

TOTALITY AND **I**NFINITY

AN ESSAY ON  
EXTERIORITY

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***To Marcelle and Jean Wahl***

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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. *but it is not it*

### *5. Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity*

The schema of theory in which metaphysics was found distinguished theory from all ecstatic behavior. Theory excludes the implantation of the knowing being in the known being, the entering into the Beyond by ecstasy. It remains knowledge, relationship. To be sure, representation does not constitute the primordial relation with being. It is nonetheless privileged, precisely as the possibility of recalling the separation of the I. And to have substituted for the magical communion of species and the confusion of distinct orders a spiritual relation in which beings remain at their post but communicate among themselves will have been the imperishable merit of the "admirable Greek people," and the very institution of philosophy. In condemning suicide, at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, Socrates refuses the false spiritualism of the pure and simple and immediate union with the Divine, characterized as desertion; he proclaims ineluctable the difficult itinerary of knowledge starting from the here below. The knowing being remains separated from the known being. 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. 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. Philosophical transcendence thereby differs from the transcendence of religions (in the current thaumaturgic and generally lived sense of this term), from the transcendence that is already (or still) participation, submergence in the being toward which it goes, which holds the transcending being in its invisible meshes, as to do it violence.

This relation of the same with the other, where the transcendence of the relation does not cut the bonds a relation implies, yet where these bonds do not unite the same and the other into a Whole, is in fact fixed in the situation described by Descartes in which the "I think" maintains with the Infinite it can nowise contain and from which it is separated a relation called "idea of infinity." To be sure, things, mathematical and

moral notions are also, according to Descartes, presented to us through their ideas, and are distinct from them. But the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea, whereas for the things the total coincidence of their "objective" and "formal" realities is not precluded; we could conceivably have accounted for all the ideas, other than that of Infinity, by ourselves. Without deciding anything for the moment as to the veritable significance of the presence of the ideas of things in us, without holding to the Cartesian argumentation that *proves* the separated existence of the Infinite by the finitude of the being having an idea of infinity (for there perhaps is not much sense to proving an existence by describing a situation prior to proof and to the problems of existence), it is of importance to emphasize that the transcendence of the Infinite with respect to the I which is separated from it and which thinks it measures (so to speak) its very infinitude. The distance that separates *ideatum* and idea here constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself. Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole *ideatum* of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite.

To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object is in reality to do more or better than think. The distance of transcendence is not equivalent to that which separates the mental act from its object in all our representations, since the distance at which the object stands does not exclude, and in reality implies, the *possession* of the object, that is, the suspension of its being. The "intentionality" of transcendence is unique in its kind; *the difference between objectivity and transcendence will serve as a general guideline for all the analyses of this work*. We find that this presence in thought of an idea whose *ideatum* overflows the capacity of thought is given expression not only in Aristotle's theory of the agent intellect, but also, very often, in Plato. Against a thought that proceeds from him who "has his own head to himself,"<sup>6</sup> he affirms the value of the delirium that comes from God, "winged thought."<sup>7</sup> Delirium here does not have an irrationalist significance; it is only a "divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention."<sup>8</sup> The fourth type of delirium is reason itself, rising to the

<sup>6</sup> *Phaedrus*, 244a.

<sup>7</sup> *Phaedrus*, 249a.

<sup>8</sup> *Phaedrus*, 265a.



ideas, thought in the highest sense. Possession by a god, enthusiasm, is not the irrational, but the end of the solitary (and which we will later call "economic") or inward thought, the beginning of a true experience of the *new* and of the noumenon—already Desire.

The Cartesian notion of the idea of the Infinite designates a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it. It designates the contact with the intangible, a contact that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched. To affirm the presence in us of the idea of infinity is to deem purely abstract and formal the contradiction the idea of metaphysics is said to harbor, which Plato brings up in the *Parmenides*<sup>9</sup>—that the relation with the Absolute would render the Absolute relative. The absolute exteriority of the exterior being is not purely and simply lost as a result of its manifestation; it "absolves" itself from the relation in which it presents itself. But the infinite distance of the Stranger despite the proximity achieved by the idea of infinity, the complex structure of the unparalleled relation designated by this idea, has to be described; it is not enough to distinguish it formally from objectification.

We must now indicate the terms which will state the deformatization or the concretization of the idea of infinity, this apparently wholly empty notion. The infinite in the finite, the more in the less, which is accomplished by the idea of Infinity, is produced as Desire—not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested—goodness. But Desire and goodness concretely presuppose a relationship in which the Desirable arrests the "negativity" of the I that holds sway in the Same—puts an end to power and emprise. This is positively produced as the possession of a world I can bestow as a gift on the Other—that is, as a presence before a face. For the presence before a face, my orientation toward the Other, can lose the avidity proper to the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands. This relationship established over the things henceforth possibly common, that is, susceptible of being said, is the relationship of conversation. The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Parmenides*, 133b-135c, 141e-142b.

Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum*—the adequate idea. It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but καθ'αυτῶ. It *expresses itself*. The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its "form" the totality of its "content," finally abolishing the distinction between form and content. This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by "thematization" turning into conversation. The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the other, his expression, which every lie already presupposes. But the first content of expression is the expression itself. To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced. The Aristotelian analysis of the intellect, which discovers the agent intellect coming in by the gates, absolutely exterior, and yet constituting, nowise compromising, the sovereign activity of reason, already substitutes for maieutics a transitive action of the master, since reason, without abdicating, is found to be in a position to *receive*.

Finally, infinity, overflowing the idea of infinity, puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question. It commands and judges it and brings it to its truth. The analysis of the idea of Infinity, to which we gain access only starting from an I, will be terminated with the surpassing of the subjective.

The notion of the face, to which we will refer throughout this work, opens other perspectives: it brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power. It signifies the philosophical priority of the existent over Being, an exteriority that does not call for power or possession, an exteriority that is not reducible, as with Plato, to the interiority of memory, and yet maintains the I who welcomes it. It finally makes possible the descrip-

The analysis of the relations that are produced within the same, to which the present section is devoted, will in reality describe the interval of separation. The formal pattern of separation is not that of every relation—a simultaneity of distance between the terms and their union. In the case of separation the union of the terms maintains separation in an eminent sense. The being that is in relation absolves itself from the relation, is absolute within relationship. Its concrete analysis as it is undertaken by a being who accomplishes it (and who does not cease to accomplish it while analyzing it) will, we have indicated, recognize separation as inner life, or as psychism. But in turn this interiority will appear as a presence at home with oneself, which means inhabitation and economy. The psychism and the perspectives it opens maintain the distance that separates the metaphysician from the metaphysical, and their resistance to totalization.

## 2. *Living from . . .\** (*Enjoyment*) *The Notion of Accomplishment*

We live from "good soup," air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc. . . . These are not objects of representations. We live from them. Nor is what we live from a "means of life," as the pen is a means with respect to the letter it permits us to write—nor a goal of life, as communication is the goal of the letter. The things we live from are not tools, nor even implements, in the Heideggerian sense of the term. Their existence is not exhausted by the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as having the existence of hammers, needles, or machines. They are always in a certain measure—and even the hammers, needles, and machines are—objects of enjoyment, presenting themselves to "taste," already adorned, embellished. Moreover, whereas the recourse to the instrument implies finality and indicates a dependence with regard to the other, living from . . . delineates independence itself, the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness, which is the original pattern of all independence.

Conversely, the independence of happiness always depends on a content: it is the joy or the pain of breathing, looking, eating, working, handling the hammer and the machine, etc. But the dependence of

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\* "Vivre de. . ." While we are uniformly translating this as "living from . . .," sometimes "living on . . ." would be more appropriate.—Trans.

happiness on the content is not that of the effect on a cause. The contents from which life lives are not always indispensable to it for the maintenance of that life, as means or as the fuel [carburant] necessary for the "functioning" of existence. Or at least they are not lived as such. With them we die, and sometimes prefer to die rather than be without them. Still the "moment" of restoration, for example, is phenomenologically included in the nourishing of oneself, and it is even the essential, though, in order to account for it, we do not have to resort to any of the knowledge a physiologist or economist possesses. Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see, as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation. Hunger is need, is privation in the primal sense of the word, and thus precisely *living from* . . . is not a simple becoming conscious of what fills life. These contents are lived: they feed life. One lives one's life: to live is a sort of transitive verb, and the contents of life are its direct objects. And the act of living these contents is ipso facto a content of life. The relation with the direct object of the verb to exist (which, since the philosophers of existence, has become transitive) in fact resembles the relation with nourishment, where there is a relation with an object and at the same time a relation with this relation which also nourishes and fills life. One does not only exist one's pain or one's joy; one exists from pains and joys. Enjoyment is precisely this way the act nourishes itself with its own activity. To live from bread is therefore neither to represent bread to oneself nor to act on it nor to act by means of it. To be sure, it is necessary to earn one's bread, and it is necessary to nourish oneself in order to earn one's bread; thus the bread I eat is also that with which I earn my bread and my life. But if I eat my bread in order to labor and to live, I live *from* my labor and *from* my bread. Bread and labor do not, in the Pascalian sense, divert me from the bare fact of existence or occupy the emptiness of my time: enjoyment is the ultimate consciousness of all the contents that fill my life—it embraces them. The life that I earn is not a *bare* existence; it is a life of labor and nourishments; these are contents which do not preoccupy it only, but which "occupy" it, which "entertain" it, of which it is enjoyment. Even if the content of life ensures my life, the means is immediately sought as an end, and the pursuit of this end becomes an end in its turn. Thus things are always

more than the strictly necessary; they make up the grace of life. We live from our labor which ensures our subsistence; but we also live from our labor because it fills (delights or saddens) life. The first meaning of "to live from one's labor" reverts to the second—if the things are in place. Qua object the object seen occupies life; but the vision of the object makes up the "joy" of life.

This does not mean that there is here a vision of vision: life's relation with its own dependence on the things is enjoyment—which, as happiness, is independence. The acts of life are not straightforward [droits] and as it were strained toward their finality. We live in the consciousness of consciousness, but this consciousness of consciousness is not reflection. It is not knowing but enjoyment, and, as we shall say, the very egoism of life.

To say that we live from contents is therefore not to affirm that we resort to them as to conditions for ensuring our life, taken as the bare fact of existing. The bare fact of life is never bare. Life is not the naked will to be, an ontological *Sorge* for this life. Life's relation with the very conditions of its life becomes the nourishment and content of that life. Life is *love of life*, a relation with contents that are not my being but more dear than my being: thinking, eating, sleeping, reading, working, warming oneself in the sun. Distinct from my substance but constituting it, these contents make up the worth [prix] of my life. When reduced to pure and naked existence, like the existence of the shades Ulysses visits in Hades, life dissolves into a shadow. Life is an existence that does not precede its essence. Its essence makes up its worth [prix]; and here value [valeur] constitutes being. The reality of life is already on the level of happiness, and in this sense beyond ontology. Happiness is not an accident of being, since being is risked for happiness.

If "living *from* . . ." is not simply a representation of something, "living *from* . . ." also does not fit into the categories of activity and potency, determinative for Aristotelian ontology. The Aristotelian act was equivalent to being. Placed within a system of ends and means, man actualized himself in exceeding his apparent limits *by action*. Like every other nature, human nature accomplished itself, that is, became entirely itself, by functioning, by entering into relations. Every being is an exercise of being, and the identification of thought with action then is non-metaphorical. If living *from* . . . , enjoyment, likewise consists in entering into relation with something other, this relation does not

take form on the plane of *pure being*. Moreover, action itself, which unfolds on the plane of being, enters into our happiness. We live from acts—and from the very act of being, just as we live from ideas and sentiments. What I do and what I am is at the same time that *from which* I live. We relate ourselves to it with a relation that is neither theoretical nor practical. Behind theory and practice there is enjoyment of theory and of practice: the egoism of life. The final relation is enjoyment, *happiness*.

Enjoyment is not a psychological state among others, the affective tonality of empiricist psychology, but the very pulsation of the I. In enjoyment we maintain ourselves always at the second power, which, however, is not yet the level of reflection. For happiness, in which we move already by the simple fact of living, is always beyond being, in which the things are hewn. It is an outcome, but one where the memory of the aspiration confers upon the outcome the character of an accomplishment, which is worth *more* than ataraxy. Pure existing is ataraxy; happiness is accomplishment. Enjoyment is made of the memory of its thirst; it is a quenching. It is the act that remembers its "potency." It does not express (as Heidegger would have it) the mode of my implantation—my *disposition*—in being, the tonus of my bearing. It is not my bearing in being, but already the exceeding of being; being itself "be-falls" him who can seek happiness as a new glory above substantiality; being itself is a content which makes up the happiness or unhappiness of him who does not simply realize his nature but seeks in being a triumph inconceivable in the order of substances. Substances are only what they are. The independence of happiness is therefore to be distinguished from the independence that, for philosophers, substance possesses. It is as though the existent could aspire to a new triumph above and beyond the plenitude of being. To be sure, the objection can be brought against us that the imperfection of the existing an existent disposes of alone renders this triumph possible and precious, and that the triumph can coincide only with the plenitude of existing. But we shall then say that the strange possibility of an incomplete being is already the opening of the order of happiness and the ransom paid for this promise of an independence higher than substantiality.

Happiness is a condition for activity, if activity means a commencement occurring in duration, which nevertheless is continuous. Action implies being, to be sure, but it marks a beginning and an end in an anonymous being—where end and beginning have no meaning. But

within this continuity enjoyment realizes independence with regard to continuity: each happiness comes for the first time. Subjectivity originates in the independence and sovereignty of enjoyment.

Plato speaks of the soul that feasts on truths.<sup>1</sup> He discerns in rational thought, in which the sovereignty of the soul is manifested, a relation with the object that is not only contemplative but confirms the same (characteristic of the thinker) in its sovereignty. In the meadow that lies in the plain of truth "that pasturage is found which is suited to the highest part of the soul; and the wing on which the soul soars is nourished with this."<sup>2</sup> What enables the soul to rise to truth is nourished with truth. Throughout this book we are opposing the full analogy drawn between truth and nourishment, because metaphysical Desire is above life, and with regard to it one cannot speak of satiety. But the Platonic image describes, with regard to thought, the very relationship that will be accomplished by life, where the attachment to the contents that fill it provides it with a supreme content. The consumption of foods is the food of life.

### 3. *Enjoyment and Independence*

We have said that to *live from something* does not amount to drawing vital energy from somewhere. Life does not consist in seeking and consuming the fuel furnished by breathing and nourishment, but, if we may so speak, in consummating terrestrial and celestial nourishments. Though it thus depends on what is not itself, this dependence is not without a counterpart which in the final analysis nullifies it. What we live from does not enslave us; we enjoy it. Need cannot be interpreted as a simple lack, despite the psychology of need given by Plato, nor as pure passivity, despite Kantian ethics. The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs. The paradox of "living from something," or, as Plato would say, the folly of these pleasures, is precisely in a complacency with regard to what life depends on—not a mastery on the one hand and a dependence on the other, but a mastery in this dependence. This is perhaps the very definition of complacency and pleasure. *Living from . . .* is the dependency that turns into sovereignty, into happiness—essentially egoist. Need—the vulgar Venus—is also, in a certain sense, the child of *πόρος* and of *πενία*; it is *πενία* as

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedrus*, 246e.

<sup>2</sup> *Phaedrus*, 248b-c.

pend on what is not itself, but is also a way of possessing and of working, of having time, of overcoming the very alterity of what I have to live from. The body is the very self-possession by which the I, liberated from the world by need, succeeds in overcoming the very destitution of this liberation. We shall return to this further.

Having recognized its needs as material needs, as capable of being satisfied, the I can henceforth turn to what it does not lack. It distinguishes the material from the spiritual, opens to Desire. Labor, however, already requires discourse and consequently the height of the other irreducible to the same, the presence of the Other. There is no natural religion; but already human egoism leaves pure nature *by virtue of the human body raised upwards*, committed in the *direction of height*. *This is not its empirical illusion but its ontological production and its ineffaceable testimony*. The "I can" proceeds from this height.

Let us again note the difference between need and Desire: in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one's teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me. Indeed the time presupposed by need is provided me by Desire; human need already rests on Desire. Need has thus the time to convert this *other* into *the same* by labor. I exist as a body, that is, as raised up, an organ that will be able to grasp and consequently place itself, in this world on which I depend, before ends technically realizable. For a body that labors everything is not already accomplished, already done; thus to be a body is to have time in the midst of the facts, to be *me* though living in the *other*.

This revelation of distance is an ambiguous revelation, for time both destroys the security of instantaneous happiness, and permits the fragility thus discovered to be overcome. And it is the relation with the other, inscribed in the body as its elevation, that makes possible the transformation of enjoyment into consciousness and labor.

## 5. Affectivity as the Ipseity of the I

We are catching sight of a possibility of rendering the unicity of the I intelligible. The unicity of the I conveys separation. Separation in the strictest sense is solitude, and enjoyment—happiness or unhappiness—is isolation itself.

The I is not unique like the Eiffel Tower or the Mona Lisa. The unicity of the I does not merely consist in being found in one sample



only, but in existing without having a genus, without being the individuation of a concept. The ipseity of the I consists in remaining outside the distinction between the individual and the general. The refusal of the concept is not a resistance to generalization by the  $\tau\acute{o}\delta\epsilon\ \tau\iota$ , which is on the same plane of the concept—and by which the concept is defined, as by an antithetical term. Here the refusal of the concept is not only one of the aspects of its being, but its whole content; it is interiority. This refusal of the concept drives the being that refuses it into the dimension of interiority. It is at home with itself. The I is thus the mode in which the break-up of totality, which leads to the presence of the absolutely other, is concretely accomplished. It is solitude par excellence. The secrecy of the I guarantees the discretion of the totality.

This logically absurd structure of unicity, this non-participation in genus, is the very egoism of happiness. Happiness, in its relation with the "other" of nutriments, suffices to itself; it even suffices to itself *because* of this relation with the other: it consists in satisfying its needs and not in suppressing them. Happiness suffices to itself through the "not sufficing to oneself" proper to need. The lack in enjoyment, which Plato denounced, does not compromise the instant of sufficiency. The opposition between the ephemeral and the eternal does not convey the true meaning of sufficiency, which is the very contraction of the ego. It is an existence *for itself*—but not, initially, in view of its own existence. Nor is it a representation of self by self. It is for itself as in the expression "each for himself"; for itself as the "famished stomach that has no ears," capable of killing for a crust of bread, is for itself; for itself as the surfeited one who does not understand the starving and approaches him as an alien species, as the philanthropist approaches the destitute. The self-sufficiency of *enjoying* measures the egoism or the ipseity of the Ego and the same. Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution. What is termed an affective state does not have the dull monotony of a state, but is a vibrant exaltation in which dawns the self. For the I is not the *support* of enjoyment. The "intentional" structure is here wholly different; the I is the very contraction of sentiment, the pole of a spiral whose coiling and involution is drawn by enjoyment: the focus of the curve is a part of the curve. It is precisely as a "coiling," as a movement toward oneself, that enjoyment comes into play. And now one can understand in what sense we were able to say above that the I is an apology: whatever be the transfigurations this egoism will receive from

speech, it is for the happiness constitutive of its very egoism that the I who speaks pleads.

The breach of the totality that is accomplished by the enjoyment of solitude—or the solitude of enjoyment—is radical. When the critical presence of the Other will call in question this egoism it will not destroy its solitude. Solitude will be recognized in the concern for *knowing*, which is formulated as a problem of origin—inconceivable in a totality. To this problem the notion of causality can bring no solution, since it is precisely a question of a *self*, a being absolutely isolated, whose isolation causality would compromise by reinstating it in a series. The notion of creation alone will be commensurate with such a question, respecting at the same time the absolute novelty of the I and its attachment to a principle, its having been called in question. The solitude of the subject will be recognized also in the goodness in which the apology issues.

The upsurge of the self beginning in enjoyment, where the substantiality of the I is apperceived not as the subject of the verb to be, but as implicated in happiness (not belonging to ontology, but to axiology) is the exaltation of the *existent* as such. The existent would then not be justiciable to the “comprehension of being,” or ontology. One becomes a subject of being not by assuming being but in enjoying happiness, by the interiorization of enjoyment which is also an exaltation, an “above being.” The existent is “autonomous” with respect to being; it designates not a participation in being, but happiness. The existent par excellence is man.

When the I is identified with reason, taken as the power of thematization and objectification, it loses its very ipseity. To represent to oneself is to empty oneself of one’s subjective substance and to insensibilize enjoyment. By imagining this anaesthesia limitless Spinoza conjures away separation. But the joy of this intellectual coincidence and the freedom of this obedience mark a cleavage line in the unity won in this way. Reason makes human society possible; but a society whose members would be only reasons would vanish as a society. What could a being entirely rational speak of with another entirely rational being? Reason has no plural; how could numerous reasons be distinguished? How could the Kantian kingdom of ends be possible, had not the rational beings that compose it retained, as the principle of individuation, their exigency for happiness, miraculously saved from the shipwreck of sensible nature? In Kant the I is met with again in this need for happiness.

come does not succeed in smothering the protestation of the private individual, the apology of the separated being (though it be called empirical and animal), of the individual who experiences as a tyranny the State willed by his reason, but in whose impersonal destiny he no longer recognizes his reason. We recognize in the finitude to which the Hegelian infinite is opposed, and which it encompasses, the finitude of man before the elements, the finitude of man invaded by the *there is*, at each instant traversed by faceless gods against whom labor is pursued in order to realize the security in which the "other" of the elements would be revealed as the same. But the other absolutely other—the Other—does not limit the freedom of the same; calling it to responsibility, it founds it and justifies it. The relation with the other as face heals allergy. It is desire, teaching received, and the pacific opposition of discourse. In returning to the Cartesian notion of infinity, the "idea of infinity" put in the separated being by the infinite, we retain its positivity, its anteriority to every finite thought and every thought of the finite, its exteriority with regard to the finite; here there was the possibility of separated being. The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity, with what at each moment it learns without suffering shock. This is the situation we call welcome of the face. The idea of infinity is produced in the *opposition* of conversation, in sociality. The relation with the face, with the other absolutely other which I can not contain, the other in this sense infinite, is nonetheless my Idea, a commerce. But the relation is maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity. The "resistance" of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical. The first revelation of the other, presupposed in all the other relations with him, does not consist in grasping him in his negative resistance and in circumventing him by ruse. I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation.

## 2. Ethics and the Face

The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the

hand comes to naught, like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power.\* The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.

And yet this new dimension opens in the sensible appearance of the face. The permanent openness of the contours of its form in expression imprisons this openness which breaks up form in a caricature. The face at the limit of holiness and caricature is thus still in a sense exposed to powers. In a sense only: the depth that opens in this sensibility modifies the very nature of power, which henceforth can no longer take, but can kill. Murder still aims at a sensible datum, and yet it finds itself before a datum whose being can not be *suspended* by an appropriation. It finds itself before a datum absolutely non-neutralizable. The "negation" effected by appropriation and usage remained always partial. The grasp that contests the independence of the thing preserves it "for me." Neither the destruction of things, nor the hunt, nor the extermination of living beings aims at the face, which is not of the world. They still belong to labor, have a finality, and answer to a need. Murder alone lays claim to total negation. Negation by labor and usage, like negation by representation, effect a grasp or a comprehension, rest on or aim at affirmation; they can. To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique "matter" possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.

But how does this disproportion between infinity and my powers differ from that which separates a very great obstacle from a force applied to it? It would be pointless to insist on the banality of murder, which reveals the quasi-null resistance of the obstacle. This most banal incident of human history corresponds to an exceptional possibility—since it

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\* "Mon pouvoir de pouvoir."

claims the total negation of a being. It does not concern the force that this being may possess as a part of the world. The Other who can sovereignly say *no* to me is exposed to the point of the sword or the revolver's bullet, and the whole unshakeable firmness of his "for itself" with that intransigent *no* he opposes is obliterated because the sword or the bullet has touched the ventricles or auricles of his heart. In the contexture of the world he is a quasi-nothing. But he can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance, but the very *unforeseeableness* of his reaction. He thus opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable and consequently presenting itself as though it were part of a whole, but the very transcendence of his being by relation to that whole; not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: "you shall not commit murder." The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenceless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance. The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt. If the resistance to murder were not ethical but real, we would have a *perception* of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception. We would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle. The epiphany of the face is ethical. The struggle this face can threaten *presupposes* the transcendence of expression. The face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word. War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter.

The impossibility of killing does not have a simply negative and formal signification; the relation with infinity, the idea of infinity in us, conditions it positively. Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes

rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution. The comprehension of this destitution and this hunger establishes the very proximity of the other. But thus the epiphany of infinity is expression and discourse. The primordial essence of expression and discourse does not reside in the information they would supply concerning an interior and hidden world. In expression a being presents itself; the being that manifests itself attends its manifestation and consequently appeals to me. This attendance is not the *neutrality* [*le neutre*] of an image, but a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height. To speak to me is at each moment to surmount what is necessarily plastic in manifestation. To manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation, the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image, in one's nudity, that is, in one's destitution and hunger. In *Desire* are conjoined the movements unto the Height and unto the Humility of the Other.

Expression does not radiate as a splendor that spreads unbeknown to the radiating being—which is perhaps the definition of beauty. To manifest oneself in attending one's own manifestation is to invoke the interlocutor and expose oneself to his response and his questioning. Expression does not impose itself as a true representation or as an action. The being offered in true representation remains a possibility of appearance. The world which invades me when I engage myself in it is powerless against the "free thought" that suspends that engagement, or even refuses it interiorly, being capable of living hidden. The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility, where the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all laughter, is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked. It is thus the irremissible weight of being that gives rise to my freedom. The ineluctable has no longer the inhumanity of the fateful, but the severe seriousness of goodness.

This bond between expression and responsibility, this ethical condition or essence of language, this function of language prior to all disclosure of being and its cold splendor, permits us to extract language from subjection to a preexistent thought, where it would have but the servile function of translating that preexistent thought on the outside, or of

universalizing its interior movements. The presentation of the face is not true, for the true refers to the non-true, its eternal contemporary, and ineluctably meets with the smile and silence of the skeptic. The presentation of being in the face does not leave any logical place for its contradictory. Thus I cannot evade by silence the discourse which the epiphany that occurs as a face opens, as Thrasymachus, irritated, tries to do, in the first book of the *Republic* (moreover without succeeding). "To leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary does not apply here," says Rabbi Yochanan.<sup>1</sup> Before the hunger of men responsibility is measured only "objectively"; it is irrecusable. The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no "interiority" permits avoiding. It is that discourse that obliges the entering into discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for, a "force" that convinces even "the people who do not wish to listen"<sup>2</sup> and thus founds the true universality of reason.

Preexisting the disclosure of being in general taken as basis of knowledge and as meaning of being is the relation with the existent that expresses himself; preexisting the plane of ontology is the ethical plane.

### *3. Reason and the Face*

Expression is not produced as the manifestation of an intelligible form that would connect terms to one another so as to establish, across distance, the assemblage of parts in a totality, in which the terms joined up already derive their meaning from the situation created by their community, which, in its turn, owes its meaning to the terms combined. This "circle of understanding" is not the primordial event of the logic of being. Expression precedes these coordinating effects visible to a third party.

The event proper to expression consists in bearing witness to oneself, and guaranteeing this witness. This attestation of oneself is possible only as a face, that is, as speech. It produces the commencement of intelligibility, initiality itself, principality, royal sovereignty, which commands unconditionally. The principle is possible only as command. A search for the influence that expression would have undergone or an unconscious source from which it would emanate would presuppose

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<sup>1</sup> Treatise *Synhedrin*, 104 b.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 327 b.