempt to debunk the successful thematization of death achieved by Heidegger’s ontology. It is the *paradox* of Levinas’s own phenomenology of death that consists in the failure of phenomenology itself.

Nevertheless, the possibility of Levinas’s own phenomenology of death comes from the failure of phenomenology itself. That is to say, the failure of phenomenology leads Levinas to go

back to what phenomenology has sought, *i.e.*, the *Sachen selbst* as they are. On the hither side of the binary opposition of a pure phenomenon and pure non-phenomenon, death appears as a *para*-phenomenon, which reveals itself as it is without being reduced to a flat phenomenon or being withdrawn into a pure non-phenomenon; there always remains an incomprehensible excess or surplus impervious to the doxical thematization. What Heidegger's doxical analysis of death covers up is the very mystery, enigma, or *para*-phenomenality of death; in doing so, the *para*-doxical signification of death is largely subordinated into the doxical meaning of Being. The primary task of Levinas's phenomenology of death is to unveil what has been veiled by the doxical thematization of death and to lay bare the exigency of the paradoxical signification of death, inscribed in the face of the other, prior to the doxical-ontological meaning of Dasein's death. At the limit of phenomenology, Levinas recognizes both the possibility and the impossibility of phenomenology of death in terms of a *para*-phenomenality of death. The phenomenological challenge Levinas faces in the ultimate structure of being split as the same and the other becomes even more complicated and exigent when the third party or the other other than the other enters the ethical relation between the two. "The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other."<sup>703</sup> Every other is absolutely and infinitely other. Now death is no longer a matter of a duo but of a trio and more. The central aim of the next chapter is to examine this perplexing problem concerning the death of the *others* in terms of the third party, on which Levinas himself largely remains silent.

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<sup>703</sup> TI, 213; TeI, 188.

## Chapter V

### Trio and More from the Outset: Hyperbolic Phenomenology of Death

Chapter Four has considered Levinas's mature elaboration of being [*être*] whose ultimate dimension lies not in the solitude of the solipsistic subject but in the separation between the same and the other. If the early Levinas, especially in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, discovers the brutal nakedness of being [*être*] without any being [*étant*] or of the anonymous *il y a* by calling into question the ongoing complicity or conjunction of *Sein* and *Seidendes*, the mature Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* goes into the concrete structure of being produced as split into same and other antecedent to a solipsistic, solitary, or lonely being or Dasein. Ontologically, in order to enter a relation to the other, the subject must first preserve its own place in which it is able to stand on its own; otherwise, it would be impossible for the subject to have any relationship with other than itself. Thus, the ontological relation always presupposes an authentic place proper to the subject. However, Levinas contends that this authentic place is already the usurpation, domination, and sovereignty of the subject where it remains the same in its self-identification, which is nothing but the reduction of the other into the same.

Phenomenologically, the central thesis of *Totality and Infinity* illustrates that the anterior solitude of the subject can be found only *after the fact* in its posterior relation to the other, as if the posteriority of its relationship with the other already conditions the anterior solitude of the subject. If the solitude of the subject is the condition for the ontological relation to the other, the too-early advent of the other already pre-conditions, pre-concerns, and pre-affects this solipsistic subject. The posterior relationship between the same and the other betrays the anterior solitude of the subject in such a way that the subject no longer finds its base, cause, origin, or *arche* in itself,

which founds, sustains, and justifies its own solitude; the subject no longer remains at home with itself [*chez-soi*] but always already exposed to the other. The phenomenological or anarchic logic of “the posteriority of the anterior”<sup>704</sup> discloses that my being is primordially structured as being-for-the-other prior to being-for-myself. The anterior posteriority of the other undermines the constant complicity between Dasein and Being, which denigrates, marginalizes, or belittles the ethical relation between beings as an ontic or inauthentic issue. What Levinas means by “the ethical” is not something ontic that waits for ontology to make clear its way of *Sein* since ontology blurs, distracts, or covers up “the royal road”<sup>705</sup> to the bare depth of *être*. Consequently, Levinas claims that what ontology has dissimulated by means of the various ontological coverings and *Sein* in particular is this concrete and ultimate dimension of *être* produced as multiple.

By appealing to the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* attempts to strip off what has been accumulated in the pure bottom of being in order to disclose the primordial structure of being concretized in the metaphysical, ethical, religious, and *absolus* relations between the same and the other without constituting any form of what Levinas calls totality. Just as the idea, already implanted in the *cogito*, thinks of the infinite whose excessive or “desirable” content cannot be exhaustively captured, grasped, or comprehended by the *cogito*, the idea of the infinite formally signifies an unsurpassable distance, separation, or “holiness [*sainteté*]” between the terms that relate. This formal structure of a relation of the idea to its *ideatum*, which maintains the *absolus* distance between the *relata*, takes its concrete form in the ethical encounter with the other. The face of the other signifies the rupture of the totalizing disposition of my identity, and its ethical resistance calls into question the free, arbitrary, and unjust spontaneity in my self-identification. Prior to my own death toward which I am able to be in the ontological responsibility

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<sup>704</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.

<sup>705</sup> TI, 29; TeI, xvii.

for my own, proper, or authentic Being, I still have time to be against death in the ethical responsibility for the other. The essence of death embedded in murder takes on the ethical signification when death truly matters to me, not because it is mine, but precisely because it is a matter of the other. The ethical signification of the death of the other originates from the irreducible, irreplaceable, and inescapable exigency of the ethical call inscribed in the command of the face: “Thou shalt not kill.” The interdiction of the face announces that I am already an accomplice in murdering the other—even though I have never committed murder in reality—and, accordingly, calls for my responsibility to respond, “*me voici*.”

However, the ethical situation becomes convoluted when the third party as the other of the other interrupts my excessive and exclusive responsibility for the other and calls for my response: “*me voici*.” The advent of the third party as another other other than the other commands me what the other commands me; I must give my word “*me voici*” not simply to the other alone but also to the third party, and to all the others. It is the troublesome moment of politics or justice that introduces “the latent birth of the *question* in responsibility.”<sup>706</sup> However, this does not mean that the later Levinas compromises the ethical burden of responsibility for the other; on the contrary, he intensifies it to the point of my responsibility for the responsibility of the other by employing hyperbolic notions, such as substitution, sacrifice, or dying for others. The central task of this chapter is to examine how the later Levinas elaborates on this complicated question, that is, the political moment in the ethical in terms of the interrogation of the third party. In order to answer this question, it is important to first consider Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Levinas that makes clear the way in which Levinas formulates the very question on the basis of his departure from both Husserl and Heidegger. The aim of the first section is to disclose that the essential

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<sup>706</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.

advantage of Derrida's critical analysis of Levinas does not simply consist in his effective or potent censure on Levinas's ethical project but rather in his deconstructive gesture which clarifies Levinas's own question running through his later texts.

### 1. Derrida's Deconstructive Gesture toward Levinas

Provided that Levinas's elaboration of ethics as opposed to ontology is mostly flourished in his mature work *Totality and Infinity*, Derrida exemplarily presents a sort of a "classic" reading of Levinas's ethics. It is "Violence and Metaphysics" (1964 & 1967)<sup>707</sup> that ignites various and extended debates on Levinas's own ethics in relation to Derrida's deconstructive reading of it inside and outside the Levinasian scholarship.<sup>708</sup> Before moving onto Levinas's later work, it is worthwhile to consider how Derrida attempts to deconstruct Levinas's ethics, developed in his mature work *Totality and Infinity*, in order to recall what Levinas has done with ethics hitherto and to foresee what he will do hereafter. However, this does not mean that Levinas's later texts and especially *Otherwise Than Being or beyond Essence* are merely a response to Derrida's critique of

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<sup>707</sup> The original version of "Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas" first appeared in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 3&4 (1964) and was later republished with the significant modifications in Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 117-228; in English, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153. These modifications are attentively discussed in Simon Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics: Derrida and Levinas*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 68-76.

<sup>708</sup> Critchley provides the most comprehensive and extended analysis of the textual dialogue between Levinas and Derrida. See Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics: Derrida and Levinas*. Among many others, see also John Llewelyn, *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002); Robert Bernasconi, "Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 181-203; Peter Atterton, "Levinas and the Language of Peace: A Response to Derrida," *Philosophy Today* 36.1 (1992): 59-70; Etienne Feron, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage: L'itinéraire philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas* (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 1992), 257-68; Robert John Sheffler Manning, "Derrida, Levinas, and the Lives of Philosophy at the Death of Philosophy: A Reading of Derrida's Misreading of Levinas in "Violence and Metaphysics"," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20.2/1 (1998): 387-405; Edward Baring, "Levinas and Derrida," in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135-53. For a trenchant reading of Levinas from the Derridean perspective, see Martin Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas," *Diacritics* 34.1 (2004): 40-71.



*Totality and Infinity*, as some commentators hold.<sup>709</sup> Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, for example, state, “Might not *Otherwise Than Being* is seen as a re-reading of *Totality and Infinity* in the light of ‘Violence and Metaphysics’? Although the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida should not be reduced to a question of influence...it seems clear that Levinas has carefully read and assimilated Derrida’s essay.”<sup>710</sup> Consequently, if the “first generation” of the Levinasian scholarship has been largely established by *Totality and Infinity* along with Derrida’s reading of it—*i.e.*, “Violence and Metaphysics,” Bernasconi and Critchley argue that “its second generation” requires “Re-reading Levinas,” which can be determined by their later works, such as *Otherwise Than Being* and “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am.”<sup>711</sup> However, what is at stake here is neither to examine a philosophical dialogue or “chiasm” between Levinas and Derrida nor to verify Derrida’s critique of Levinas—all of which are neither meaningless nor insignificant at any rate—but rather to read Levinas properly with regard to his phenomenology of death. When it comes to the central purpose of this dissertation, a Derridean passage—whether Levinas himself indeed underwent or not—plays a significant role in understanding how Levinas’s phenomenology of death departs from Husserl’s phenomenological method and Heidegger’s ontological

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<sup>709</sup> See Jacques Rolland, *Parcours de l'autrement: Lecture d'Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 15; Feron, *De l'idée de transcendance à la question du langage*, 120, 259; Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1999), 6; Robert Bernasconi, “Skepticism in the Face of Philosophy,” in *Re-Reading Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 153-55. Robert Bernasconi claims that the core chapter of *Otherwise Than Being*, “Substitution,” is an apparent response to Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics.” Robert Bernasconi, “What is the Question to Which ‘Substitution’ is the Answer?” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley & Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 234, 249-50. See also Philip J. Maloney, “Levinas, Substitution, and Transcendental Philosophy,” *Man and World* 30 (1997), 50.

<sup>710</sup> Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Re-Reading Levinas*, xiii. This collection contains Derrida’s “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” (11-47) and Levinas’s “Wholly Otherwise,” (3-10). The former was first published in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, ed. François Laruelle (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1980) and reprinted in *Psyche: Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987); in English, Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Volume I, trans. Ruben Berezdivin and Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 143-90. The latter first appeared in the journal *L’Arc* (no. 54, 1973) and was reprinted in *Noms propres* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976); in English, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 55-62. Simon Critchley tries to read both texts in a “deconstructive or *clôtural*” way. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 107-187.

<sup>711</sup> Bernasconi and Critchley, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Re-Reading Levinas*, xii.

thematization of death. Moreover, Derrida's critical engagement of Levinas's ethics makes clear Levinas's own question, which runs through his early texts implicitly and his later ones explicitly. By means of examining the Derridean passage, this chapter claims that far from falling into a pure, impotent, or angelic ethics, Levinas's ethics remains *ethical* in the political moment of the third party who calls into question the duo-relationship between the same and the other.

Derrida's peculiar concept of deconstruction or *clôture* shows the way he reads a text by treating it as a "tradition." When reading a metaphysical tradition, he describes the deconstructive situation of metaphysics by posing "*the question of the relations between the belonging [appurtenance] and the opening [percée], the question of clôture.*"<sup>712</sup> In terms of the strategy of deconstruction that characterizes a textual practice of double or equivocal reading, Derrida attempts to exhibit that philosophy necessarily belongs to a metaphysical tradition and, simultaneously, searches for the breakthrough from that tradition. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida takes Levinas as a text and then reads him with regard to the deconstructive strategy, which consists in the double reading of Levinas. In the first reading, Derrida follows "in the style of commentary"<sup>713</sup> Levinas who reads traditional texts—especially Husserl and Heidegger. Derrida's reading style of commentary means neither an annotated repetition of the text to simply accept it nor a refutation of the text to leave it behind, but rather gives rise to the second reading in which he re-reads his first reading by opening up the ellipses embedded within Levinas's treatment of the traditional texts. Derrida believes that his deconstructive reading of Levinas makes Levinas *qua* the text more Levinasian than Levinas himself by disclosing the blind spots—which Levinas might not recognize—within Levinas's own reading of Husserl and Heidegger. Derrida goes on to argue that his double reading of Levinas "will ask several questions. If they succeed in approaching

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<sup>712</sup> WD, 110; ED, 163.

<sup>713</sup> WD, 84; ED, 124.

the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections, but rather the questions put to *us* by Levinas.”<sup>714</sup> Consequently, it is the essential merit of Derrida’s reading of Levinas that clarifies Levinas’s own question *via* the deconstruction of Levinas’s consideration of Husserl and Heidegger.

### 1-1. Transcendental Violence of Light

According to Derrida, Levinas’s ethical thought “summons us to depart from the Greek site,”<sup>715</sup> which is the source of the violence placed in both Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology. In the deconstruction of Levinas’s reading of Husserl, Derrida points out that Levinas condemns Husserl’s phenomenology for its violence of the phenomenological “light” as the third term that reduces the Other to the Same; the other is neutralized under the panoramic vision of the transcendental Ego. For Levinas, vision always presupposes the light. What the eye sees is not the light but objects in the light, by which they obtain their own forms and become intelligible in the transcendental sphere. Derrida maintains that what bothers Levinas here is “the imperialism of *theoria*” precisely because “More than any other philosophy, *phenomenology*, in the wake of Plato, was to be struct with light.”<sup>716</sup> The phenomenological eye becomes the transcendental locus of *theoria* which penetrates or sees through all objects and makes sense of them on the basis of the light. In the eyes of Levinas, Husserlian phenomenology presents the other as an alter ego, constituted by analogical appresentation in the Ego’s intentional sphere, and thus reduces the infinite alterity of the Other to the totalitarian identity of the transcendental Ego. Levinas thus states, “The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object—appearing,

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<sup>714</sup> WD, 84; ED, 125.

<sup>715</sup> WD, 82; ED, 122.

<sup>716</sup> WD, 84-5; ED, 126.

that is, taking its place in the light—is precisely the reduction of the other to the same.”<sup>717</sup> Levinas attempts to protect the alterity of the Other from the violent light through his own metaphysical ethics or “Ethics of Ethics”<sup>718</sup> in Derrida’s word.

However, Derrida argues against Levinas that the transcendental reference to analogical appresentation does not refer to the subordination of the other to the same, which destroys the alterity of the other, but to “the unsurpassable necessity of (nonobjective) mediation,”<sup>719</sup> without which the other ceases to be an (other) ego other than the same as the (same) ego and so cannot appear to the same. Derrida goes on to ask whether it is possible to maintain any philosophical or ethical “discourse” presented in *Totality and Infinity* without the phenomenological light; he then contends that there can be no pure ethics without violence, since the phenomenological light is a necessary condition for the presence of the other to the same. Insofar as the other cannot present itself to the same, there will be neither violence nor responsibility altogether in Ethics of Ethics. Derrida thus argues, “It is difficult to maintain a philosophical discourse against light.”<sup>720</sup> The Levinasian version of ethics or a meta-ethics, as Derrida understands it, seems to conceive of the presence of the other as a pure absence, and thereby the other appears as a pure non-phenomenon: “The other must present himself as absent and manifest as non-phenomenal.”<sup>721</sup> If the other manifested itself as a pure non-phenomenon outside the phenomenological light and so never appeared to the same, the ethical resistance of the other would be, Derrida claims, “the strange,

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<sup>717</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 14 (translation modified). Already in *Time and the Other*, Levinas insists on the violent or imperialistic character of light: “Light is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me. The illuminated object is something one encounters, but from the fact that it is illuminated one encounters it as if it came from us. It does not have a fundamental strangeness. Its transcendence is wrapped in immanence. It is with myself that I find myself again in knowledge and enjoyment,” TO, 64-5; TA, 47. (The last sentence is missing from the English translation.)

<sup>718</sup> WD, 111; ED, 164.

<sup>719</sup> WD, 124; ED, 182.

<sup>720</sup> WD, 85; ED, 126.

<sup>721</sup> WD, 103; ED, 152.

unthinkable notion of unreal resistance.”<sup>722</sup> Accordingly, the non-phenomenality of the other would simply go far beyond the phenomenological inquiry, as if the face of the other were not a proper subject matter of phenomenology, as Derrida states: “Thus the expression of the face is expressed beyond all thematization, all constitutive analysis, and all phenomenology.”<sup>723</sup> For Derrida, thus, Levinas fails to recognize that Husserl has already achieved what Levinas himself attempts to achieve through overcoming Husserlian phenomenology:

Levinas and Husserl are quite close here. But by acknowledging in this infinitely other *as such* (appearing as such) the status of an intentional modification of the ego in general, Husserl gives himself the *right to speak* of the infinitely other as such, accounting for the origin and the legitimacy of his language. He describes the system of the phenomenality of nonphenomenality. Levinas *in fact* speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego—which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him—he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language....To return, as to the only possible point of departure, to the intentional phenomenon in which the other appears as other, and lends itself to language, to *every possible language*, is perhaps to give oneself over to violence...but in question, then, is an irreducible zone of factuality, an original, transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence.<sup>724</sup>

As this passage clearly shows, Derrida does not reject Levinas’s claim that to speak of the other in terms of the intentional modification of the ego is essentially violent; the reason Derrida criticizes Levinas here lies in the latter’s rejection of this essential, original, or transcendental violence in the discourse of the other. For Derrida, the transcendental reference to analogical appresentation is the minimum violence only on the basis of which the other can be an (other) ego other than the ego, that is, an alter ego: “the other as transcendental other...can never be given to me in an original way and in person, but only through analogical appresentation.”<sup>725</sup> In opposition to Levinas who

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<sup>722</sup> WD, 104; ED, 154

<sup>723</sup> WD, 105; ED, 156.

<sup>724</sup> WD, 125; ED, 183-84.

<sup>725</sup> WD, 124; ED, 182.

insists that Husserl's conception of analogical appresentation gives rise to the reduction of the other to the same, Derrida advocates that analogical appresentation is the only way to "confirm and respect separation" between the same and the other: "The other as alter ego signifies the other as other, irreducible to *my* ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego."<sup>726</sup> In Derrida's reading of Levinas's ethical language, the refutation of the Husserlian analogical appresentation not only deprives Levinas of the right to speak of the other but also necessarily entails the worst violence Levinas attempts to avoid. Insofar as Levinas does not accept that the other is recognized as an alter ego by way of the intentional modification of the ego, according to Derrida, he cannot speak of the other as infinite, absolute, or whatsoever. Neither does the Levinasian other lend itself to any language nor appears to the same who would respond to the ethical call. Therefore, Derrida argues that Levinas's ethical discourse of the other is "the very gesture of all violence,"<sup>727</sup> since it never allows the other to be an (alter) ego.

Derrida contends that Husserl, unlike Levinas, is able to speak of the other as an alter ego whose egoity "permits him to say 'ego' like me....This is why the other is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually command me."<sup>728</sup> The minimum violence of the intentional modification based on the analogical appresentation discloses Derrida's basic premise of economy of violence, which is intolerable to Levinas: "Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without this symmetry."<sup>729</sup> The ethical dissymmetry between the same and the other that Levinas maintains can properly work only under the symmetrical condition that the other be an ego like the same *qua* the transcendental Ego. At the expense of entering into the philosophical discourse and becoming

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<sup>726</sup> WD, 125; ED, 184.

<sup>727</sup> WD, 125; ED, 184.

<sup>728</sup> WD, 125-26; ED, 184.

<sup>729</sup> WD, 126; ED, 184.

an (alter) ego, the other is necessarily exposed to a “transcendental and preethical violence,”<sup>730</sup> without which the other cannot obtain the transcendental status of an ego and thereby have any relationship with the same; thus, to reject the minimum or least violence is to risk the worst violence. By criticizing a non-violent relationship to the other as an “ethical ideal,” Marin Hägglund follows Derrida: “Violence does not supervene upon a peaceful Other but marks the possibility of every relation.”<sup>731</sup> He goes on to argue that for Derrida, unlike Levinas, violence is not a corruption or derivative of a pure or ideal peace. It is not only because there can be no absolute peace uncontaminated by violence according to the deconstructive logic, but also because such a peace would in fact annihilate the possibility of all relations in advance and thus be “the equivalent of absolute violence.”<sup>732</sup> Instead, Hägglund makes a Derridean claim that a “constitutive violence”<sup>733</sup> opens up the relationship between the same and the other; the relation to the other cannot be ethical in a primordial sense. As Derrida insists in *Of Grammatology*, it is a preethical, transcendental, or violent opening that renders possible the ethical relationship: “the nonethical opening of ethics.”<sup>734</sup> In this context, Levinas’s ethical discourse of the other exempt from all violence ironically envisions the pure other who remains abandoned to the worst violence, since it can neither enter any relationship with the same nor be even said and articulated by the ethical discourse: “pure nonviolence, the nonrelation of the same to the other (in the sense understood by Levinas) is pure violence.”<sup>735</sup> Consequently, Derrida claims that the Levinasian other remains

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<sup>730</sup> WD, 128; ED, 188. Derrida goes on to say, “For this transcendental origin, as the irreducible violence of the relation to the other, is at the same time nonviolence, since it opens the relation to the other. It is an *economy*. And it is this economy which, by this opening, will permit access to the other to be determined, in ethical freedom, as moral violence or nonviolence” (WD, 128-29; ED, 188).

<sup>731</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 40-1.

<sup>732</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 60. Hägglund here argues that Levinas’s ideal ethics is not only “untenable” but also “undesirable” since it would be in danger of “the worst violence,” as Derrida would hold.

<sup>733</sup> Hägglund, “The necessity of discrimination,” 40.

<sup>734</sup> OG, 140. See also Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 49.

<sup>735</sup> WD, 146-47; ED, 218.

vulnerable, susceptible, or exposed to the worst violence although it might be free from the least violence; pure non-violence is nothing but pure violence.

As seen in the foregoing chapter, however, the approach or epiphany of the other is neither a sheer phenomenon nor a sheer non-phenomenon but rather a *para*-phenomenon on the hither side of the binary opposition between being and non-being, between presence and absence, or between phenomenon and noumenon. For Levinas, the other is merely neither present nor absent; rather, it is not present insofar as its presence is not synchronized into the presence of the same, and, at the same time, it is not absent insofar as its presence calls into question the presence of the same. The ambiguity of the approach of the other, culminated in the enigma of death, characterizes the para-phenomenality of the other's alterity, which cannot be captured by the doxical thematization, ontological comprehension, or transcendental phenomenology. However, this does not mean the Levinasian other, as understood by Derrida, simply goes beyond or strays from phenomenology as if the inexhaustibility of the alterity of the other simply remains outside all phenomenological investigation. Levinas thus notes: "The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it."<sup>736</sup> In the confrontation with the enigmatic alterity of the other, Levinas never leaves phenomenology behind but shows its failure. It is an inexhaustible excess, surplus, or *para-doxa*, inscribed in the face of the other, that overflows, ruptures, and frustrates all doxical thematizations and transcendental reflections. In this failure of phenomenology, the para-phenomenality of the other signifies an "infinite dimension which separates me from the other, both present and still to come, a dimension opened by the face of the Other."<sup>737</sup> Insofar as the other is understood as an alter ego in terms of the analogical presentation of the ego, its upright [*droit*] expression is subsumed under the symmetric system

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<sup>736</sup> TI, 198; TeI, 172.

<sup>737</sup> TI, 225; TeI, 200.



of language where the exigent call of the other is banalized into an everyday moment of a mutual communication. In this vein, the least or transcendental violence of language that Derrida maintains in order to ward off the worst violence is no other than the very violence—whether it is least or worst—that compromises the alterity of the other, as Levinas contends.

When it comes to speaking of the other, the primary interest of Levinas's ethics does not lie in the Derridean question of how the discourse of the other possibly enters into a linguistic system, which enables or entitles the other to communicate with the same in a symmetrical or reciprocal manner. Rather, the essential point Levinas attempts to make here is to disclose not only what renders the symmetrical system of language possible but also what this linguistic system dissimulates—it is the first expression of the face, “Thou shalt not kill,” that underlies all symmetrical system of language. Levinas thus claims: “The ambivalence of apparition is surmounted by expression, the presentation of the Other to me, the primordial event of signification.”<sup>738</sup> The ethical discourse begins with the first word of the other, which does not consist in a symmetrical communication between the same and the other but in the asymmetrical obligation to the command, as Levinas unambiguously states, “The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation.”<sup>739</sup> The problem with the phenomenological light for Levinas is that the mediation of the third term nullifies the straightforwardness or uprightness [*droiture*] of the expression of the face by synchronizing the approach of the other into the presence of the same. If the phenomenological light is a transcendental condition for the appearance of the other to the same, for Levinas contra Derrida, the original uprightness of the expression of the face already pre-conditions this transcendental condition. Just as the ethical relationship between the same and the other is not an intimate one, the other approaches to the same neither indifferently

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<sup>738</sup> TI, 92; TeI, 64.

<sup>739</sup> TI, 201; TeI, 175.

nor symmetrically but always asymmetrically calls into question the self-enclosed, solipsistic, and egoistic identity of the same. This traumatic encounter characterizes the *para*-phenomenality of the other that cannot be exhausted by all doxical thematization and thereby discloses the inherent miscarriage of ortho-*dox* phenomenology.

## 1-2. Ontological Violence of Being

The ethical discourse of the other becomes more problematic in Derrida's deconstructive reading of Levinas's critique of Heidegger's ontology. According to Derrida's reading of Levinas, Heidegger's ontology affirms the priority of Being over beings, by which the other is neutralized as an anonymous being among others; thus, the Being appears as the neutral or third term, that is, "the light in which existents become intelligible."<sup>740</sup> Derrida points out that "the light of Being" as the third term "brings the other back into the midst of the same for the sake of the unity of Being."<sup>741</sup> For Levinas, the intelligibility of beings is constituted on the basis of the light of Being, not only which reduces the alterity of the other into the identity of the same, but also in which "the shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deadened."<sup>742</sup> In Derrida's view, however, when Levinas criticizes the priority of Being for its power or domination over beings and the other in particular, Levinas seems oblivious to the ontological difference between Being and beings that Heidegger rigorously attempts to make. Derrida claims against Levinas that "there can be an order of priority only between two determined things, two beings" and thereby that "to precomprehend or explicate the implicit relation of Being to a being is not to submit a being (for example, someone) to Being in a violent fashion."<sup>743</sup> For Derrida along with Heidegger, the Being is not an excellent

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<sup>740</sup> TI, 42; TeI, 13.

<sup>741</sup> WD, 96; ED, 143 (translation modified).

<sup>742</sup> TI, 42; TeI, 12.

<sup>743</sup> WD, 136; ED, 200 (translation slightly modified).

or highest being among other beings that governs, controls, or suppresses other beings: “Being is not a principle, is not a principal being, an *archia* which would permit Levinas to insert the face of a faceless tyrant under the name of Being.”<sup>744</sup> Rather, it is “the letting-be [*laisser-être*]” or *Gelassenheit* in Heidegger’s own term that lets beings—including the other in the first place—reveal themselves as they are: “If to understand Being is to be able to let be,...then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity and *par excellence* the alterity of the Other in all its originality.”<sup>745</sup> Derrida asks whether Levinas can legitimately conceive of the other without the (pre-)comprehension of Being and argues that Levinas has no choice but to state the other (ethical discourse) with the language of the same (ontological language); otherwise, he “must renounce all language and first of all the words *infinite* and *other*.”<sup>746</sup> Without the precomprehension of Being, the other can neither manifest itself to the same nor be stated whatsoever; accordingly, no language, no responsibility, or no ethics will be possible. Derrida’s polemic against Levinas’s critique of Heidegger’s ontology lies in the fact that the thought of Being does not refer to the reduction of the other into the same but rather conditions the respect or responsibility for the other as it is in its alterity.

Furthermore, Derrida provides a syntactic analysis of a verb “to be” which shows that Levinas’s alleged neglect of the ontological difference entails the serious pitfalls of the ethical discourse of the other. Derrida doubts whether Levinas’s ethical language as “nonviolent language would be a language that would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication.”<sup>747</sup> Syntactically, Being or to be is the minimum requirement of sentence, discourse, and language, which functions as the most common copular or a linking verb. It is not simply a real predicate of

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<sup>744</sup> WD, 136; ED, 200.

<sup>745</sup> WD, 141; ED, 207.

<sup>746</sup> WD, 144; ED, 168.

<sup>747</sup> WD, 147; ED, 218.

a subject in a sentence but rather a “*transcendental* or *transcategorical* predicate”<sup>748</sup> that authorizes all predication, sentence, and language. Neither can the other escape from Being nor the ethical discourse of the other can be immune from ontological language. Insofar as Levinas conceives of the ethical language, which lacks this necessary component of a sentence or what Derrida calls “the passage through Being,” his own ethical discourse is no other than a “speech produced without the least violence [that] would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other.”<sup>749</sup> Accordingly, Levinas seems to present a silent or *angelic* language exempt from the violent source of Being, which would be in fact hollow, irresponsible, and even violent—it is “a *certain* silence, a certain beyond of speech.”<sup>750</sup> Ironically, the ethical discourse makes the same and the other silent altogether; in the silent language of ethics, nothing exchanges between the same and the other. Therefore, Derrida’s syntactic account of Being illustrates that Levinas’s description of the ethical relationship between the Same and the Other requires a minimum violence of Being, without which not only the Other cannot command that “Thou shalt not kill,” but also the Same cannot respond: “*me voici*.”

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida’s deconstructive gesture toward Levinas does not display the regrettable fact that the language of *Totality and Infinity* should not have been ontological in order to be ethical, but the inevitable fact that it *should* remain ontological in order to articulate “the ethical.” Although *Totality and Infinity* attacks the totality of ontology in favor of the infinity of ethics, its ethical discourse of the other still relies on ontological language. In other words, Levinas’s critique of ontology ironically affirms what it wants to reject. Derrida thus states: “Levinas must ceaselessly suppose and practice the thought of precomprehension of Being

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<sup>748</sup> WD, 317, n. 66; ED, 206, n. 2.

<sup>749</sup> WD, 147; ED, 217-18.

<sup>750</sup> WD, 117; ED, 172.

in his discourse, even when he directs it against ontology.”<sup>751</sup> According to Derrida’s deconstructive reading of Levinas, therefore, whenever Levinas speaks of the other by means of ethical language, he cannot but betray his original intention to articulate the ethical discourse of the other as wholly and absolutely other.

The fundamental pitfall Derrida recognizes in Levinas’s ethical discourse of the other is that in order to save the other from the least violence, that is, the circulation of Being or ontological language, Levinas sacrifices the essential condition for the ethical relationship between the same and the other. The ethical discourse of the other purified of all violence cannot properly articulate the other; only through the circulation or passage of Being, the other can be legitimately stated, and hence its face can be respected. For Derrida, thus, pure non-violence without the least violence is nothing but pure violence: “Without the thought of Being which can open the face, there would be only pure violence or pure nonviolence.”<sup>752</sup> From his deconstructive reading of Levinas, Derrida draws a question—if not a conclusion—about Levinas’s metaphysical ethics: Does Levinas become an irresponsible and violent dreamer who dreams of the Other as an angelic figure free from all violence by employing “language without sentence [*phrase*],”<sup>753</sup> which in fact does not deserve its name? When Levinas speaks of the Other as an infinitely and absolutely other, Derrida notices that this Other is a pure Other other than the same who is totally free from all violence and so “absolved of its relationship to the same.”<sup>754</sup> Insofar as Levinas attempts to keep an ethical language from the least violence, that is, Being or ontological language, his metaphysical

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<sup>751</sup> WD, 141; ED, 208.

<sup>752</sup> WD, 147; ED, 218.

<sup>753</sup> WD, 147; ED, 219 (translation modified). Strictly speaking, the French term “*phrase*” here should be translated as “sentence” or “clause” rather than “phrase.” In order to have any syntactic sense, a sentence or a clause, unlike a phrase, requires a subject and a predicate as well as a linking verb to be [*être*] that links the two.

<sup>754</sup> WD, 126; ED, 185.

ethics would remain a “*dream* of a purely *heterological* thought at its source.”<sup>755</sup> Derrida eventually claims that “We say the *dream* because it must vanish at *daybreak*, as soon as language awakens”<sup>756</sup> and as soon as the light of Being illustrates the nocturnal anonymity of all beings.

### 1-3. *Être* (Responsible) on the Hither Side of *Sein* (Authentic)

Does Levinas really dream of the infinite Other, purified from the light of Being as the locus of all violence, in his articulation of ethical metaphysics, as Derrida holds? Does Levinas think of ethics for an angelic other rather than a human other by abandoning Heideggerian ontology, as if ethics as the “royal road” would never “dirty its hands”? Indeed, Levinas’s view of violence is much more complex than the view that Derrida attempts to attribute to him, as Bernasconi holds.<sup>757</sup> Nevertheless, Levinas ceaselessly pays attention to the problems of both “where” and “when” violence takes place. This is where Derrida remains close to Levinas even though he still doubts whether Levinas overlooks the ontological difference between Being and beings. Derrida suspects that for Levinas, the ontological difference gives rise to the reduction of beings into Being or an “ontic domination between Being and beings.”<sup>758</sup> And he argues against Levinas that the Heideggerian *Sein* does not control, reign, or oppress beings since it is the *Sein*-letting of beings as they are; rather, it is a necessary and minimum condition for “the *respect* for the other *as what it is*: other.”<sup>759</sup> The comprehension of *Sein*, as Derrida understands it, does not entail the submission of beings into an excellent being. Thus, domination, submission, oppression, or

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<sup>755</sup> WD, 151; ED, 224. Dermot Moran also argues that Levinas creates “a new dogmatism” in favor of the priority of the Other over the Same and then asks whether it is “a fantasy picture of what ethical relation with others ought to be.” Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 351

<sup>756</sup> WD, 151; ED, 224.

<sup>757</sup> For a genealogical analysis of Levinas’s understanding of violence, see Robert Bernasconi, “The violence of the Face: Peace and Language in the Thought of Levinas,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 23.6 (1997), 81-93.

<sup>758</sup> WD, 138; ED, 202.

<sup>759</sup> WD, 138; ED, 202.

violence for Derrida does not take place in the ontological relation between Being and beings but only in the ontic relation between beings; it is an ontic matter of beings rather than of an ontological matter of *Sein*. However, this is exactly what Levinas emphasizes when he discovers “the absolute violence” in murder, which reveals “the scales of human relations.”<sup>760</sup> It is far from clear that Levinas would concede that the Heideggerian *Sein* does directly violence to beings and, on that account, it is the exceptional place from which violence proceeds. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that Levinas would not accept that the *Sein* is completely immune from violence, not because it is the excellent or highest being as the *ultima ratio* or the *causa prima*, as onto-theological tradition conceives. Rather, it is precisely because the *Sein* is always in and through beings and Dasein in the first place, as Derrida also notes: “Being is nothing outside of a being.”<sup>761</sup> That is to say, the inseparable attachment of *Sein* to beings renders *Sein* itself not free from violence, since *Sein* is itself the ontological locus that lets beings be as they are. For Levinas, therefore, the secret of violence resides in the ongoing complicity of *Sein* and beings.

The secret of violence is already disclosed in Derrida’s syntactic analysis of *Sein*. Syntactically, *Sein* or the verb “to be” as a transcendental predicate (*Sein*) of a subject (Dasein) is itself the minimum or “least” violence, which plays an essential role in the constitution of sentence and language. *Sein* in a verbal sense is no longer a pure non-violence but the least violence, which prevents the worst violence with regard to substantive beings and the other in particular. Derrida criticizes Levinas’s ethical discourse for its lack of the necessary passage or circulation of *Sein*, as if the ethical language conceived by Levinas would be an angelic language by and for angels which never allows the least violence of *Sein*. However, it is even far from apparent that Levinas would

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<sup>760</sup> TI, 233, 236; TeI, 210, 213, respectively. I have examined the problem of murder as the absolute violence in Chapter Four.

<sup>761</sup> WD, 138; ED, 203.

reject Derrida's syntactic interpretation of *Sein*. Indeed, Levinas appreciates Heidegger's original motif to discover a pure verblality of *Sein* by means of the *Seinsfrage*: "Being [*Sein*] of beings is not a being [*Seiende*]."762 Nevertheless, Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* remains not radical enough for Levinas to delve further into being in a purely verbal sense without any reference to a substantive or subjective connotation, because the Heideggerian *Sein*—albeit not a being—is always the Being of beings and Dasein in the first place: "Being is always the Being of beings."763 This is why the early Levinas radicalizes the *Seinsfrage* to the point of articulating an absurd notion of the *il y a*, being without beings, or *être* in general against the backdrop of the *Es gibt*.764 In order to disclose the brutal nakedness of being, into which the Heideggerian version of the *Seinsfrage* fails to penetrate, it is important for Levinas to first uncover the ontological coverings, which shed light on—more properly, cover up—*être per se*.

As seen in Chapter Three, Levinas's notion of *être* does not convey any violence but almost nothing; it is the anonymous, impersonal, neutral, anarchic, and enigmatic *il y a*. It cannot be properly expressed in terms of ethico-ontological categories because it is neither being nor an other of being but prior to an ontological distinction or ethical separation; (it is merely) *il y a*. Even the name or noun [*nom*] "*il y a*" cannot exhaust the pure verblality of what it names. The name expresses the *il y a* by betraying it prior to or on the hither side of all the categorial distinction between being and non-being, between presence and absence, between *arche* and *telos*, and so forth. By contrast, the Heideggerian *Sein*, as Levinas understands it, cannot be completely immune from violence since it is always in and through beings. Strictly speaking, Levinas's polemic against

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<sup>762</sup> SZ, 6. It is important to remember that Levinas admires *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger awakens a "verblality" of Being. EI, 38; EeI, 28.

<sup>763</sup> SZ, 9.

<sup>764</sup> Levinas states: "I do not believe Heidegger can admit an existing without existents, which to him would seem absurd." TO, 45; TA, 24.



Heidegger's ontology does not come from the fact that Being does violence to beings and the other in particular, as Derrida might interpret it, but from the ontological difference, which is further developed into various gestalts in the later Heidegger, such as *Kehre*, *Seyn*, *Astrag*, *Unterschied*, *Ereignis*, and *Es gibt*. Unfortunately, Derrida points out the indispensability of the "systematic confrontation" between Levinas's *il y a* and Heidegger's *Es gibt* but never elucidates it at least in "Violence and Metaphysics."<sup>765</sup> Due to the lack of any close attention to the crucial relation between the early Levinas and the later Heidegger, between the *il y a* and the *es gibt*, or between *être* and *Sein*, Derrida's interpretation of Levinas seems to miss the essential point Levinas attempts to make in the radical version of the *Seinsfrage*, which in fact concerns the Levinasian *être* rather than the Heideggerian *Sein*.

When Derrida challenges Levinas's treatment of being, he seems not always conscious of the distinction between the Heideggerian *Sein* and the Levinasian *être*, especially when it comes to the violence of being—either *être* or *Sein*. Derrida of course uses the French *être* but means the German *Sein* in Heidegger's terminology in revisiting both Heidegger's ontology and Levinas's own ethics. As the above-mentioned claim "being [*l'être*] is nothing outside of a being" indicates, although Derrida writes the French *être*, what is meant by it is not the Levinasian *être* but the Heideggerian *Sein*. For the Levinasian *être* in a primordial sense refers to being without beings or the *il y a* and hence is not simply an opposite of nothing; it is prior to the distinction between being and nothing. In Derrida's original intention, this remark is deployed to condemn Levinas's blindness to the ontological difference and so to the inseparability between Being and beings. When Levinas speaks of *être*, Derrida criticizes him by means of *Sein*. The confusion between the

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<sup>765</sup> WD, 90; ED, 133. Derrida here writes: "The theme of the '*il y a*' calls for systematic confrontation with Heidegger's allusions to the '*es gibt*' (*Being and Time*, *Letter on Humanism*)." However, Heidegger fully elaborates on the "*es gibt*" in his later work, entitled *On Time and Being*. In Chapter Three, I have securitized this significant confrontation that Derrida mentions in passing.

Levinasian *être* and the Heideggerian *Sein* gives rise to Derrida's misconstruing Levinas's point in the critique of Heidegger's ontology as well as his project of ethics. In the elaboration of ethics, Levinas does not merely modify the Heideggerian *Sein* to discover a *Sein* otherwise or another *Sein* but struggles to penetrate into the pure depth of *être* other than and, at the same time, older than the *Sein* in order to express the pure verblivity of being. It is thus not fair to say that Levinas's view of violence of *Sein* stems from his oblivion of the ontological difference because he would neither misunderstand Heidegger's notion of *Sein* nor reject Derrida's (syntactic) interpretation of it. What is at stake here is that the ontological difference does not really matter to Levinas since it does not make a difference to the fact that *Sein* is—albeit not in a direct or ontic way—involved in violence, as Derrida also states: “it is impossible to avoid the ontic metaphor in order to articulate Being [*être* but read: *Sein*] in language, in order to let Being [*être* but read: *Sein*] circulate in language.”<sup>766</sup> Consequently, Levinas remains not too far away from Derrida in arguing that the Heideggerian *Sein*, not the Levinasian *être*, can be the *dormant* locus of violence insofar as it is inseparable from beings *where* violence actually takes place.

When it comes to the problem of violence, what is more crucial to Levinas is that the (ethical) meaning of violence emerges *when* it takes place. As seen in Chapter Four, the absolute or first violence took place in Cain's murder of Abel. The absolute violence as murder consists in the failure of encountering the other in the face-to-face relation; that is, it occurs when the same fails to recognize the face of the other who commands “Thou shalt not kill.” The pre-original expression of the face does not consist in the disclosure of Being where its alterity is reduced, dissimulated, or “[congealed] into a plastic form,” but rather in the discourse of the other, which testifies “the manifestation of a face over and beyond form.”<sup>767</sup> Cain wanted to annihilate Abel by

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<sup>766</sup> WD, 138; ED,

<sup>767</sup> TI, 66; TeI, 37.

reducing the face of his brother into a faceless form over which he would hold sway and annihilate forever. Nevertheless, this annihilation, although Cain really slew Abel, remains “a purely relative annihilation” since Cain could not annihilate the face of Abel who had already looked at him “as the eye that in the tomb shall look Cain.”<sup>768</sup> This relative annihilation in murder discloses the impossibility of murdering the other whose face paralyzes my mastery or power over death and accuses me even before my intention to kill. Prior to my initiative to murder the other at whom I [*Moi*] aim in my intention, the face of the other accuses me [*moi*] and testifies that “as me [*moi*], I [*je*] am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer.”<sup>769</sup> The ethical meaning of murder springs from the first word of the other, “Thou shalt not kill,” by which the substantive *Moi* finds itself as violent, murderous, and unjust in its accusative *moi*. The primordial prohibition inscribed in the face does not refer to the impossibility of murdering in reality but rather presupposes the possibility of violating what it prohibits. Levinas states: “This interdiction is to be sure not equivalent to pure and simple impossibility and even presupposes the possibility.”<sup>770</sup> Cain really slew Abel but ethically could not murder him, as Levinas claims, “Murder exercises a power over what escapes power.”<sup>771</sup> Cain’s murder of Abel *betrays* the impossibility of murder; the ethical impossibility is revealed by the real transgression or betrayal of it. Murder does not aim at something faceless but only at the face of the other who forbids it; therefore, the impossibility of murder is not real but ethical. Consequently, the face of the other is not the *single*-faced locus insulated from all violence but the *double*-faced locus, which instigates and, at the same time, interdicts murder as the absolute violence.

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<sup>768</sup> TI, 233; TeI, 209.

<sup>769</sup> TI, 84; TeI, 56. In the 1950 text, entitled “Place and Utopia,” Levinas asks, “What is an individual, if not a usurper? What is signified by the advent of conscience, and even the first spark of spirit, if not the discovery of corpses beside me and my horror of existing of assassination?” DF, 100; DL, 155. See also EN, 144; E, 155-56.

<sup>770</sup> TI, 232; TeI, 209.

<sup>771</sup> TI, 198; TeI, 172.

In no way does Derrida lose sight of the Janus-faced feature in Levinas's view of the violence of the face, as he points out, "murder is always directed against the face, but thereby always misses it."<sup>772</sup> However, Derrida's attention to the ambiguity of the face does not release him from his relentless suspicion about Levinas's alleged misreading of the ontological difference when Levinas claims that the alterity of the other is dissimulated into the comprehension of Being. Derrida states, "for both [Heidegger and Levinas], dissimulation would be a conceptual gesture. But for Levinas, the concept is on the plane of Being; for Heidegger, it is on the plane of ontic determination."<sup>773</sup> In Derrida's view, whereas a dissimulation as a conceptual determination belongs to an ontic gesture for Heidegger, Levinas considers it an ontological gesture of Being, which neutralizes, suppresses, or *de-faces* the face of the other; thus, Derrida's critique of Levinas hinges upon this ontico-ontological confusion. Finally, Derrida raises a *Seinsfrage* concerning the face of the other: How can the face of the other *be* present to the same without the minimum condition for its presentation, *i.e.*, the Heideggerian *Sein*, which does not reduce the other into the same but in fact lets the other *be* totally and absolutely other than the same?

Before answering this Heideggerian question put by Derrida against Levinas, it is important to first consider exactly what Levinas means by non-violence, whose primordial signification leads him to put into question Heidegger's ontology. Levinas states non-violence as the presentation of the face as follows:

The face in which the other—the absolutely other—presents itself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with the one who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. This presentation is preeminently nonviolence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As nonviolence, it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>772</sup> WD, 104; ED, 154.

<sup>773</sup> WD, 149; ED, 221.

<sup>774</sup> TI, 203; TeI, 177-78 (translation slightly modified).

The presentation of the face is non-violence *par excellence*, which sustains the ethical relationship between the same and the other, and the absolute violence takes place in this relationship. Hence, non-violence for Levinas is not a pure, impotent, angelic, negative, or silent emptiness devoid of all violence that the worst violence or pure violence immediately and necessarily occupies, as Derrida might interpret it. As seen above, Derrida argues contra Levinas that pure non-violence is nothing but pure violence, since they lack the least and yet necessary condition for the presentation of the other, that is, the passage of *Sein*. For Levinas contra Derrida, however, non-violence is neither the exact opposite of pure violence nor the exact same as pure violence, both of which can be thought only on the basis of the Heideggerian *Sein*. What Levinas means by non-violence is that the presentation of the face is the primordial locus of the ethical prior to or on the hither side of pure violence and pure non-violence in terms of the *Sein*. Levinas hence argues that the presentation of the face appears as the ethical resistance of the other, which calls for my responsibility, respect, and response: “The ‘resistance’ of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical.”<sup>775</sup> The primary leitmotif running through Levinas’s critical stance toward Heidegger’s ontology lies in the fact that ontology dissimulates this positive structure of the ethical meaning of *être* beneath or on the hither side of the ontological coverings and *Sein* in the first place.

The central task of *Totality and Infinity* is thus to expose the primordial depth of being, that is, the production of being [*être*] prior to the comprehension of Being [*Sein*]. According to Levinas, prior to the light of *Sein* in which all beings are understood, intelligible, and grasped, “*être* is produced as multiple and as split into same and other,”<sup>776</sup> and this fundamental structure of *être* is

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<sup>775</sup> TI, 197; TeI, 171.

<sup>776</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

concretized in the ethical relationship between the same and the other. The problem with the dissimulation of Being—whether it is an ontic or ontological gesture—for Levinas is that as soon as the face of the other obtains its intelligible form in the light of Being, it loses its alterity; therefore, it is *defaced* in the comprehensive and comprehensible whole of Being. Whether the dissimulation of Being is an ontic or ontological—and violent or non-violent—gesture is not Levinas’s concern since this question already presupposes the ongoing complicity of Being and beings. Derrida is well aware of this ontico-ontological ambiguity: “In reality, there is not even a *distinction* in the usual sense of the word, between Being and beings.”<sup>777</sup> In his elaboration of ethics, Levinas does not simply go to either an ontic or ontological way in the sense of Heidegger’s terminology because the ontico-ontological difference knows nothing of a primordial separation as being out of joint, ruptured, fractured or separated, that is, as *être* split into same and other. The difference only knows of an ontological distinction in the reciprocal relation between Being and beings, which is exactly what the later Heidegger means by the *Kehre*. As seen in Chapter Three, the fact that Heidegger’s *Kehre* makes no difference to the ongoing complicity of Being and beings enables Levinas to speak of *the* Heidegger in his sustained polemic against Heidegger. While John D. Caputo insists that ethics does not require “ontological preparation (the Heidegger of *Being and Time*),”<sup>778</sup> Levinas’s ethics does not—and must not—wait for even the later Heidegger of *On Time and Being* since “the ethical” is there from the very outset prior to “the ontological.”

The anachronic or anarchic logic of the anterior posteriority justifies the *raison d'être* of ethics Levinas envisages in *Totality and Infinity*. As seen in Chapter Four, the absurd logic of “the posteriority of the anterior”<sup>779</sup> discloses that the ethical relationship (separation or *absolutio*)

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<sup>777</sup> VM, 138; ED, 203.

<sup>778</sup> John D. Caputo, “Hyperbolic Justice: Deconstruction, Myth, and Politics,” *Research in Phenomenology* 21.1 (1991), 11.

<sup>779</sup> TI, 54; TeI, 25.

between the other and the same—although it is dissimulated by the ontological coverings—is concretely produced antecedent to the ontological relation (difference or *Differenz/Unterschied*) between Being and beings. Levinas’s ethics is neither a reaction to ontology to remedy all kinds of the illness of what he calls the totality nor a rejection to the Heideggerian ontology to invent another ontology; rather, the pressing task of ethics consists in unveiling what ontology dissimulates. It is the pure depth of *être*, which is concretized in the ethical situation where the irreducible alterity of the other calls into question the egoistic spontaneity of the same and thereby makes the same vigilant, wakeful, and non-indifferent to the first word inscribed in the face: “Thou shalt not kill.” The ethical signification of the pure verbleness of “to be” proceeds from the primordial expression of the face; “to be [*être*]” is primordially to be responsible before to be authentic [*eigentlich*]. The presence of the face does not do violence to me but calls, summons, and awakes me to be responsible for the death of the other before to be authentic in my Being-toward-death. Levinas thus claims: “Prior to the disclosure of Being in general as the basis of knowledge and as the meaning of Being, the relation with an existent that expresses itself pre-exists; prior to the plane of ontology, the ethical plane pre-exists.”<sup>780</sup> Levinas’s polemic against ontology consists in the fact that the irreducible alterity of the other is dissimulated, neutralized, and compromised in the ongoing complicity of Being and beings, which serves as the ontological violence that “places ethics under the heel of ontology.”<sup>781</sup> This is why Levinas attempts to leave the Heideggerian climate under which Derrida would still stay in his deconstructive reading of Levinas.

## 2. How to Speak of the Unspeakable: The Political in the Ethical

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<sup>780</sup> TI, 201; TeI, 175 (translation significantly modified).

<sup>781</sup> WD, 135; ED, 198.

As the anachronic logic of the anterior posteriority indicates, the ethical signification emanates from the face-to-face relationship with the other, in which I find myself as the accusative *moi* prior to the subjective or substantive *Moi*. I am already opened and exposed to the infinitely other who calls for my response, “*me voici*,” which expresses the unthematizable exposure of the *moi* to the other whose *an*-archic primordially cannot be represented, recuperated, or synchronized in the ecstatic presence of the *Moi*. Levinas thus states, “‘*Me voici*’ as the testimony of the Infinite, but the testimony that does not thematize what it testifies, and whose truth is not the truth of representation, is not evidence.”<sup>782</sup> Chapter Four has described this anterior posteriority of the accusative *moi* over the substantive *Moi* as the infinite in the finite, the more in the less, or the other in the same. What *me voici* testifies is the very idea of the infinite; there always remains an incomprehensible surplus or excess that overflows, exceeds, and unsettles what the *Moi* thinks. This asymmetric relation between the idea that thinks of the infinite and the excessive *ideatum* to be thought takes a concrete form in the non-adequate, non-correlate, and asymmetric relation between the command of the other and my response of *me voici*. The Cartesian model of the idea of the infinite informs the primordial way of being, which signifies my preoccupation with another being prior to the comprehension of my authentic Being. To give my word “*me voici*” to the other is to respond to the call of the other by way of an “inversion of [my own] exercise of being, which suspends [my] spontaneous movement of existing.”<sup>783</sup> The posterior response to the other in the *moi* is phenomenologically anterior to taking my place in which the *Moi* can respond. Before the *Moi* claims its own, proper, or authentic place, the ethical call of the other accuses the *moi* of taking my place and calls for my response. Thus, the testimony of *me voici* is the expression of the passivity of the accusative *moi* on the hither side of the spontaneity of the substantive *Moi*.

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<sup>782</sup> OBBE, 146; AEAE, 186 (translation modified).

<sup>783</sup> TI, 63; TeI, 34.



The biblical implication of the original Hebrew word “*hineni*” discloses that the English “It’s me here” is probably a more appropriate translation for the Hebrew *hineni* than the English “Here I am” and, as will be seen, (more or less) than the French “*me voici*” Levinas constantly uses. First of all, the English “It’s me here” can preserve the accusative form of the *moi* that “Here I am” cannot. It is not “I” in the substantive who is standing here to wait for the order of the other; rather, it is the other who puts “me” in the accusative into here. More importantly, Hilary Putman provides an etymological account of *hineni*, which conveys not simply a descriptive but rather performative proposition; to say “*hineni*” to the other is to perform “the speech-act of presenting oneself, the speech-act of making oneself available to another.”<sup>784</sup> To give my word does not simply refer to giving propositional signs but giving myself to the other. In a similar vein, Oona Eisenstadt prefers the French “*me voici*” to the English “Here I am” because “The French does not imply that the subject *is* something, but simply that she offers herself. Moreover, as Levinas points out, the subject or the ‘I’ or *me voici* appears in the accusative.”<sup>785</sup> She complains about the English “Here I am” since it implies the substantive subject as the *Moi* who autonomously gives itself to the other and thereby nullifies the passive exposure of the accusative *moi* to the other. The witness of *me voici* as offering the *moi* to the other is not the outcome of a free will or decision made by the *Moi*; rather, the anterior *Moi* in the substantive is already summoned, interpellated, and elected as the posterior *moi* in the accusative by the other. Eisenstadt goes on to argue that the English translation contains the copula verb, which not only neutralizes the original connotation of the verb “to behold” but also serves as “the root of all thematization.”<sup>786</sup> For Levinas, the ethical discourse

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<sup>784</sup> Hilary Putman, “Levinas and Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>785</sup> Oona Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text: The Premodern Sources of Levinas’s Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>786</sup> Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text*, 116, 90, respectively. In this context, “behold me” is probably the best English translation since it preserves not only the accusative form “me [*moi*]” but also the original Hebrew meaning “to behold.” (Tammi J. Schneider suggested this translation in my dissertation defense.)

of the other does not begin with the verb “to be” which authorizes all propositional predications in the linguistic system but with giving me to the other in the primordial utterance of *me voici*. The “*me voici*” is thus “the very essence of language of every language,”<sup>787</sup> including ontological language in the first place. It is the key motif of Levinas’s later work, *Otherwise Than Being*, in which he rigorously struggles with the problem of language to find ethical language as “*autrement*” in an adverbial form irreducible to a noun or a verb, even to the copular verb—all of which, for Levinas, conveys a spontaneous, voluntary, or self-assured activity of the substantive *Moi* that undermines the radical passivity of *me voici*.

## **2-1. To Whom to Give: “Here I Am,” “It’s Me Here,” and “*Me voici*”**

Although the etymological account of *me voici* might undercut Derrida’s critique of Levinas’s ethical language for its lack of the indispensable or transcendental predicate of the copular verb “to be,” Levinas would not reject Derrida’s challenge when he continues to employ the verb “to be” in his consideration of the ethical signification primordially found in the mode of *being-for-the-other* prior to *being-for-oneself* or to *be* responsible prior to *be* authentic. While accepting the language of his early work is ontological in order not to be psychological,<sup>788</sup> the later Levinas becomes more attentive to the problem of language in his treatment of the entry of the third party [*le tiers*] into the ethical relationship between the same and the other. The entrance of the third party calls into question my exclusive response to the other and calls for my another response; “*me voici*” can no longer be silently performed in my unquestioned and unconditional response to the other. The advent of the third party announces that “*me voici*” should be stated, thematized, or said [*dit*] in the ontological language. It is the *political* moment in the ethical that

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<sup>787</sup> CPP, 122; DEHH, 323.

<sup>788</sup> GWCM, 82; DD, 133.

requires ethics to “dirty its hands” in order to respond not only to the other but also to all the others. The linguistic question of the problematic relation between ethics and ontology becomes more complicated and serious when the third party interrogates the duo-relationship.

In his early text in 1954 entitled “The Ego and Totality,” Levinas already touched upon the linguistic problem of the third party, which clarifies what he means by a society in an ethical sense. By attacking an “intimate” or “closed” society from which “third parties are excluded,” Levinas contends that an ethical society is founded upon “the relationship with a third party—responsibility extending beyond intention’s ‘range of action’—characterizes the subjective existence capable of discourse *essentially*.”<sup>789</sup> The essential involvement of the third party in the duo-relation of the same and the other is also echoed in *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas argues that the ethical relationship is not an intimate, exclusive, or formal I-Thou relationship but a traumatic one in which “the third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other—language is justice.”<sup>790</sup> In the face-to-face relationship with the other, the third party other than the other always already solicits and calls for my response: *me voici*. In his later texts and especially *Otherwise Than Being*, the linguistic problem concerning the third party receives more attention and development than in previous works. The primary task of this section is to examine how the later Levinas articulates the political moment in the ethical with regard to his linguistic consideration of the third party.

In the Preface to the German edition (1987) of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas admits that although there is no “terminological difference” in *Totality and Infinity* between the responsibility for the other and justice for others or between ethics and politics, “the general ethical notion of

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<sup>789</sup> EN, 19-22; E, 29-32.

<sup>790</sup> TI, 213; Tel, 188. In *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas makes a parallel claim: “But in reality, the relationship with another is never uniquely the relationship with the other: the third party is already represented in the other; that is, in the very appearance of the Other, the third party already regards me,” GWCM, 82; DD, 132-33.

justice is mentioned without discrimination in the two situations.”<sup>791</sup> In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas delves further into this terminological distinction in terms of the distinctive and yet inseparable relation between “the Saying [*le Dire*]” on the side of ethics and “the Said [*le Dit*]” on the side of ontology.<sup>792</sup> Since the third party also commands me what the other commands, the Saying can no longer remain in a silent or angelic Saying but must be Said and thematized *via* the passage of the verb “to be.” Due to the appearance of the third party, I have to compare, measure, or calculate to whom I respond, to whom I give my word “*me voici*,” and to whom I offer myself. This is where the French *me voici* runs the risk of being translated into the English “It’s me here” by betraying the original Hebrew *hineni*. The ethical Saying of “*me voici*” must be said, translated, thematized in the ontological Said of “It’s me here.” Now, the unthematizable Saying of “*me voici*” must find its way into the language to be thematized and undergo the passage of the copular verb in the Said without sacrificing the accusative form of the *moi*, as the English “It’s me here” properly displays.<sup>793</sup> The major challenge of Levinas’s later work lies in the Derridean question—in fact, Levinas’s own question clarified by Derrida—of how to pinpoint the Said inspired by the Saying in terms of the notion of the third party, which leads the later Levinas to the painful struggle to articulate an ethical language in and through an ontological language: the extraction of the ethical Saying from the ontological Said.

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<sup>791</sup> EN, 198; E, 232. This Preface was separately published in EN, 197-200; E, 231-34.

<sup>792</sup> Although Levinas is inconsistent in capitalization of “*le Dire*” and “*le Dit*,” I will, with no consensus in the Levinasian scholarship, capitalize them with the definitive article for consistency whenever they need a distinctive stress in their reciprocal relation: the former as “the Saying” and the latter as “the Said.” For a comprehensive and influential analysis of these terminologies, see Etienne Feron, *De l’idée de transcendance à la question du langage: L’itinéraire philosophique d’Emmanuel Levinas* (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Million, 1992), 117-255. For a general account of two aspects of language, see Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 167-262.

<sup>793</sup> It is important to remember that the Saying “It’s me here” does not simply refer to the descriptive fact that I am standing here to find myself, to identify my place, and to sustain my Being, as the Heideggerian there [*da*] indicates, but to performative fact that I am already given to the other as the *moi* who Says “behold me.”

In his later reading of Levinas in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1997), Derrida also appreciates the significant status of the third party in Levinas's ethics to the point of arguing that "almost the entirety of Levinas's discourse, for example, almost the entire space of its intelligibility for us, appeals to this third."<sup>794</sup> The linguistic dilemma imposed upon Levinas intensifies to the extent that the ethical discourse is no longer a matter of a duo but of a trio and more, since the third party is not a latecomer who comes only after the Other, but "comes at the origin of the face and of the face to face."<sup>795</sup> For Derrida, therefore, the position of the third party signifies "the leap without transition"<sup>796</sup> in Levinas's ethical thought, since it never waits but has already been there from the very beginning. It would be reductive to say that Levinas's later work, *Otherwise Than Being*, is a mere response to Derrida's deconstructive reading of *Totality and Infinity*, as if there would be an apparent "chiasm" between Levinas and Derrida. Levinas rarely interrogates Derrida's deconstructive thought or responds to Derrida's reading of his work in any detail except in "Wholly Otherwise" (1973).<sup>797</sup> Moreover, the theme of the third party in terms of the ethical discourse has already appeared in the early text, even before the publication of *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>798</sup> It is, however, apparently misleading to say that any cross-reading between two thinkers is futile or meaningless insofar as Derrida's critical or deconstructive reading of Levinas makes clearer and more distinct Levinas's own question concerning the linguistic problem of the ethical discourse throughout the gradual evolution of Levinas's ethics.

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<sup>794</sup> AEL, 31; AE, 64.

<sup>795</sup> AEL, 31; AE, 63.

<sup>796</sup> AEL, 31; AL, 64.

<sup>797</sup> This text is translated in *Re-Reading Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3-10; Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Name*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 55-62.

<sup>798</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "Le Moi et la Totalité," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 59 (1954), 353-73. This text was translated and published in EN, 13-38; E, 23-48.

The dilemma of language into which Levinas might fall in *Totality and Infinity* underlies the leitmotif of Paul Ricoeur's exegesis of *Otherwise Than Being*. In *Autrement: Lecture d'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Levinas*, Ricoeur dedicates his effort to scrutinizing the themes of the third party and justice by discerning in the ethical thought of Levinas an "advance [*avancée*]," which brings out a "new Said evoked by the Saying," that is, "otherwise Said [*autrement dit*]." <sup>799</sup> According to Ricoeur, while Levinas thoroughly wrestles with "the difficulty for ethics to liberate itself from its unflagging confrontation with ontology" in the midst of groping for an ethical language as an "exception disrupting the regime of Being," <sup>800</sup> the third party comes to the fore in the competing field in which Levinas struggles to get out of his linguistic pitfalls. Ricoeur depicts the linguistic dilemma as "desert of words" <sup>801</sup> that Levinas faces in searching ethical language in ontological language. Consequently, the beginning of Levinas's presumable response presented in *Otherwise Than Being* to Derrida's critical reading of *Totality and Infinity* hinges upon how to find the Saying otherwise than the Said in and through the Said.

Drawing on the problem of how the ethical Saying is to be (the) Said within the ontological horizon, Simon Critchley makes a Levinasian response to Derrida's challenge. According to Critchley, deconstruction never posits "the question of politics *as* a question," which is Derrida's own "impasse of the political." <sup>802</sup> He goes on to argue that the Derridean impasse can be overcome by "Levinas's traversal of the passage from ethics to politics," <sup>803</sup> from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise Than Being*. This traversal can be accomplished by the "linguistic or deconstructive

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<sup>799</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Autrement: Lecture d'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Levinas*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 4 (henceforth my translation). "*Autrement dit*" is also the title of the last part of *Otherwise than Being*, which in the English edition, Alphonso Lingis translates idiomatically as "In Other Words." Throughout this dissertation, I will translate this significant terminology literally as "the otherwise Said" in order to preserve the distinctive forms of "*le Dire*" and "*le Dit*."

<sup>800</sup> Ricoeur, *Autrement*, 1-2.

<sup>801</sup> Ricoeur, *Autrement*, 25.

<sup>802</sup> Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics*, 189.

<sup>803</sup> Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics*, 190.

turn” from the “unjustified Said” to the “justified Said.”<sup>804</sup> But wouldn’t this effective promise make the problematics of an ethical language too *facile* or *schematic*? One might be doubtful whether there would be possibly any justified Said that effectuates the transition from ethics to politics. Would Levinas himself subscribe to any justified Said into which the Saying is reduced in a conclusive manner? On the contrary, does not politics demand that the possible effectivity of the ethical promise must be *effectuated*? If this promise remains permanently an effective possibility, does not it betray the promise itself by delaying or evading what it promises? Isn’t it Derrida, along with Ricoeur—although Critchley might not agree at least in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*—that raises all these aforementioned questions in terms of justice and politics? What is at stake here is how the linguistic turn itself can be effectuated in the swing of the linguistic pendulum from the unjustified to the justified Said. It is the linguistic predicament that Ricoeur, along with Derrida, points out in his reading of *Otherwise Than Being*: “the effectuation of the Saying in ethics.”<sup>805</sup>

## 2-2. Political Interrogation of the Third Party

Whether there is a terminological difference (Levinas), a leap (Derrida), an advance (Ricoeur), or the linguistic turn (Critchley) between the ethical responsibility for the Other and justice for others on the basis of the third party, it should not be understood as the *replacement* of the former by the latter since the appearance of the third party in no way destroys the fundamental structure of being concretized in the ethical relationship between the same and the other. Indeed, Levinas never loses sight of ethics as first philosophy. It is, however, obvious that the advent of the third party makes the duo-relationship more problematic in the sense that the third party calls

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<sup>804</sup> Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics*, 8, 229, respectively.

<sup>805</sup> Ricoeur, *Autrement*, 20. See also AEL, 105; AE, 182-83.

into question a unilateral, unconditional, or exclusive responsibility of the same for the other and thereby makes it restless, vigilant, awake, and non-indifferent. Levinas thus contends that the entry of the third party brings forth “the latent birth of the *question* in responsibility” and introduces a “contradiction into the Saying”<sup>806</sup>—or “Contra-Diction”<sup>807</sup> in Derrida’s word. This unquestioned responsibility becomes the birthplace of the very question, which requires a new Said evoked by the Saying, that is, an “otherwise Said.” The crucial moment of the otherwise Said is to “resay” the ethico-ontological language in the political situation; now language is not only a matter of a relation between ethics and ontology but also of justice and politics. Accordingly, the interrogation of the third party seems to force Levinas to summon again what has been rejected in favor of the exclusive responsibility for the other:

The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party. “Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off” (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric. The third party introduces a contradiction in the Saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the *visibility* of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice.<sup>808</sup>

The position of the third party *qua* the other of the other calls into question the unconditional relationship between the same and the other and calls for comparison, thematization, calculation, judgment, synchrony, intentionality, and so forth: “In the comparison of the incomparable there would be the latent birth of representation, logos, consciousness, work, the neutral notion

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<sup>806</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.

<sup>807</sup> AEL, 30, 118-19; AE, 62, 203-04.

<sup>808</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.



*being*.”<sup>809</sup> In this *regressive* move, Levinas recognizes “the limit of responsibility” in the political situation where the third party always already troubles and disturbs my exclusive responsibility for the other. However, this regression does not refer to the relapse into the Heideggerian climate to resume the *Seinsfrage* which “places ethics under the heel of ontology,”<sup>810</sup> but rather to the return to the basic motif of the Levinasian question clarified by Derrida: How can ethics remain *ethical* without falling into an angelic form of ethics? Unless the position of the third party is seriously taken into consideration with regard to the *moi-Vous* relationship, one will make a fetish of the Other who might be a celestial angel—or the “beautiful soul”<sup>811</sup> in Hegel’s language—in the ethereal Empyrean rather than an other person in the battlefield of the socio-political predicaments, such as antagonism, conflict, discord, contention, and anti-Semitism. Derrida’s critical stance toward the Levinasian Other would be quite Hegelian in this sense.

Arguing that Levinas’s ethical transcendence and infinity should be “*aufgehoben*” from the Hegelian perspective that Levinas might not basically accept, Anselm K. Min convincingly points out the danger of a pure ethics without totality, history, politics, or justice, which Levinas cannot and indeed does not reject. In favor of “the positive dialectic of infinity and totality in the interest of solidarity,”<sup>812</sup> Min contends that the unconditional “denial of all historical mediation” necessarily produces an “angelic,” “empty,” and “sentimental” relation in which the Other is reduced into an “ahistorical abstraction.”<sup>813</sup> Min’s Hegelian charge against Levinas discloses

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<sup>809</sup> OBBE, 158; AEAE, 202.

<sup>810</sup> WD, 135; ED, 198.

<sup>811</sup> OBBE, 47; AEAE, 61. According to Hegel, the beautiful soul lacks “actual existence, entangled in the contradiction between its pure self and the necessity of that self to externalize itself.” Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 406. In the entire journey of phenomenology of spirit, the moment of the “beautiful soul” shows how morality becomes impotent in its pure abstraction, indemnified from all kinds of contamination and dirtiness; thus, this beautiful soul might remain unsullied yet empty and thus “devoid of Spirit” (406).

<sup>812</sup> Anselm K. Min, “Toward a Dialectic of Totality and Infinity: Reflections on Emmanuel Levinas,” *The Journal of Religion*, 78: 4 (1998), 578.

<sup>813</sup> Min, “Toward a Dialectic of Totality and Infinity,” 578.

Levinas's main project of *Otherwise Than Being*, upon which this chapter embarks: "We murder the other not only by reducing the other to an object of violence in history and also by elevating and etherealizing the other beyond all history in thought."<sup>814</sup> As will be seen, Levinas's consideration of the political in terms of the third party might be a certain response to the Hegelian-Derridean challenge by showing that the fetishism of the Other necessarily yields a *pure* ethical, *apolitical*, and so *anti-ethical* relation. This chapter claims that Levinas's ethics is already always political by means of examining the notion of the third party and justice.

Levinas's conception of politics or "the political" does not simply follow traditional views of politics. In the first place, Levinas is not interested in formulating any legal systems or moral norms to generate a "technique of social equilibrium,"<sup>815</sup> a means to maintain the *status quo*, in which politicians or political theorists might be interested. Their primary interest lies in how to regulate human masses to ensure the "most complete exercise of spontaneity" by reconciling their conflicting freedoms, which allows them to be "situated within the totality."<sup>816</sup> It is the technique of a symmetric economy of Being that renders all beings to *participate* in an intimate, harmonious, or *sacred* community. Levinas thus condemns that "Politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself"<sup>817</sup> by neutralizing the same, the other, the third, and all the others altogether according to universal rules and norms; thus, "Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naivete."<sup>818</sup> However, politics for Levinas is not a tactical skill to manage antagonistic forces or a tactful rhetoric to negotiate them in favor of a unified or totalizing society. Instead, Levinas recognizes a genuine "place for politics" when "your neighbor attacks another neighbor or treats him

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<sup>814</sup> Min, "Toward a Dialectic of Totality and Infinity," 580.

<sup>815</sup> OBBE, 159; AEAE, 202.

<sup>816</sup> TI, 83; TeI, 55.

<sup>817</sup> TI, 300; TeI, 276.

<sup>818</sup> TI, 21; TeI, ix.

unjustly.”<sup>819</sup> In “The Ego and Totality” (1954), Levinas already alluded to the ticklish position of the third party in terms of violence and forgiveness:

But the conditions of a legitimate forgiveness are realized only in a society of beings totally present one another, in an *intimate society*. Such is a society of beings who have chosen one another, but in such a way as to keep a hand on all the ins and outs of the society. Such a truly intimate society is in its autarchy quite like the false totality of the ego. In fact, such a society consists of two people, I and thou. We are among ourselves. Third parties are excluded. The third person essentially disturbs this intimacy: my wrong with regard to you, which I can recognize entirely on the basis of my intentions, is objectively falsified by your relations with the *third person*, which remain hidden from me, since I am, in turn, excluded from the unique privilege of your intimacy. If I recognize the wrong with regard to you, I can, even by my act of repentance, injure the third person. Hence, my intention no longer exactly measures the meaning of my act.<sup>820</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Levinas does not find true violence in an intimate society of the duo as the same and the other, in which a symmetric economy of violence is perfectly at work. In an intimate society where the two involved in the violence are fully present to each other, the violence might be forgiven according to their intentions. However, their symmetrical acts cannot exhaust the meaning of their intentions since there is the third party who is already engaged in the violence. Levinas thus claims, “the violence undergone by a victim who is capable of annulling it is not properly speaking violence.”<sup>821</sup> There is always the third party whose unblinking eyes unremittingly gaze, concern, and witness the violence; the victim can forgive it, but the third cannot. Violence is thus not simply a matter of a duo but of a trio and more. The entry of the third party is not simply the empirical fact that the third person is numerically added to the duo-relation between the *moi* and *Vous*, but rather the pre-original fact that all the others other than the other—albeit *in absentia*—gaze, call, and obsess me through the eyes of the other from the outset; thus, in the

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<sup>819</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics and Politics,” trans. Jonathan Romney, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 292-94.

<sup>820</sup> EN, 19; E, 29 (translation modified).

<sup>821</sup> EN, 19; E, 29.

proximity of the other, “this obsession cries out for justice.”<sup>822</sup> Justice begins with the absent presence of the third party that “interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other human, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbor.”<sup>823</sup> Therefore, Levinas’s peculiar view of politics should be understood on the basis of the third party and justice. It is the political moment that puts ethics into question and renders it a vigilant *question* in non-indifference to the challenges of an infinite number of the third parties. At the limit of the political in the ethical, Levinas painfully undergoes the paradoxical question of “How to speak of the unspeakable, to thematize the unthematizable, to compare the incomparable, and to calculate the incalculable.” In this vein, Ricoeur claims that the third party or “justice permits to *thematize* a type of the Saying that allows [Levinas] to philosophize.”<sup>824</sup>

### 2-3. Proper Name Proper to the Saying Proper

Provided that Levinas’s own question proceeds from the *just* exigency of the third party, which calls for Saying the Saying in and through the Said, the equivocal implication of the term “*l’exposition*”<sup>825</sup> illustrates the way in which Levinas attempts to philosophize in terms of the distinctive and yet inseparable relation between the ethical or unthematizable *exposure* to the other (the Saying) and the ontological thematization or *exposition* of this exposure (the Said). When it comes to the different modes of language, the anachronic logic of the anterior posteriority is still at work. Although the Saying in the present participle is grammatically later than the Said in the past participle, the former is phenomenologically older or more primordial than the latter. It is as

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<sup>822</sup> OBBE, 158; AEAE, 201.

<sup>823</sup> OBBE, 150; AEAE, 191 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>824</sup> Ricoeur, *Autrement*, 28.

<sup>825</sup> This term is the title of the body part of *Otherwise than Being*. Henceforth, I will freely modify the English translation with reference to the French edition because italics are removed in many places in the English version. Moreover, there are considerable typographical errors due to the confusion between “*le dire*” and “*le dit*,” which undermines the overall context of the work.

if the past Said could not reveal itself without the present Saying, as if the present Saying alone could render the past Said reverberant *en ce moment même et ici*, and not the other way around. As “*me voici*” indicates that the accusative *moi* is already exposed to the other before the substantive *Moi* speaks to the other, the Saying is “prior to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a fore-word [*avant-propos*] preceding languages.”<sup>826</sup> Levinas does not designate the Saying as a principle, origin, or *arche* of all language which belongs to the language of onto-theology and thereby reduces the Saying to the past Said of the present Saying; rather, it is a pre-original or an-archival “silence ahead of all words.”<sup>827</sup> Therefore, the anarchical foreword of the Saying from the immemorial past cannot be synchronized into the thematization of the Said.

However, the appearance of the third party does not let the Saying remain unthematized in its silence but claims it to be said, betrayed, and thematized. In order to betray [*trahir*] itself in the Said, the Saying has to betray [*trahir*] itself in the Said. Levinas states, “The correlation of the Saying and the Said, that is, the subordination of the Saying into the Said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands.”<sup>828</sup> As soon as the Saying is to be Said, it is absorbed into “the doxa, the *already Said*, fable, or epos where the *given* is held in its theme.”<sup>829</sup> The Saying here runs the risk of moving into the Said in such a way that the Saying betrays itself in the Said by circulating the verb “to be” in it; therefore, “*me voici*” is to be translated into “It *is* me here.” Politics here takes on a peculiar meaning in the interrogation of the third party,

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<sup>826</sup> OBBE, 5; AEAE, 6.

<sup>827</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Through Being to the Anarchy of Transcendence: A Commentary on the First Chapter of *Otherwise than Being*,” in *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 92.

<sup>828</sup> OBBE, 6; AEAE, 7.

<sup>829</sup> OBBE, 36; AEAE, 46 (translation modified).

who solicits me to solemnly say “It’s me here” to all the others rather than to silently say “*me voici*” to the other alone.

What is Said about the Saying is expressed in a sentence or language, which inevitably undergoes the ambiguous passage of being—either a noun or a verb—or what Levinas calls “essence” in a verbal-cum-substantival fashion. In the Preliminary Note to *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas redefines essence as follows: “the term *essence* here expresses *être* different from an *étant*, the German *Sein* distinguished from *Seiendes*, the Latin *esse* distinguished from the Scholastic *ens*.”<sup>830</sup> As seen above, the fundamental ontology for Levinas is not fundamental enough due to the ongoing complicity of *Sein* and *Seiende*; thus, Levinas understands it as a “less restricted ontology”<sup>831</sup> when he uses *être*, *Sein*, *esse*, essence, or *essance*—all of which are “confirmed positively to be the *conatus* of beings.”<sup>832</sup> It is the so-called “*conatus essendi*,”<sup>833</sup> borrowed from Spinoza, that characterizes the essence of being involved in the ontico-ontological complicity: the constant and consistent persistence in being that never allows any interval, trauma, diachrony, or distance, which interrupts the being interested in maintaining its own being in the present. “*Esse* is *interesse*; essence is interestedness [*intéressement*].”<sup>834</sup> In the correlation of the Saying and the

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<sup>830</sup> OBBE, xlvii; AEAE, ix-x. Levinas claims that the task of this work is “to see in subjectivity an exception putting out of the conjunction of *essence*, *étant*, and the ‘*difference*’.” This preliminary note clearly alludes to Levinas’s implicit target of this work without an explicit reference to the name of Heidegger. The title of this work can be expressed in a more specific manner: *Otherwise than the Heideggerian Sein or beyond the Heideggerian Essence*. See Richard A. Cohen, “Foreword,” in OBBE, xiii.

<sup>831</sup> Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Levinas’s Method,” *Research in phenomenology* 28/1 (1998), 118. This is where the Levinasian *être* faces the Heideggerian *Sein* for the first time. It is, therefore, not always clear whether it is the Levinasian *être* or the Heideggerian *Sein* when Levinas writes *être* in *Otherwise than Being*. However, this problem no longer matters since being—either *être* or *Sein*—is the final word in *Otherwise than Being*.

<sup>832</sup> OBBE, 4; AEAE, 4.

<sup>833</sup> In *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas relates Dasein to the *conatus essendi*: “The expression ‘Dasein is a being for whom, in its being, its own being is at stake’ is seductive in *Being and Time*, where it signifies the *conatus*. But in reality the *conatus* is deduced from the degree of its Being strictly bound to this being,” GDT, 25; DMT, 34 (translation modified). For Levinas’s adoption of Spinoza’s concept of the *conatus essendi*, see Robert Bernasconi, “Levinas and the Struggle for Existence,” in *Addressing Levinas*, eds. Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 170-84. Bernasconi here describes the *conatus essendi* as “the struggle for existence,” which plays a key role in the discussion of Levinas’s polemic against Heidegger (172).

<sup>834</sup> OBBE, 4; AEAE, 4

Said, the Saying is reduced to the Said in which the Heideggerian *Sein*, *esse*, and essence echo as the *conatus essendi*, that is, being-for-oneself that undermines the ethical signification of the Saying itself. Levinas thus states, “The birth of ontology finds its place in the Said. Ontology is stated in the amphibology of *être* and *étant*.”<sup>835</sup> Levinas contends that language remains *dogmatic* in the history of Western philosophy when it finds its ultimate meaning in the correlation of the Saying and the Said, as if the Said could exhaust the signification of the Saying. “The logos *Said* has the last word dominating all meaning, the word of the end, the very possibility of the ultimate and the result. Nothing can interrupt it.”<sup>836</sup> By calling into question this dogmatic Said as the locus of *Sinngebung*, Levinas attempts to lay bare “a prior signification proper to the Saying, which is neither ontological nor ontic.”<sup>837</sup> Levinas thus raises a semantic question about whether all meaning originates from being, *Sein*, Essence, or *conatus essendi* echoed in the Said.

According to Levinas, the fact that the Saying reveals itself by betraying itself already heralds that language is itself *skeptical* since what is betrayed in the Said is to be betrayed by the Saying: “Language is already skepticism.”<sup>838</sup> The Saying lets itself be translated, conveyed, and Said in the Said by betraying the very Said. If there is betrayal in the philosophical discourse, this betrayal already presupposes a betrayal of the betrayal: “The philosophical speaking that betrays in its Said the proximity it conveys before us still remains, as the Saying, a proximity and a responsibility.”<sup>839</sup> In no way is the signification of the Saying exhausted in its manifestation *via* the Said; the Saying signifies otherwise than the Said “as an apparitor presenting essence and beings.”<sup>840</sup> This is where the second reduction or the reduction of the reduction takes place in terms

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<sup>835</sup> OBBE, 42; AEAE, 55 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>836</sup> OBBE, 169; AEAE, 214-15.

<sup>837</sup> OBBE, 46; AEAE, 59.

<sup>838</sup> OBBE, 170; AEAE, 216. For Levinas’s discussion on skepticism of the philosophical discourse, see OBBE, 165-71; AEAE, 210-18. See also Critchley, *The Deconstruction of Ethics*, 156-69.

<sup>839</sup> OBBE, 168; AEAE, 214.

<sup>840</sup> OBBE, 46; AEAE, 59.

of the betrayal of the Said in the Saying. Through the *chiasmatic* reduction between the Saying and the Said, Levinas writes, “We must go back to on the hither side of this correlation.”<sup>841</sup> For Levinas, philosophy cannot be released from skepticism since it is sensitive to the ambivalence of the term “*l’exposition*,” which refuses to synchronize the primordial exposure to the other with the doxical thematization or ontological exposition of this exposure. Skepticism can secure the Saying, having undergone through the passage of being, from being reabsorbed into the Said where being and essence resound. The skeptical discourse sustains a distance, proximity, diachrony, or interval between the Saying and the Said, which makes it possible for the Saying to be heard, written, and Said on the hither side of the Said. Levinas thus claims, “Language permits us to say, be it by betrayal, *this outside of being*, this *ex-ception* to being, as though the other of being were an event of being.”<sup>842</sup> The Saying unsays the Said, resays it, says it again in other words, and says otherwise than the Said; it is to be Said *autrement* on the hither side of the amphibology of a verbal being and a substantive being. Therefore, the skeptical language conceives of otherwise than being or beyond essence without relapsing into being otherwise or another essence; that is, it articulates being as otherwise than being *via* being without being reduced to being.

As seen above, Levinas’s ultimate question posed in *Otherwise Than Being* lies in how to articulate the Said inspired by the Saying—it is the question about a “*nom propre*,” a proper noun/name of the Said for the Saying or of the Said proper to the Saying proper. The skeptical language enables Levinas to designate the *nom propre* for the Saying not as a being otherwise or another essence which is inevitably subsumed under the regime of ontology, but as otherwise than (the Heideggerian) being or beyond (the Heideggerian) essence, which exceptionally ruptures the

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<sup>841</sup> OBBE, 43; AEAE, 55. For a discussion of the chiasm of the Saying and the Said in terms of the double reduction, see Feron *De l’idée de transcendance à la question du langage*, 221-29. Feron here states, “The chiasm of the Saying and the Said conditions the possibility of a discourse on the otherwise than being” (226).

<sup>842</sup> OBBE, 6; AEAE, 7.



ontological regime. Consequently, what the *nom propre* signifies is the fact that there is no conclusive, authentic, or proper name/noun of the Said that exhausts the ethical signification of the Saying proper. Although the thematic-ontological exposition of “It’s me here” lets the pre-original or an-archival response of “*me voici*” be heard, thematized, and Said, the primordial signification of “*me voici*” cannot be exhausted in the Said of “It’s me here.” Unless I say “*me voici*” to the other, I cannot say “It’s me here” to all the third parties; in other words, if I failed to see the face of the other, I could not see those of all the others. The primordial voice of “*me voici*” resounds on the hither side of “It’s me here.” Levinas writes, “the reduction is reduction of the Said to the Saying, beyond the logos, beyond being and non-being, beyond essence,...to signification, to one-for-the-other involved in responsibility (or more exactly in substitution).”<sup>843</sup> It is the anarchical surplus or excess of the Saying of “*me voici*” over the Said of “It’s me here” that discloses the primordial mode of being otherwise than being as being-for-the-other in disinterestedness on the hither side of the *conatus essendi*, i.e., being-for-oneself in interestedness. When I say “It’s me here” to the third party, the very Said signifies “*me voici*,” that is, the primordial exposure to the other. The third party never lessens the ethical weight and exigency of my responsibility for the other in the response of “*me voici*” by distributing or sharing it among all the others but rather redoubles the ethical burden of my response. “The equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights. The forgetting of self moves justice.”<sup>844</sup> As will be seen in the next section, Levinas *hyperbolizes* my responsibility for the other to the point of my responsibility for the responsibility of the other, that is, substitution, sacrifice, or dying for the other.

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<sup>843</sup> OBBE, 45; AEAE, 58.

<sup>844</sup> OBBE, 159; AEAE, 203.

### 3. Ethical Hyperbole: Substitution, Sacrifice, and Dying for Others

Provided that the primordial exposure of the accusative me [*moi*] to the other in the Saying “*me voici*” consists in subjecting, offering, and giving myself [*soi*] to the other, one might doubt whether the unconditional, asymmetric, and traumatic encounter with the other would entail a self-refuting denunciation or alienation of subjectivity. It is as if in the Saying “*me voici*,” the *moi* gave up the *soi* by giving it to the other without assuming to whom it gives itself and thematizing what it testifies. This is the challenge leveled by Hägglund from the Derridean perspective by arguing that “Levinas’s denunciation of egoism should be contrast with Derrida’s affirmation of a constitutive narcissism.”<sup>845</sup> Hägglund argues that an asymmetric relation between *moi* and *Vous* can be sustained only on the basis of a symmetric relation between *Je* and *Tu*; thus, the command “Thou shalt not kill” is haunted by Derrida’s statement, “I can kill you, you can kill me, we can kill ourselves.”<sup>846</sup> For Hägglund, Levinas’s ethical ideal presupposes that the other is always a good friend who accepts my offering, not an enemy who wants to kill me; accordingly, Levinas has nothing to say about all the situations “where you are confronted with an other who assaults you, turns down the offered hospitality, and in turn denies you help when you need it.”<sup>847</sup> He then concludes, “Levinas’s ideal ethical relation between two is not only untenable but undesirable; it would be ‘the worst violence’.”<sup>848</sup> Indeed, Levinas has nothing to say about all those situations in which I first evaluate, measure, and assume whether the other is my friend or my foe since this question rests on my thematization, comprehension, and knowledge. What Levinas attempts to say here is that the *Moi* cannot be innocent in its being-interested-in-the-*soi* or its *conatus essendi*, and

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<sup>845</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 53, n. 19.

<sup>846</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 122. See also Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 52.

<sup>847</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 52.

<sup>848</sup> Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination,” 60.

thereby that the *Moi* in its indifference to the death of the other cannot be justified, as if my indifference would tolerate, defend, or justify murder of the other.

It is important to remember that the interdiction “Thou shalt not kill” is not real but ethical, as seen in Chapter Four. The ethical signification of “Thou shalt not kill” emerges from the primordial exposure to the other, that is, the testimony of “*me voici*” that I have no reason, origin, right, or *arche* which would justify my being-for-myself within myself. I am already opened to something other than myself prior to the opening of my own Being; this anarchical exposure to the other characterizes my being-for-the-other. The unconditional submission to the other would destroy a *Je-Tu* relation in advance, as Hägglund holds, but the ethical relation of the *moi-Vous* begins when all the symmetrical relationships are broken down; phenomenologically speaking, the former has already begun even before the latter is shattered. What the Saying of “*me voici*” bears witness to is the fact that the Saying “After you!” goes first before and without asking “Who are you?” and not the other way around. The asymmetry between the *moi* and *Vous* is the unconditional condition for the ethical relation, in which the *moi* first Says the Saying without asking the other to Say the Saying to the *soi*.

However, Ricoeur recognizes in the testimony of “*me voici*” the attestation of a *soi*-consistency, *soi*-affirmation, or *soi*-maintaining. Ricoeur insists that the Saying “*me voici*” proceeds from “a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize the *soi* as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative; *me voici!*”<sup>849</sup> In short, the Saying “*me voici*” is the expression of the *conatus essendi*, by which the radical passivity immediately turns into the overpowering activity in the reliable attestation and assurance of the *soi*. In the accusation of the other, I find my power to be accused;

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<sup>849</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 22; *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1990), 34-5 (translation modified).

in the responsibility for the other, I find my power to be responsible; in the response to the other, I find my power to respond; ultimately, in Saying “*me voici*,” I find my power to give myself to the other so that the other can count, lean, and rest on me. Ricoeur identifies the ethical responsibility for the other whose ultimate recourse is to the “*assurance of being one acting and suffering*”<sup>850</sup> and explicates a self-assertive pretense of this responsibility as follows:

Self-maintaining [*Le maintenir de soi*] is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that the other can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another. The term “responsibility” unites both meanings: “counting on [*compter sur*]” and “being accountable for [*être comptable de*].” It unites them, adding to them the idea of a *response* to the question “Where are you?” asked by another who needs me. This response is “*me voici!*” It is the response that is a statement of self-maintaining.<sup>851</sup>

According to Ricoeur’s view of *me voici*, if the accusative *moi* wishes to give its *soi* to the other, it must be able to possess its *soi* within the substantive *Moi* who has the capacity to take it to be something at its disposal; otherwise, there would be no chance to Say “*me voici*” to the other. To respond to the other is to secure, preserve, and claim an authentic or proper place in which the *moi* remains at home with its *soi* [*chez-soi*]. In this identity of the *moi* and the *soi*, the subject of the Saying discovers its subjectivity in the mode of interestedness, being-for-itself, and the *conatus essendi*; thus, the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* is the ontological condition for disinterestedness or being-for-the-other. Ricoeur seems to suggest here that the ethical response demands the ontological preparation to give my being to the other. In his treatment of “*me voici*,” however, what Ricoeur fails to capture is the anarchic logic of the anterior posteriority, so that he misconstrues the radical passivity of the subject and thus compromises the ethical signification of *me voici*. For Levinas, the statement of “*me voici*” does not presuppose the anterior place where

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<sup>850</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22; *Soi-même comme un autre*, 35.

<sup>851</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 165; *Soi-même comme un autre*, 195 (translation modified).

the substantive *Moi* begins to speak to the other on the basis of my comprehension, reflection, or power, but marks the primordial and yet posterior voice that obsesses the accusative *moi* without or before representing, reflecting, or thematizing the ethical voice of the other. Levinas asserts that this anterior place as the authentic locus of being is already the usurpation and domination in which the subject remains the same in its *soi*-identification; therefore, the testimony of “*me voici*” precludes the reduction of the other to the same and so the absorption of the Saying into the Said.

### 3-1. Subjectivity of the *moi malgré soi*

The primordial signification of “*me voici*” signifies that the accusative *moi* is given to the other, even before the substantive *Moi* gives itself to the other. Phenomenologically speaking, I am not giving myself to the other in my will, freedom, or power, but what is given to the other is to be found as the accusative *moi* in the radical passivity on the hither side of the alternatives of activity and passivity. Therefore, Levinas claims: “Subjectivity...comes to pass as a passivity more passive than all passivity.”<sup>852</sup> The accusative *moi* offered to the other is then different from a generous, altruistic, or condescending *Moi* who voluntarily gives itself to the other in its unselfish will and intention. The act of giving committed by the *Moi* still rests upon my intention, my will, my freedom, and my power to give myself to the other. In fact, it is the overpowering activity under the pretense of passivity since the unselfish subject returns to itself in its *conatus essendi* by means of its own act of giving and generosity. However, giving is not a luxury of the *Moi* who enjoys the fullness of being (-interested-in-the-*soi*), in which the *moi* returns to the *soi* in the mode of being-for-the-*soi*, but an obligation imposed upon the *moi* in the mode of being-for-other-than-the-*soi*. The Saying “*me voici*” testifies this obligation that precludes the identity of the *moi* and

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<sup>852</sup> OBBE, 14; AEAE, 18.

the *soi* or the return of the *moi* to the *soi*. Giving in the Saying does not refer to giving what I have in my self-possession and self-maintenance but rather to giving what I have never possessed, that is, the *soi*. The *moi* cannot dominate, control, or govern the *soi* since it is already de-positioned, dis-possessed, and dis-placed; it is out of joint with the *soi*. Levinas thus states: “One must show in the Saying, qua approach, the very de-position [*dé-position*] or de-situation [*dé-situation*] of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness [*unicité*], and is thus the subjectivity of the subject.”<sup>853</sup> For Levinas, Western philosophy, which ceaselessly reduces the Saying into the Said, fails to recognize this “absolute passivity on the hither side of activity and passivity.”<sup>854</sup> The subjectivity of the *moi* who Says “*me voici*” is constituted—less ontologically speaking, accused, elected, or obsessed—“not by a rest on itself [*soi*], but by a restlessness [*inquietude*]”<sup>855</sup> which releases the *moi* from the ontological mode of being-for-itself and exposes it to the primordial mode of being-for-the-other. The restlessness in in the mode of being-disinterested-in-the-*soi* does not refer to any ontological inauthenticity or destitution, but a respiration that liberates the *moi* from the breathless enchainment of being and leads it to otherwise than being, beyond essence, or beyond its *conatus essendi*.

The testimony of *me voici* neither entails a renunciation or desertion of subjectivity through the total evasion of the *moi* from the *soi* nor presupposes an ontological foundation of subjectivity in the identity of the *moi* and the *soi*. Levinas thus contends that the subject is not to be conceived “in the function of being and non-being, taken as ultimate references. Humanity, subjectivity—the excluded third, excluded from everywhere, a non-place [*non-lieu*]—signifies the rupture of this alternative.”<sup>856</sup> If the ambiguous duality of the *moi* and the *soi* on the hither side of the identity is

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<sup>853</sup> OBBE, 47-8; AEAE, 62 (translation modified).

<sup>854</sup> OBBE, 110; AEAE, 140.

<sup>855</sup> OBBE, 142; AEAE, 181.

<sup>856</sup> OBBE, 14; AEAE, 17 (translation modified).

neglected as in the cases of Hägglund and Ricoeur, Bernasconi claims that “a whole dimension of Levinas’s thought goes missing.”<sup>857</sup> In his early work, entitled *On Escape*, Levinas already pays attention to the ambiguous duality of the *moi* and the *soi* in terms of escape from being and being riveted to being. While examining hypostasis as opposed to *ekstasis*, *Existence and Existents* describes a hypostatic solitude of the subject as being out of joint with itself. This out-of-jointedness or “dual solitude”<sup>858</sup> prepares the way for *Totality and Infinity* where Levinas develops further the ultimate dimension of being “produced as multiple and as split into same and other.”<sup>859</sup> It is the Levinasian *être* on the hither side of the Heideggerian *Sein* that takes its concrete form in the ethical relationship between the same and the other. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas introduces a neologism “the despite self [*le malgré soi*]”<sup>860</sup> to radicalize the ambiguous duality, which undercuts the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* where *Sein*, essence, and the *conatus essendi* ceaselessly echo. Therefore, the subjectivity of the subject Levinas attempts to defend in *Otherwise Than Being* does not consist in the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* but in the de-position or de-situation in such a way that the accusative *moi*, despite the *soi*, does not have its own, authentic, or proper place in which it could remain at home with the *soi*. It is “a self despite self in incarnation as the very possibility of offering, suffering, and trauma.”<sup>861</sup> This duality is expressed in the hyperbolic terms as follows:

The *I* [je] approached in responsibility for-the-other, is a denudation, an exposure to being affected, a pure susceptiveness. It does not posit itself, does not possess itself, and does not recognize itself; it is consumed, delivered over, dis-locates itself, *loses its place*, is exiled, relegates itself into itself, but as though its very skin were still a way to shelter itself in

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<sup>857</sup> Robert Bernasconi, “‘Subjectivity Must Be Defended’: Substitution, Entanglement, and the Prehistory of the Me in Levinas,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 261.

<sup>858</sup> EE, 90; DEE, 128.

<sup>859</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

<sup>860</sup> OBBE, 50; AEAE, 65. For a discussion on the subjectivity of the despite self, see Peperzak, “Through Being to the Anarchy of Transcendence,” 96-99.

<sup>861</sup> OBBE, 50; AEAE, 65 (translation modified)

being, exposed to wounds and outrage, emptying itself in a non-place, to the point of substituting itself for the other, holding on to itself only as it were in the trace of its exile.<sup>862</sup>

The Saying of *me voici* intensifies my responsibility for the other as the one-for-the-other to the point of substitution as the one-in-place-of-the-other-despite-oneself. Substitution signifies that the ethical command of the other *situates* the *moi*—despite its will, its intention, and its *conatus essendi*—under the amplified weight of responsibility for the responsibility of the other. The Saying as the ethical exposure to the other exceeds and, at the same time, precedes the initiative of the *Moi* who would voluntarily open, expose, or give itself to the other in its *conatus essendi*; it exposes the radical openness of the accusative *moi*—without returning to the *soi*—to the other on the hither side of the letting-be [*Gelassenheit*] that lets the other be as it is. In this regard, the subjectivity of the subject who Says the Saying does not consist in “the mysterious *manège* of being’s essence, where, despite all of Heidegger’s anti-intellectualism, the gnoseological correlation, man called forth by a manifestation, is found again.”<sup>863</sup> Instead, Levinas proclaims that the central thesis of *Otherwise Than Being* is to clarify that “the overemphasis of openness is responsibility for the other to the point of substitution,” which ruptures, disrupts, and breaks with “being’s essence.”<sup>864</sup> The subjectivity of *me voici* does not rest upon the identity of the *moi* and the *soi* where the Said of the Saying alone resounds but, contrarily, appears as the rupture of this identity by means of (re-)Saying the Said of the Saying that “absorbs me of all identity.”<sup>865</sup> Levinas continues: “This absolution reverses essence. It is not a negation of essence, but a disinterestedness,

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<sup>862</sup> OBBE, 138; AEAE, 176 (translation modified).

<sup>863</sup> OBBE, 184; AEAE, 231 (translation modified). In this sentence, Alphonso Lingis translates “*manège* [merry-go-round]” as “housekeeping [*ménage*].” It is not clear whether the translator would confuse “look-alike” French terms between “*manège*” and “*ménage*,” or if there would be a typographical error in the original French text. In my view, both words metaphorically make sense in the overall context of the work insofar as they refer to the Heideggerian difference, that is, the ongoing complicity of Being and a being, which is the constant target Levinas aims at in his critique of Heidegger’s ontology.

<sup>864</sup> OBBE, 119, 184; AEAE, 152, 232, respectively.

<sup>865</sup> OBBE, 50; AEAE, 65.



an ‘otherwise than being’ which turns into a ‘for the other’.”<sup>866</sup> The radical signification of the hyperbolic notion of substitution or one-for-the-other-despite-oneself becomes apparent in contrast with Heidegger’s ontological concept of care and especially solicitude of the other.

### 3-2. Solicitude [*Fürsorge*]: Ontological Impossibility of Substitution

In the analysis of care [*Sorge*] as the fundamental structure of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, Heidegger makes a distinction between concern [*Besorgen*] for things and solicitude [*Fürsorge*] for other Daseins. Heidegger states in *Being and Time*: “Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand [*Zuhandenen*] could be taken in our previous analysis as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others [*Anderen*] as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude*.”<sup>867</sup> While solicitude is a way for Dasein to relate other Daseins in the care of solitude, concern is a way for Dasein to relate to the ready-to-hand things in terms of the care of equipment. Concern and solicitude are two distinct moments of the care that make Dasein an issue in the web of various relationships with which Dasein comports itself [*verhält sich*]. In the mode of Being-in-the-world, Dasein finds itself and compares itself with others—either objective things in *Zuhandenheit* or other Daseins in their own *Existenz*: “The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is being-with others. Their Being-in-themselves of others within the-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*].”<sup>868</sup> The ontological structure of the care displays Dasein’s Being-in-the-world as Being-itself [*Selbst-sein*] and, simultaneously, as Being-with [*Mitsein*]. In his polemic against Heidegger, Levinas never fails to recognize this care-structure of Dasein’s relationship to others. Indeed, Levinas attacks Heidegger’s ontology not because *Being*

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<sup>866</sup> OBBE, 50; AEAE, 65.

<sup>867</sup> SZ, 193.

<sup>868</sup> SZ, 118.

*and Time* remains silent about the question of the other, but because it marginalizes and reduces this question into the ontological question. As Marion rightly points out, the difference between two thinkers is not placed between “Dasein without alterity” and “*me* determined by the other” but rather between “two different ways of describing the relation of *me* (Dasein?) to the other.”<sup>869</sup> In order to clarify the hyperbolic signification of substitution in Levinas’s thought, it is important to first consider how Heidegger understands substitution as opposed to solicitude, although both terms more or less have to do with the question of the other.

For Heidegger, substituting me for the other, placing me in place of the other, or imposing my own possibilities upon the other refers to disburdening the other of its care by me. This disburdening or release deprives the other of its own place and forces it to my domination. This is one of two extreme possibilities of *Fürsorge* that turns into *Besorgen*: “solicitude [*Fürsorge*] can, as it were, take away ‘care [*Sorge*]’ from the other [*Anderen*] and put itself in his position in concern [*Besorgen*]; it can *stand in or leap in* [*einspringen*] for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the other that with which he is to concern himself.”<sup>870</sup> Dasein here takes the other (Dasein) to be an objective thing in the mode of *Zuhandenheit*, and thereby their relationship can be characterized by *Besorgen*—rather than *Fürsorge*—in terms of domination and dependency. In the second possibility of solicitude, Dasein relates to the other *qua* another Dasein whose authentic mode of Being consists in Being-toward-death, in such a way that Dasein gives the care back to the other and lets the other take its own place and take responsibility for its Being. This second

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<sup>869</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “The Care of the Other and Substitution,” trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, in *The Exorbitant: Emmanuel Levinas Between Jews and Christians*, eds. Kevin Hart and Michael A. Signer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 203. This text is an abridged version of “La substitution et la sollicitude: Comment Levinas replit Heidegger,” which was first published in Danielle Cohen-Levinas and Bruno Clement (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas et les territoires de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 51-72 and then republished in Jean-Luc Marion, *Figures de Phénoménologie: Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Henry, Derrida* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2015), 129-48. I will refer to the latter along with the English translation.

<sup>870</sup> SZ, 122.

possibility of solicitude “helps the other to become transparent to him in his care [*Sorge*] and to become *free for it*.”<sup>871</sup> This is where *Fürsorge* becomes the *Sorge* for the other as another Dasein. For Heidegger, the authentic care for the other does not consist in substituting one for the other but in letting the other take its own place and allowing the other to bear the burden of its own possibilities and, first of all, its own death as its possibility *par excellence*.

The authentic solicitude of the care for the other signifies that the other as another Dasein cares for its place, its possibilities, its own death, and its responsibility for Being. The other (Dasein) exists as “a being for which, in its Being, that Being is itself an issue,”<sup>872</sup> and its own Being is at stake in every case. This fundamental structure of the solicitude displays that the other *qua* Dasein cannot be substituted by any other Dasein. The impossibility of substitution is most discernable in Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of death as the most authentic, non-relational, insuperable, indefinite, and certain possibility for Dasein.<sup>873</sup> I can die for the other in place of the other but not in *the* place of the other. My sacrifice or my substitution for the other never takes death away from the other and thus makes no difference to the ontological fact that the other dies insofar as it exists as Dasein. Heidegger thus claims, “*No one can take the Other’s dying away from him*.”<sup>874</sup> And he immediately adds, “*Every Dasein itself must take dying upon itself in every instance*.”<sup>875</sup> Death is a matter of what Heidegger calls mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*]; therefore, death is always mine so that it is not something to be substituted by anyone else’s. Ontologically understood, the mineness of

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<sup>871</sup> SZ, 122.

<sup>872</sup> SZ, 406. In this context, Marion claims that “*Fürsorge* always belongs through and through to *Sorge*” because the prefix “*für-*” does not change the central meaning of *Sorge* to the meaning of Dasein’s own Being. He immediately adds, “Heidegger concedes to the alterity of the other only that it might repeat the nonsubstantiality of ipseity.” Marion, “The Care of the Other and Substitution,” 206.

<sup>873</sup> SZ, 258-59. Heidegger writes: “The full existential and ontological concept of death can now be defined as follows: *as the end of Dasein, death is the most authentic [eigenste], non-relational [unbezügliche], certain [gewisse], and as such, indefinite [unbestimmte] and insuperable [unüberholbare] possibility of Dasein*.” I have detailed these characteristics of the ontological view of death as the possibility *par excellence* in Chapter Two.

<sup>874</sup> SZ, 240.

<sup>875</sup> SZ, 240 (italics added).

death as the authentic mode of Being-toward-death dissolves the possibility of substitution or dying for the other into the inauthentic moment of *Mitsein*.

Nevertheless, the idle talk [*Gerade*] of the anonymous they [*Man*] persistently attempts to justify “the *temptation* of covering up from oneself one’s most authentic Being-toward-death”<sup>876</sup> by reducing the ontological possibility of death into the ontic-empirical one. That is to say, the idle talk constantly entices Dasein to believe that one certainly dies some other day, but not me and not right now. When it comes to death, the anonymous they would hence declare that “Everyone is the other, and no one is oneself.”<sup>877</sup> In no way does *das Man* die, but Dasein alone is able to die. In the face of anxiety of death as the *end* of Being-in-the-world, however, Dasein discovers itself face to face with nothingness, that is, “no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [*Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens*].”<sup>878</sup> It is the anxiety of death that emancipates Dasein from the temptation or illusion of the idle talk of the anonymous they. In the possibility of the impossibility of its existence, all relations other than its own relation with itself are completely shattered, and Dasein confronts its own Being in its authenticity and totality. In this context, death as the non-relational possibility is to individualize [*vereinzeln*] Dasein down to its authentic Being as Being-thrown into the *Da* where it manifests itself as its able-to-be-toward-death in its isolation [*Vereinzeltug*] from the anonymous they. The death of others is then subordinated to the ontic issue that hides, conceals, and dissimulates the existential-ontological mineness of death as such. Accordingly, the death of others would be only a matter of the idle talk, which keeps publicizing or gossiping that it is no

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<sup>876</sup> SZ, 253.

<sup>877</sup> SZ, 128.

<sup>878</sup> SZ, 250. Ontologically understood, death is the *end* of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, which *de*-limits the existential scope of Da-sein, that is, being-there between not-yet-being-there (before its birth) and no-longer-being-there (after its death). Thus, death as the end of Dasein circumscribes or encloses the totality [*Ganzheit*] of Dasein: “Death is, after all, only the ‘end’ of Dasein, and formally speaking, it is just *one* of the ends that embraces the totality of Dasein. But the other ‘end’ is the ‘beginning,’ ‘birth.’ Only the being ‘between’ birth and death presents the total [*Ganze*] we are looking for,” SZ 373.

longer my business. For Heidegger, substitution or sacrifice proceeds from the idle talk, which distracts Dasein from the authentic *Fürsorge* in the *Sorge* for its own place, its Being, and its most authentic possibility as death. Substitution either of me for the other or of the other for me merely belongs to the anonymous they; it remains accessible to anybody and yet to nobody but never to *me*. Heidegger thus argues, “The ‘anonymous they’ never dies because it *cannot* die; for death is in each case mine [*je meiner*].”<sup>879</sup> The other alone dies in its own place, just as I do; there is no place for substitution and sacrifice in the ontological sense.

### 3-3. Substitution: Otherwise than Being beyond “To Be or Not to Be”

Provided that the ontological meaning of death becomes exemplarily evident in the impossibility of substitution or sacrifice due to the mineness of death, Levinas suspects that Heidegger’s ontology suffers from an ontological obesity on the basis of the identity of the *moi* and the *soi*. The mineness of death characterizes the authentic burden of Being that never allows otherwise than Being, beyond essence, or beyond the *conatus essendi*. Ontologically, Dasein appropriates everything that can serve to its own Being, even its own death as nothingness. In his last lecture courses delivered in 1975-76, published as *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas calls into question Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death by asking whether the meaning of death can be exhausted by the mineness in the service of the authentic Being.

We understand that shapes or forms pass into and out of being, while something subsists. Death contrasts with all that: it is inconceivable, refractory to thought, and yet exceptionable and undeniable. It is not a phenomenon; hardly thematizable, unthinkable—the irrational begins there. Even in anxiety, even through anxiety, death remains unthought. To have experienced anxiety does not allow one to *think* it. *Nothingness has defied Western thought.*<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> SZ, 424-25.

<sup>880</sup> GDT, 70; DMT, 82.

This passage clearly shows that death does not take any form through which it transparently manifests itself to Dasein; thus, it is not a phenomenon to be thought in terms of a noetic-noematic correlation. In Levinas's view, nonetheless, "Heidegger deduces all thinkable signification from the attitude of [Dasein] in regard to [its] own death."<sup>881</sup> Levinas claims against Heidegger that death reveals itself at the point where Dasein fails to think in terms of the dialectic of Being and nothingness. In the approach of death, Dasein faces otherwise than Being, *i.e.*, the other of Being that cannot be reduced into the comprehension of Being. As seen in the foregoing chapters, death never transparently presents itself to Dasein to be understood, grasped, or anticipated in its authentic Being, but rather approaches as an enigmatic mystery, which heralds that Dasein is "in relationship with what does not come from itself."<sup>882</sup> In the approach of death, Dasein encounters what it cannot encompass within its authentic solitude and finds itself in relation with something wholly other than itself. "The solitude of death does not make the Other vanish."<sup>883</sup> This does not mean that Levinas understands death as the negation of a phenomenon, such as a pure non-phenomenon or noumenon, which never matters to Dasein, as if death would be completely irrelevant or meaningless to Dasein itself. Indeed, death appears to Dasein as a *para*-phenomenon that overflows, disrupts, and betrays the *Seinsdenken*; it can be thought only as the unthinkable, which signals the rupture of the comprehension of Being. Levinas argues: "Death is the end of what makes the thinkable thinkable, it is in this sense that it is unthinkable."<sup>884</sup> It is a "question

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<sup>881</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 126.

<sup>882</sup> TO, 70; TA, 56.

<sup>883</sup> TI, 234; TeI, 210.

<sup>884</sup> GDT, 90; DMT, 105-06.

without givens [*donnée*], a pure interrogation mark”<sup>885</sup> that puts into question Dasein who asks about its own Being [*Seinsfrage*].

For Levinas, Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* is not *questionable* enough since it always already presupposes something “given [*donné*]”—it is the pre-comprehension of Being that pre-guides or pre-determines the way of the *Seinsfrage*. In other words, the *Seinsfrage* already presupposes or contains within itself its own answer, as the threefold structure—*Gefragte*, *Befragte*, and *Erfragte*—of the *Seinsfrage* indicates.<sup>886</sup> It is *Sein* of Dasein as a question to be asked and, simultaneously, an answer to be sought in the question; through the *Seinsfrage*, Dasein discovers its answer, its reason, and its right to *be* within itself. The effort to be or the *conatus essendi* is the arche and the telos of every right to be there. The *Seinsfrage* finds the most proper answer in the phenomenon of death, which discloses Dasein’s Being-in-the-world in its totality and authenticity. In the course of the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger takes death to be something—to be more precise, nothing [*Nichts*]—that transparently appears to Dasein as a *flat* phenomenon, which makes it possible for Dasein itself to achieve its own, solitary, and authentic Being. There is no room for otherwise than Being or beyond essence in the *Seinsfrage*. Levinas writes, “Thus the totality of the human being and of its own being-there is sought without any intervention by another, solely in *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world. The meaning of death is from the beginning interpreted as the end of Being-in-the-world, as nothingness. The enigma is erased from the phenomenon.”<sup>887</sup> At the limit of the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger attempts to think of what cannot be thought through simply reducing the unthinkable to the thinkable, the unthematizable to the thematizable, the

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<sup>885</sup> GDT, 14; DMT, 23.

<sup>886</sup> The formal structure of the *Seinsfrage* was discussed in Chapter Two. See also SZ § 2. Heidegger states here: “Thus to work out the question of Being means to make a being—one who questions—transparent in its Being. Asking the question, as a mode of *Being* of a being, is itself essentially determined by what is asked about in it—Being. This being, which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being, we formulate terminologically as *Dasein*” (SZ, 7).

<sup>887</sup> GDT, 36; DMT, 45.

unexperienceable to the experienceable, the *para*-phenomenalizable to the phenomenalizable, and finally the Saying into the Said. Consequently, the *Seinsfrage* divests death of its enigmatic alterity and assimilates it into the authentic moment of the comprehension of Being.

Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* remains faithful to or *dogmatic* in the ontological thematization of death, which rests on the dialectic of Being and nothingness; it only knows of betrayal of the Saying by the Said but knows nothing of betrayal of the betrayal, that is, the reduction of the Said to the Saying. Dogmatic language cannot articulate a *para*-phenomenon of death beyond the alternative of a flat phenomenon or a non-phenomenon—both of which are subsumed under the doxical, thematic, and ontological exposition of the Said. By contrast, Levinas proposes that death as the question *par excellence* calls into question the *Seinsfrage* and brings back the *para*-doxical signification of death from the doxical meaning: “The question is the way in which belief, or *doxa*, to which the universe is referred, is reversed in a radical fashion; it is the way in which this *doxa* reverses itself into a question.”<sup>888</sup> Such a question is incomprehensible within the *Seinsfrage* since the paradoxical sense of death cannot be captured by the ontological categories. Ontologically, substitution or sacrifice in suffering “for nothing”—but not for nothingness [*Nichts*]<sup>889</sup>—is meaningless or nonsensical since ontological alternatives of Being or nothingness cannot properly make sense of it. This is where death takes on an ethical and *para*-doxical sense as “the surplus of non-sense over sense by which the sense of suffering is possible.”<sup>889</sup> Levinas thus claims: “the death signified by the end could not measure the entire significance of death without becoming responsibility for another.”<sup>890</sup> The paradoxical signification of substitution or dying for the other

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<sup>888</sup> GDT, 42; DMT, 52.

<sup>889</sup> OBBE, 196, n. 21; AEAE, 150, n. 21.

<sup>890</sup> GDT, 42-3; DMT, 52-3.



rises to the surface on the hither side of the doxical-ontological thematization of death entangled in the dialectic of Being and nothingness.

In “Dying for...” (1987), where Levinas’s challenge against Heidegger’s ontological analysis of death culminates, Levinas argues that Heidegger would fail to capture the ethical meaning of substitution, which cannot be laid bare by an “order divided between the authentic and the inauthentic.”<sup>891</sup> According to Levinas’s view of Heidegger, in death as Dasein’s authentic Being-toward-its-own-end, all relationships to the other dissolve into an inauthentic moment of Being-with since “everyone [as Dasein] dies for itself” in its own place, which sustains its own *conatus essendi* “in the guise of a *care for Being*, a *Being-there*, a *Being-with-others*, and a *going-to-death*.”<sup>892</sup> At the heart of Heidegger’s view of death, Levinas recognizes the struggle for a perseverance in Being, that is, the *conatus essendi* that in turn buttresses the entire architecture of ontology. By appealing to the biblical resource, Levinas claims against Heidegger that death is the enigmatic locus which puts me [*moi*] in relation to other than myself [*soi*]—it is the very locus that founds the relation to the other and in which the relation to the other is found: “Saul and Jonathan were lovey and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions” (II Samuel 1: 23).<sup>893</sup> Death does not isolate me from the other in the care for my Being-toward-death but rather obsesses and affects me to the point of “including myself in the death of the other.”<sup>894</sup> The death of the other does not let the *moi* remain at home with the *soi* in the interested-in-Being or *conatus essendi* but affects me even more than my own death. The primordial and essential way that relates me to the death of the other is neither a “*knowledge* about the death of the other” nor “the experience of that death in its particular way

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<sup>891</sup> EN, 217; E, 214.

<sup>892</sup> EN, 216; E, 214, EN, 209; E, 206, respectively.

<sup>893</sup> EN, 215; E, 212.

<sup>894</sup> GDT, 42-3; DMT, 52-3.

of annihilating being”; rather, it is “an emotion, a movement, a disquietude within the *unknown*.”<sup>895</sup> In the emotional relation with the death of the other, the fear of the death of the other is not a fear for myself, but it is itself my fear for the other in the disinterestedness in my *conatus essendi*. Levinas calls into question Heidegger’s reflective notion of affectivity [*Befindlichkeit*], which is determined by “A double intentionality of the *of* and the *for*, and thus a return to the *soi*, a return to anxiety for the *soi*, to anxiety for its finitude.”<sup>896</sup> The ethical meaning of death begins with the primordially of the death of the other over my own death, that is, the fear *of* the death of the other that cannot be reduced to the anxiety *for* my-no-longer-able-to-be-there.

Dying for the other is the concrete expression of the primordial, pre-original, and anarchical fact that the fear of the death of the other is not an anxiety for myself, my being, and my *conatus essendi*; rather, the fear of the death of the other is itself my fear that preoccupies or overwhelms my being, my nothingness, and my *conatus essendi*. Levinas thus argues that “Death signifies in the concreteness of what for me is the impossibility of abandoning the other to his aloneness, in the prohibition addressed to me of that abandonment.”<sup>897</sup> Unlike the *moi* who is primordially accused by the ethical interdiction inscribed in the face of the other, Dasein cannot encounter the face of the other since it is imprisoned in the ontological shackle, which defaces the face of the other ; it remains indifferent to and thus *unaffected* by the ethical call of the face: “Thou shalt not leave the other die alone.” The ethical responsibility for the other takes a concrete form in my non-indifference to the suffering, pain, and death of the other to the extent that I am dying for the other. It is the affective relation with the death of the other that signifies a “surpassing in the human of the animal effort of life, purely life—a surpassing of the *conatus essendi* of life.”<sup>898</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> GDT, 16; DMT, 25.

<sup>896</sup> EN, 146; E, 157.

<sup>897</sup> EN, 146; E, 156.

<sup>898</sup> EN, 215; E, 213.

Substitution, sacrifice, or dying for the other is not the question of either to be or not to be; rather, it is otherwise than being, beyond essence, or beyond the *conatus essendi*. “Substitution, in which responsibility does not cease, thus remains otherwise than being.”<sup>899</sup> Beyond the alternative of to be or not to be, of Being or nothingness, the ethical signification of death emerges from otherwise than being: “otherwise than being is not a something. It is the relation to the other, the ethical relation.”<sup>900</sup>

For Levinas, what makes the *moi* the *soi* does not correspond to the way the substantive *Moi* or Dasein is in the *ekstatic* identity of the *moi* and the *soi*, but to that for which I [*je*] am responsible, to that to which I respond, and to that for which I am substituted: “The word I [*je*] means *me voici*, responding to or being responsible for everything and everyone.”<sup>901</sup> In short, “Subjectivity is from the first substitution offered in place of another.”<sup>902</sup> However, this does not mean that Levinas attempts to retrieve an ontological signification of substitution that Heidegger reduces to the idle talk of the anonymous they. Substitution for the other is not motivated by my act of giving me to the other in the guise of my passivity; otherwise, it would return to myself, my being, and my *conatus essendi* by substituting myself for myself. Rather, it originates from the *an-*archical or *pre*-original passivity or “sincerity” in which I am exposed to the other beyond the alternatives of activity and passivity: “sincerity is not reducible to anything ontic or anything ontological, and leads as it were beyond or on the hither side of everything positive every position.”<sup>903</sup> It is the *moi malgré soi* who takes responsibility for the other to the point of being

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<sup>899</sup> GDT, 186; DMT, 218.

<sup>900</sup> Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?* 177.

<sup>901</sup> OBBE, 114; AEAE, 145 (translation modified).

<sup>902</sup> OBBE, 145; AEAE, 185.

<sup>903</sup> OBBE, 144; AEAE, 183.

substituted for the other prior to taking its own place in which it asks and cares for its own Being and finally returns to itself.

The Saying of *me voici* testifies that I cannot be justified by myself and have no reason, origin, source, or *arche*, which would justify my own being in my place; my being—be it ontic or ontological, and authentic or inauthentic—is already the usurpation of the whole world. Dasein as Being-toward-death asks about what it means to be (already thrown into) there from the beginning [*Anfang*] to the end [*Ende*], but never asks whether it is *just* or *righteous* to be the *Da*. The Saying of *me voici* signifies that prior to the *Seinsfrage* concerning what it means to be the *Da*, a more exigent question that primordially obsesses me is whether the *Da* of my Dasein is not already an unexcused occupation without the permission of the other. It is, therefore, not enough to say that solicitude [*Fürsorge*] lets the other take its own place because my being is already an inexcusable occupation. Solicitude here becomes a condescending means to justify my place, my being, and my death in my indifference to others. This is why Levinas needs to hyperbolize his notion of the ethical responsibility for the other to the point of substitution for the other as a “surplus of responsibility.”<sup>904</sup> Levinas thus states, “From the outset, I am not exonerated. I am originally in default,”<sup>905</sup> as if my being itself already took the place that does not belong to me; there is no authentic place proper to me.

François Raffoul’s criticism of Levinas’s understanding of *Mitsein* ironically betrays the essential point Levinas himself attempts to make: “For authentic Being-toward-death does not dissolve being-with but only the possibility of substitution, which, we must insist, is an *inauthentic*

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<sup>904</sup> OBBE, 100; AEAE, 126.

<sup>905</sup> GDT, 159; DMT, 184.

mode of Being-with.”<sup>906</sup> Raffoul seems to believe that Levinas simply rejects the ontico-ontological fact that “In its singularity and in this very solitude, *Dasein* is open to others.”<sup>907</sup> However, Levinas does not naively argue that the solitude of *Dasein* destroys the ontological structure of *Mitsein* and divests *Dasein* of the possibility of any relationship to the other. Rather, Levinas’s point is that *Mitsein* and *Fürsorge* presuppose *Dasein*’s being-*Da* upon which all relations to the other are founded; these relations then merely become inauthentic moments of *Dasein*’s Being-toward-death in its isolated individuality [*Vereinzelung*]. In other words, the opening to the other is always already conditioned by the opening to Being as soon as *Dasein* is thrown into the *Da* and as long as it is the *Da*; however, the *Da* is given to *Dasein* without why. In Levinas’s view, this unconditional condition of *Da-Sein* forecloses the ethical—if not ontico-ontological—relationship with the other and the possibility of substitution. For Levinas, Heidegger’s *Seinsfrage* presupposes *Dasein* as Being-there, as Being-with, and as Being-in-the-world without justifying what justifies the very Being of *Dasein*. This ontological presupposition of *Dasein*’s Being in its *conatus essendi* renders any responsibility for the other and even substitution for the other senseless and ridiculous. However, Levinas’s fundamental thesis apropos of the signification of *me voici* is that there is no reason to *be* there from the very beginning; hence, I am no longer innocent and have no excuse, no right, and no reason to justify my being. The Saying of “excuse me” does not mean to say to the other that “You are in my private place” but, on the contrary, to straightforwardly Say to the other that “I am already invading your place.” The

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<sup>906</sup> François Raffoul, “Being and the Other: Ethics and Ontology in Levinas and Heidegger,” in *Addressing Levinas*, eds., Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 149.

<sup>907</sup> Raffoul, “Being and the Other,” 149.

*moi malgré soi* is not the *Moi* capable of expiating for the other but is “this original expiation—involuntarily—prior to the will’s initiative (prior to the origin).”<sup>908</sup>

When it comes to the hyperbolic notion of substitution, it is important to recall exactly what Heidegger means by the individualization or isolation [*Vereinzelung*] of Dasein in the possibility of the sheer impossibility of its existence. The individuality of Dasein should be understood as a quiddity or “whatness” that makes Dasein Dasein *in general* rather than as a haecceity or “thisness” that distinguishes a *particular* Dasein from other Daseins.<sup>909</sup> The interest of Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein does not lie in the haecceity of Dasein that renders “me me and not you or you you and not me” but rather in the quiddity of Dasein, that is, the Being of Dasein in general that distinguishes *Existenz* from both *Vorhandheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. In this context, *Fürsorge* signifies this *co-responding* relationship between two equivalent Daseins in the symmetric economy of Being: “the Other would be a duplicate of the Self.”<sup>910</sup> By contrast, substitution does not presuppose the co-responding or I-Thou relationship—either substituting me for you or you for me—which undermines an asymmetric distance or diachronic proximity sustaining an ethical relationship. Levinas writes, “To say that the *Moi* is a substitution is then not to state the universality of a principle, the *quiddity* of a *Moi*.”<sup>911</sup> I am not a Dasein among others but the unique *moi* in the accusative; I am substituted for the other, but I cannot demand the other to substitute himself or herself for me. “When one begins to say that someone can substitute himself or herself for me, immorality begins.”<sup>912</sup> Substitution presupposes an asymmetric

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<sup>908</sup> OBEE, 118; AEAE, 151.

<sup>909</sup> See Chapter Two. For an excellent analysis of Dasein’s individualization in opposition to personalization, see Carol White, *Time and Death: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005) 30-3.

<sup>910</sup> SZ, 124.

<sup>911</sup> OBEE, 127; AEAE, 163-63.

<sup>912</sup> GWCM, 84; DD, 135. In an interview with Philippe Nemo, Levinas states, “I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his or her* affair.” EI, 98; EeI, 94-5. See also Emmanuel Levinas, “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” in R. Bernasconi and D. Wood

relationship between the accusative *moi* and the other; otherwise, it would become a pervasion of *Fürsorge* by which the accusative *moi* reverts to the substantive *Moi* as Dasein, who knows nothing of substitution but only of solicitude.

Substitution for the other does not mean that the substantive *Moi* takes the place of the other and returns to its own place, but that the accusative *moi* has already been taken in place of the other, like a hostage who discovers its *soi* to be substituted for the other without retuning to itself. “For under accusation by everyone, the responsibility for everyone goes to the point of substitution. The subject is a hostage.”<sup>913</sup> In the substitution for the other, I am held hostage by and to the other who has already elected, summoned, and “accused me as *unique* in the supreme passivity.”<sup>914</sup> As the unique hostage for the other, the *moi* finds its *soi* the “non-interchangeable *par excellence*.”<sup>915</sup> Slavoj Žižek questions here whether this excessively and exclusively demanding responsibility of the uniqueness of the subject gives rise to an “inverted arrogance, as if I am the center whose existence threatens all others.”<sup>916</sup> However, this is exactly what Levinas rejects in his critique of Heidegger’s symmetric notion of *Vereinzelung*, which neutralizes not only the uniqueness of the *moi* but also the alterity of the other into the quiddity of Dasein in general. That for which I am responsible remains something that cannot be measured, consummated, or mastered in my self-consistency and self-sovereignty; thus, the ethical responsibility for the other cannot be assumed as a domination, mastery, or power that would make the accusative *moi* relapse into a patronizing, masterful, or heroic *Moi* who undertakes the supreme responsibility for its

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(eds.) *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 176; Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?* 133.

<sup>913</sup> OBBE, 112; AEAE, 142. See also GDT, 138; DMT, 157-58.

<sup>914</sup> OBBE, 135; AEAE, 173 (italics added). See also GDT, 182; DMT, 213.

<sup>915</sup> OBBE, 117; AEAE, 149. See also EI, 101; EeI, 97.

<sup>916</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2005), 156.

authentic Being. Rather, it is a “responsibility to which I am straightforwardly exposed, like a hostage”<sup>917</sup> who in no way returns to itself in its self-conceit and self-complacency.

What individualizes the *moi* as the uniqueness of the *soi* is not the care for my place, my being, and my own death in its detachment from the death of others, but rather the hyperbolic and irreplaceable responsibility for others to the point of being the unique hostage who alone is substituted for others, for their responsibilities, for their sufferings, and even for their deaths. It is “the religious soul” that finds itself in relation to “the beyond of the world”<sup>918</sup> without lapse into the way of Being-in-the-world where it encounters itself in its *conatus essendi*. Levinas states: “There lies the religiosity of the *moi*, pre-originally tied to another.”<sup>919</sup> The subjectivity of the religious *moi* refers neither to egoism by which it remains in its self-relation to itself by appropriating everything—and even nothingness [*Nichts*]—to its *conatus essendi*, nor to altruism where it makes a relationship to others in favor of its ulterior interest in the *conatus essendi*. For Levinas, all those relations are nothing but pseudo-relations which dissimulate the return to the *Moi* by reducing, subordinating, and totalizing all *relata* into the identification of the *Moi*. In this totalizing or pseudo relation, the *Moi* encounters no other than itself and remains the same [*même*] in its *conatus essendi*; there will be no longer any relation at all. Levinas thus claims, “Beyond egoism and altruism, it is the religiosity of the self.”<sup>920</sup> The religiosity of the *moi* consists in the substitution, sacrifice, or dying for the other which does not belong to the sacred experience, as if the *Moi* took the exact place of the other, as if the *Moi* and the other would be totalized into a participation or fusion in the symmetric or reciprocal economy of substitution either of the *Moi* to the other or of the latter for the former.

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<sup>917</sup> GWCM, 10; DD, 28.

<sup>918</sup> GWCM, 132; DD, 204.

<sup>919</sup> GDT, 175; DMT, 205.

<sup>920</sup> OBBE, 117; AEAE, 150.



As seen in Chapter Four, to maintain the ethical relation, the *relata* must remain separate from each other and absolve themselves [*s'absolvent*] from the very relation that they establish; otherwise, they would fall into a sacred participation, synthetic union, or fanatic fusion—all of which destroy any relation in advance. It is an *absolute* distance, separation, transcendence, proximity, holiness [*sainteté*], or *kidouch* that sustains the asymmetric and thus ethical relation to the other. This *absolus* relation, from which all *relata* are absolved, is what Levinas calls in *Totality and Infinity* religion: “We propose to call ‘religion’ the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality.”<sup>921</sup> It is not a pseudo relation in which the *Moi* finds itself and returns to itself in its *conatus essendi*, but rather religion, “unrelating relation,” or “relation without relation”<sup>922</sup> where the *moi* discovers its *soi* already placed in relation with otherwise than its *soi* without a return to the *soi*. Substitution is the holy [*sainte*] experience in which the *moi* is otherwise than being in the mode of disinterestedness in its being, essence, and *conatus essendi*. Thus, the subjectivity of the religious *moi* despite its *soi* consists in being responsible to the other to the point of being substituted for the other. The signification of substitution signifies the primordial significance of the ethical weight and exigency of my responsibility for the death of the other, as if the death of the other were my business even prior to my own death. In my indifference to the death of the other, I am already an accomplice in murdering the other. Levinas’s polemic against Heidegger’s thematization of death lies in the fact that the ontological-existential interpretation of death entails, vindicates, and justifies my indifference to the death of the other in the sense that death is only a matter of *Jemeinigkeit*. There is no place for substitution in ontology since ontology never allows otherwise than being or beyond essence, that is, the hither side of the *conatus essendi*.

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<sup>921</sup> TI, 40; TeI, 10.

<sup>922</sup> TI, 80, 295; TeI, 52, 271.

By virtue of being responsible more primordial than being authentic, I am exposed, summoned, and accused as the survivor who lives at the expense of others. “It is as if I were responsible for [their] mortality, and guilty of surviving.”<sup>923</sup> I am no longer one of Daseins who let the other die alone, but “I am an other,”<sup>924</sup> to the extent that I am, despite myself, standing in place of the other to be responding to and responsible for its death. “Subjectivity is described as a substituting for the other, as disinterestedness, or a break with essence; it leads us to contest the thesis about the ultimacy or the priority of the ontological problem.”<sup>925</sup> To be the *moi malgré soi* is to be disinterested in *Sein*, *esse*, essence, and *conatus essendi*—all of which are the very “principals in the first degree” that grow, nourish, and finally fatten up ontology itself under the rubric of metaphysics. The exceptional and excessive uniqueness of the *moi malgré soi* in the anarchical passivity consists in “divesting itself, emptying itself of its being, turning itself ‘inside out.’”<sup>926</sup> It is the primordial fact of otherwise than being that ruptures the ontological order of the binary opposition of noun and verb, being and nothingness, or authenticity and inauthenticity—all of which ultimately refer back to the ongoing complicity of Being and beings. “To be or not to be” is no longer the question for the *moi malgré soi* since this ontological question is triggered only by the struggle for being, essence, or the *conatus essendi* in the neglect of *non*-indifference to the death of others. What is at stake is to be otherwise than being beyond on the hither side of the “to be or not to be” question; substitution, sacrifice, or dying for others is otherwise than being or beyond essence.

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<sup>923</sup> OBBE, 91; AEAE, 115. In “Ethics and Politics,” Levinas makes a personal statement about the death camp, which certainly recalls the epigraphy appeared in *Otherwise Than Being*. “No-one has forgotten the Holocaust, it’s impossible to forget things which belong to the most immediate and the most personal memory of every one of us, and pertaining to those closest to us, who sometime make us feel guilty for surviving.” Levinas, “Ethics and Politics,” 291.

<sup>924</sup> OBBE, 118; AEAE, 151.

<sup>925</sup> OBBE, 140; AEAE, 178.

<sup>926</sup> OBBE, 117; AEAE, 149.

## Conclusion

Every question has a power that would be lost in the answer.<sup>927</sup>

This dissertation has examined Levinas's phenomenology of death in order to disclose the religious dimension of Levinas's ethics in the political context of the interrogation of the third party. As the topic "phenomenology of death" already indicates, both Husserl's transcendental phenomenology (Chapter One) and Heidegger's ontological thematization of death (Chapter Two) provide the methodological and thematical ingredients for the consideration of Levinas's phenomenology of death, respectively. Given that Husserl's phenomenological method of the *Rückfrage* is to inquire into the way back to the *Sinngebung* and Heidegger's ontological thematization of death based on the *Seinsfrage* clarifies the mineness [*Jemeingkeit*] of death, Levinas finds his own *question* in death as a "departure without return, a question without givens, a pure interrogation mark"<sup>928</sup> on the hither side of Husserl's *Rückfrage* and Heidegger's *Seinsfrage*. This dissertation claimed that death is neither a phenomenon nor a non-phenomenon, but rather a *para*-phenomenon in which Levinas diagnoses a built-in limit of ortho-*dox* phenomenology. In other words, Levinas faces in the *para*-phenomenality of death the failure of phenomenology. Far from simply dismissing both *Rückfrage* and *Seinsfrage*, Levinas radicalizes them to the point of tackling what these questions do not interrogate by means of his own question—it is the paradoxical locus of death beyond the binary opposition of a phenomenon or a non-phenomenon. In the *para*-phenomenality of death, Levinas recognizes the alterity of the other that phenomenology fails to thematize and to make sense of (Chapter Three); this dissertation contends that an ethical

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<sup>927</sup> Ellie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 5.

<sup>928</sup> GDT, 14; DMT, 23.

sense of death emerges from the failure of the doxical thematization of death (Chapter Four and Five).

On the one hand, the failure of phenomenology ushers Levinas to the return to the *Sachen selbst* as the ultimate source of the *Sinngebung*, which cannot be grasped by phenomenology. The failure of phenomenology discloses that death as the question *par excellence* is reduced neither to a pure phenomenon transparently intelligible in the intentional structure of a noema-noesis, nor to a sheer non-phenomenon completely irrelevant to the phenomenological inquiry. Beyond or on the hither side of the alternative of a phenomenon or a non-phenomenon, death appears as a *para*-phenomenon that ruptures, disrupts, or unsettles all phenomenological investigations; in short, death as the para-phenomenon becomes the proper subject matter of phenomenology only by betraying phenomenology itself. At the intrinsic limit of the phenomenological methodology, phenomenology of death inevitably miscarries since death resists phenomenological investigations. It is the paradox of Levinas's phenomenology of death that his phenomenological method begins with the failure of phenomenology itself. This dissertation has argued that the effectual accomplishment of phenomenology of death necessarily betrays not only death as the *Sache selbst* that phenomenology looks for but also phenomenology that seeks the *Sachen selbst*. For Levinas, the ethical meaning of death originates not from the triumph of a phenomenological inquiry into death but rather from its miscarriage. When it comes to death *qua* the para-phenomenon, therefore, phenomenology vindicates its *raison d'être* only in its failure.

On the other hand, the failure of phenomenology leads Levinas to call into question any kind of thanato-*logy*, which was exemplarily accomplished by Heidegger's ontological thematization of death. According to the Heideggerian version of thanatology, Dasein understands the impossibility of its own existence as the most authentic possibility, which characterizes the

solitary finitude of the authentic Being in its totality [*Ganzheit*]. It would be Heidegger's remarkable achievement elaborated in *Being and Time* that the meaning of death is thoroughly clarified by the existential architecture of ontology. The ontological meaning of death thus consists in the fact that the existential finitude exhibits how much heroic and masterful Dasein is able to *be* in isolation from and indifference to the death of the other. By appealing to the para-doxical character of death, however, Levinas challenges Heidegger's thanatology, which never permits a para-phenomenality of death and, eventually, reduces the enigmatic mystery of death into the heroic mastery of death. This dissertation maintained that Heidegger's architectonic structure of ontology dissimulates or covers up the para-doxical signification of death, which is more primordial and exigent than the ontological *Jemeinigkeit* of death. In order to unveil an ethical meaning of death, it is necessary to strip off the ontological coverings—*Sein*, in particular—and expose the primordial sense of death, which has been concealed in the “*Sein*-topped” architecture of ontology. In this context, phenomenology of death does not justify its *raison d'être* in its successful achievement to thematize death but in its failure. This does not mean that phenomenology should first distinguish what can be thematized and what cannot be thematized and then remain silent about the latter. Rather, phenomenology should thematize what cannot be thematized—*i.e.*, death—only to fail to do so. The failure of phenomenology is the price Levinas cannot but pay in his elaboration of phenomenology of death since the ethical meaning of death emerges from the miscarriage of the thematization of death.

Inspired by the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas attempts to uncover what ontology has covered up—*i.e.*, the bare nakedness of *être* that is “produced as multiple and as split into same and other; this is its ultimate structure.”<sup>929</sup> The formal structure of the idea of the infinite, which

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<sup>929</sup> TI, 269; TeI, 247.

signifies the absolute distance or separation between the idea and its *ideatum*, takes the concrete form in the ethical encounter with the other who command me not to murder: “Thou shalt not kill.” This interdiction is the first word of the other that obsesses and overwhelms me even more than the anxiety for my death. Based upon Levinas’s essential view of ethics as “a calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other,”<sup>930</sup> this dissertation showed that the enigma of death disrupts the authentic [*eigentlich*] and finite [*endlich*] spontaneity of the same and thereby discloses a more primordial and exigent dimension of the ethical meaning of death: the non-indifference to the death of the other. The exigent call inscribed in the face of the other precedes the *Jemeinigkeit* of death, as if the death of the other would matter to me more than my own. Death matters to me not because it is mine but precisely because it is a matter of the other. Indeed, death is not something or nothing [*Nichts*] at my disposal, so that it makes me restless, vigilant, and non-indifferent to the death of the other. The ethical signification of death stems from the face of the other that solicits me: “Thou shalt not let the other die alone.”

One might feel an “intellectual discomfort,”<sup>931</sup> as Bertrand Russell did, when he wrote the Introduction (once rejected by the author) to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Russell’s complaint came from Wittgenstein’s self-contradictory gesture in the *Tractatus*; in other words, whereas Wittgenstein indicated that what cannot be said should remain silent in order to clearly say about what can be said, he attempted to speak “a good deal about what cannot be said.”<sup>932</sup> Likewise, one might wonder whether Levinas tries to thematize the unthematizable, *i.e.*, death. When describing death as the unknowable, enigmatic, mysterious, and unthematizable locus in

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<sup>930</sup> TI, 43; TeI, 13.

<sup>931</sup> Bertrand Russell, “Introduction,” in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 22.

<sup>932</sup> Russell, “Introduction,” 22. The most famous yet misunderstood aphorism 7 in the *Tractatus* reads: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 108.

which Levinas finds the alterity of the other, does he indeed thematize it in a negative fashion? Is it possible to describe death without thematizing it? Should one remain taciturn about the unthematizable death in order *not* to thematize it, like the Tractatian silence? This is where both the methodological and the thematical challenges converge on the fundamental difficulty of the topic of phenomenology of death: the problem of how to describe what is resistant to all description. It is the paradoxical problem that underlies in this seemingly self-defeating gesture of Levinas's description of death.

This dissertation goes through this difficulty with a focus on the concept of a para-phenomenality of death by which I attempted to re-describe Levinas's description of death with the intention of releasing the ethical signification of death from the ontological shackle. One can notice here a Hegelian version of a radical gesture. When Kant makes a clear distinction between a noumenon and a phenomenon due to his "fear of error," that is, his worry about any confusion of the two, Hegel criticizes this rigid distinction because what Kant's fear of error divulges is no other than his own "fear of truth."<sup>933</sup> I employed the term "para-phenomenon" in order to depict the para-doxical characteristic of death, which not only avoids the Kantian rigid dualism of a phenomenon and a noumenon but also disrupts the doxical thematization of death. Levinas's self-defeating gesture of the "thematization" of death, in a Hegelian sense, signifies his attempt to overcome the fear of truth by way of traversing—rather than eluding—the fear of error. The purpose of this dissertation is to bring to light the ethical meaning of death, which has been buried underneath the ontological edifice, through probing the paradox of Levinas's phenomenology of death.

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<sup>933</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 47. According to Slavoj Žižek, this Kantian aletheophobia stems from "the avoidance of the traumatic encounter of the Truth." Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London & New York: Verso, 2009), 216.

This dissertation has highlighted—and sometimes overstated—the radical peculiarity in Levinas’s attentiveness to the ethical meaning of the death of the other in opposition to the ontological meaning of the *Jemeinigkeit* of death. However, the entry of the third party checks, hampers, and questions any exaggeration of the ethical meaning of the death of the other, which might entail a pure *naïveté* of an abstract, angelic, and even anti-ethical ethics. The paradox of Levinas’s phenomenology of death becomes more evident and problematic in the political moment of the interrogation of the third party. The appearance of the third party calls into question the unlimited, infinite, unconditional, and absolute responsibility of the same for the other and summons again everything that has been rejected in favor of the ethical responsibility, such as comparison, thematization, calculation, judgment, equality, memory, synchronization, history, totality, and ontology; thus, it is the political moment in the ethical relation that unveils “the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question.”<sup>934</sup> This dissertation explicated that the political interrogation of the third party never compromises or undermines the ethical structure but rather makes it possible for ethics to remain *ethical* in this “regressive” move. The third party always already troubles any possible intimate or exclusive I-Thou relationship; hence, ethics remains the question *par excellence* in non-indifference to the political challenges of an infinite number of the third parties.

At the limit of the ethical responsibility, Levinas painfully undergoes a reverse dilemma of the early Wittgensteinian question, “How *not* to speak of the unspeakable,” with his own question, “How to speak of the unspeakable, to thematize the unthematizable, to compare the incomparable, and to calculate the incalculable.” This dissertation insisted that the Levinasian question becomes most radical, problematic, and even questionable in the case of death with respect to the third party,

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<sup>934</sup> OBBE, 157; AEAE, 200.



the theme that remains *unthematized* in Levinas's own philosophical oeuvre and the Levinasian scholarship as well. How can one compare, judge, and calculate the deaths of others other than one's own? Can one compare the death of the other with those of others other than the other? Should one remain here in need of the Tractatian silence? However, is not this kind of silence a "clever" way of evading the Levinasian question which tacitly divulges our "seal of approval" for the sufferings, bloods, and deaths of others? In our tolerance, tranquility, indifference, equanimity, calmness, and silence, we would become the accomplice as an accessory to murder of others. Levinas plainly insists that the responsibility for others is "the impossibility of being silent, the scandal of sincerity." In other words, "one has to say 'what it is about,' say something, before saying only the Saying itself."<sup>935</sup> Levinas's painstaking endeavor to thematize the unthematizable yields the most ticklish question of the political problematics in his ethical articulation of death. The ultimate question of the whole dissertation depends on this Levinasian question: How can one say [*dire*] something about the death(s) of the others with respect to the third party? What is Levinas's answer to this question? Is any answer here possible? Does Levinas's own ellipsis originate from the peculiar fate of his own question that has no answer? Even though there would be no answer to his question, don't we have to say something about it?

Rather than finding an answer, Levinas considers what oppresses a question itself. Levinas thus opens *Totality and Infinity* by discussing the ontology of war, which never allows any question. War does not permit any "distance" or "exteriority" to thematize, compare, calculate, and Say anything—whether the thematizable or the unthematizable, since there is no room for a question but only an answer: either to be or not to be, either to kill or to be killed. The term "holy war [*guerre sainte*]" is thus oxymoronic since war never sanctions a distance, exteriority, proximity,

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<sup>935</sup> OBBE, 143, 198. n. 7; AEAE, 224, n. 2 (translation modified).

separation, and what Levinas calls “holiness [*sainteté*].” Levinas hence states, “[War] establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior.”<sup>936</sup> The ontology of war swallows everything into the all-embracing, totalitarian, and sacred [*sacré*] order that it generates; thus, “[war] renders morality derisory,”<sup>937</sup> senseless, and ridiculous. There is no room for morality in the ontology of war; indeed, “to be or not to be” is not a question but an answer given by the ontological order that war establishes. A sacred—not holy—war is the ontological event in which all beings *are* transparently present themselves and thereby synchronized into the presence of war “produced as the pure experience of pure being [*être* but read: *Sein*].”<sup>938</sup> Levinas thus maintains that the same, the other, the third party, and all the others become “what they will appear to *be* in the already plastic forms of the epic.”<sup>939</sup> In the ontology of war, the face of the other is *de*-faced and stops Saying “Thou shalt not kill” while the *moi* loses the sense of responsibility for others and thus no longer Says “*me voici*.”

For Levinas, “to be or not to be” is not the primordial question to be asked in the first place. This dissertation exhibited that Levinas’s phenomenological account of *être* lays bare the primordially of being responsible, which does not consist in being authentic [*eigentlich*] in the Heideggerian sense of the term but rather in otherwise than being (authentic). The ontology of war knows nothing of otherwise than *Sein*, beyond essence, or beyond the *conatus essendi*, in which Levinas recognizes the primordial signification of death, such as substitution, sacrifice, or dying for others. Levinas’s phenomenology of death displays that the religious dimension of his ethics lies in the face-to-face relation with others. “For the self, in its being, it is not a question of being.

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<sup>936</sup> TI, 21; TeI, ix-x.

<sup>937</sup> TI, 21; TeI, ix.

<sup>938</sup> TI, 21; TeI, ix.

<sup>939</sup> TI, 22; TeI, x (italics added).

There lies the religiosity of the me, preoriginally tied to another.”<sup>940</sup> To be religious does not require an ontological question since it is not a matter either of “to be or not to be,” of being or non-being; rather, it is itself otherwise than being. Religion is not a sacred *rapprochement* in which the face of the other is de-faced, but rather a holy “*rappport sans rappport*.”<sup>941</sup> Only in this paradoxical *rappport*, from which the other absolves itself, its face reveals itself uprightly or straightforwardly [*droit*] without being absorbed into a mystical fusion or sacred participation. Prior to the ontological question—to be more precise answer—of “to be or not to be,” the primordial question is irradicably inscribed in the face of the other who commands: “Thou shalt not kill.” This interdiction of the other is the question proper that has been suppressed by the doxical-ontological comprehension of death; nevertheless, it restlessly haunts the ontological answer of “to be or not to be.” What is at stake here is to be otherwise than being before either “to be or not to be.” Ethics for Levinas is not an answer (to ontology) but a question *par excellence* (against and despite ontology).

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<sup>940</sup> GDT, 175; DMT, 205

<sup>941</sup> TI, 80, 295; TeI, 52, 271.

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