We - For The Other: Solidarity as an Enactment of Ethical-Empathetic Subjectivity (An Analysis of the Philosophical Projects of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein, and the Concept of Solidarity)

Karen M. Kolano
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(AN ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECTS OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS
AND EDITH STEIN, AND THE CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY)

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Karen M. Kolano

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ABSTRACT

WE – FOR THE OTHER:
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What does it mean to be a human person? How do we enact our humanity? These are the questions that run like a thread throughout this project. Eschewing Hamlet’s famous question – To be or not to be? – this dissertation situates itself within the postmodern context, exploring the work of Emmanuel Levinas and his ethical presentation of the human person. Here we find the human person not concerned with his or her own state of being, but rather turning toward the other in ethical responsibility. However, Levinas’ work presents us with a peculiar problem – this ethical encounter does not take place in the “real time” of justice, politics, work, and play. It is an anarchical encounter taking place in an immemorial past of which we can only sense a trace. Thus, to render his work accessible to our daily lives, I place Levinas’ thought in dialogue with Edith Stein’s understanding of the concept of empathy. I argue that the
empathetic encounter with the other person is a turn to the other that avoids the reductive tendencies found in the ontological traditions of the West. This encounter allows and even demands that we enact our humanity from within the type of ethical context which Levinas insists makes us human. Furthermore, it is in this ethical-empathetic encounter with the other that one can be in relationship with God. We will see how this turn to the other is prayer, hence relationship with God, and lived spirituality. In conclusion, I argue that solidarity with others, especially with those who suffer and particularly with those who suffer from injustice, is the natural outcome of this ethical-empathetic enactment of the human person. Here we refer to the writings of Pope John Paul II, philosopher-theologian Józef Tischner, and the tradition of Latin American Liberation Theology to explore the concept of solidarity within the Catholic social justice tradition.
That’s the deal. That’s what you were saying without saying it right out. When we know there are people in need, right now, in the same breath as what we are breathing, we cannot look away. It is not abstract. We have to go. That is humanity. The whole thing relies on it. Human beings do not look away.

Sarah Blake
The Postmistress
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INTRODUCTION

To be or not to be? Hamlet’s timeless question has been hailed for centuries as the human question. It is the question of existence, of the meaning of life, and in particular the meaning of human life. What does it mean to be? What, specifically, does it mean to be human? However, for one man in particular to be or not to be is most emphatically not the question.1 For Emmanuel Levinas the true question that should lie at the heart of every human soul is how to be. That is, “what matters for Levinas is not so much the question of meaning in life, but the question of ethics”.2 Indeed, the basic theme of Levinas’ philosophical project is the overthrowing of Western philosophy’s insistence on ontology as first philosophy and the establishment of ethics as first philosophy, “where ethics is understood as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person”.3 What is significant is that Levinas’ very disregard for the ontological and metaphysical questions, and his insistence on ethics and the ethical encounter with the other that he calls the face-to-face4 and which takes place before any self-interested establishment of subjectivity,

1 See Emmanuel Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness," in Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 132. He states: “To be or not to be is probably not the question par excellence.”


allows him to answer the very question of the meaning of human life but in a radically
new way. For Levinas, our humanity, that is true human subjectivity or authentic human
life, begins not in our “being” but in the intimacy of the face-to-face ethical relationship
with the other person. Human subjectivity is not something we are or have but something
we enact.

Subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another…. In principle
the I does not pull itself out of its “first person”; it supports the world.
Constituting itself in the very movement wherein being responsible for the other
devels on it, subjectivity goes to the point of substitution for the Other. It
assumes the condition – or the uncondition – of hostage. Subjectivity as such is
initially hostage; it answers to the point of expiating for others.  

For Levinas, the only time “being” comes into question is when it is questioned; is when I question my right to be.  As Pascal proclaims, it is “my place in the sun” that
began “the usurpation of the whole world”.  Or as Levinas claims, it is the insistence on
being that has plagued Western Philosophy almost since its inception that is, in part,
responsible for the vast amounts of human suffering and violence in the world. And so,
in a world that is continually suffering under the manifestations of inhuman behavior

6 Ibid, 121.
7 Ibid.
8 This view is poignantly expressed in Levinas’ preface to *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21-30. Here he shows how “the visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in
9 One need only mention the names of Auschwitz, Dachau, Cambodia, My Lai, Rwanda, Darfur, 9/11, Abu Ghraib, etc. with no apparent end in sight. It is interesting to
ethically questioning our human “being-ness” seems blatantly pertinent and a dire necessity to human life on earth today. However, Levinas’ work presents us with a peculiar problem – this ethical encounter does not take place in the “real time” of justice (or injustice), politics, work, and play. It is an anarchical encounter taking place in an immemorial past of which we can only sense a trace. Thus, to render his work accessible to our daily lives, I place Levinas’ thought in dialogue with Edith Stein’s understanding of the concept of empathy. I argue that the empathetic encounter with the other person is a turn to the other that avoids the reductive tendencies found in the ontological traditions of the West. This encounter allows and even demands that we enact our humanity from within the type of ethical context which Levinas insists makes us human. This dissertation is a participation in this ethical questioning of the enactment and meaning of human life.

The thesis of this dissertation can be stated simply. This project will be an analysis of the ethical-empathetic concept of the human person established through a dialogue between the philosophical projects of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein. This understanding of human subjectivity will then be offered as the philosophical framework for the concept of solidarity as it functions within the Catholic social justice tradition, and specifically as within the tradition of Liberation Theology. As such, this thesis can be broken down into two main parts. The first part, chapters one through four, presents the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein, both of whom focus on the enactment and

note that we refer to such situations as exhibiting “inhuman” behavior thus underlining the point that it is when we eschew the ethical relationship with the other we in fact lose our humanity.
meaning of the human person as necessarily intersubjective and thus ethical. These two philosophers of intersubjectivity will then be placed into dialogue. The second part of this study turns to the concept of solidarity. As noted, I limit my analysis to the Roman Catholic tradition and specifically to the presence of solidarity in Latin American Liberation Theology.

Chapters one and two concentrate on Emmanuel Levinas. Chapter one sets the stage for the presentation of Levinas’ work. There we briefly explore the evolution of postmodernity out of the modern traditions of the West. We will see how the turn to the subject was rejected in favor of the turn to the other, how metaphysics was overturned in favor of ethics. It will be show how Levinas, with his own emphasis on alterity and ethics and his critique of the modern traditions of the West, is clearly situated in this tradition. We will focus on Levinas’ critique of both Husserlian phenomenology, the tradition out of which his own project grew, and Martin Heidegger, who may be seen as Levinas’ arch-nemesis.

Chapter two offers a general overview of Levinas’ philosophical project. Having witnessed Levinas’ attempt to flee the generally metaphysical and ontological traditions of Western philosophy that approach the other from the totalizing and intentional perspective of the egoist self in chapter one, we will then explore Levinas’ thinking of the other, the self, and the encounter between them as “otherwise than being” or “beyond essence”.10 It is in the ethical encounter that the other as radically and irreducibly other is

10 This is of course the title of his second major text, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).
approached. It is in this ethical response of the self to the other, the “one-for-the-other”,\(^\text{11}\) that the self is enacted both as a subject and as specifically human. We will explore certain key concepts such as *the saying* and *the said*, time, the trace, substitution, and Levinas’ understanding of the human-divine relationship. It will be shown how, for Levinas, the point of absolute subjection to the other is the point at which one both achieves the mark of being a human person and witnesses to God.

Chapter three turns to the work of Edith Stein. Here we present her intersubjective understanding of the human person. To be a human person necessarily means to be in relation with others. For Stein, the human encounter as truly *human* can only take place through empathizing with the other. Empathy allows us to encounter the other person as a subject in his or her own right and not as an object of our intentional gaze. What is more, it is, in part, through empathizing with the other that I myself achieve the mark of human subjectivity. Thus there is an empathetic enactment of the human person *as* a human person per se. We will also explore how this empathetic approach to human personhood colors her understanding of human community. We conclude this chapter reflecting upon Stein’s understanding of God and the human-divine relation. As will be seen, empathy is not only necessary in our encounters with human others, but is key to the human-divine encounter as well.

Chapter four places Levinas and Stein in dialogue. First it will be shown how the thought of these two philosophers, whose lives ultimately followed two very different paths, bears a certain affinity. I will argue how Stein’s empathetic enactment of the

\(^{11}\) See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 136-140. As we will see Levinas often referred to the ethical constitution of human subjectivity as the "one-for-the-other".
human person is not only complementary to Levinas’ ethical subjectivity, but also allows this ethical subjectivity to be enacted in the realm of the said, the time of justice when those who are incomparable must be weighed against one another. This chapter will end, as did the previous two chapters, with a reflection on God and the human-divine relationship. It will be argued that the relationship with God is made possible only through the ethical-empathetic encounter with the human other. Indeed, it is the very commandment of God that we turn to the other in ethical responsibility.

Chapter five presents the concept of solidarity as a natural response to the ethical-empathetic encounter with human others. We will limit our reflection on solidarity to its presence in the Roman Catholic social justice tradition. Thus we find it fitting to refer to the writings of Pope John Paul II both in his days prior to becoming the Roman Pontiff and during his papacy. As will be seen, solidarity is a key aspect in the late pope’s understanding of the human person. The writings of Józef Tischner, philosopher, theologian, and John Paul II’s compatriot, will add to our analysis of solidarity. It was Józef Tischner who defined solidarity as we – for the other. Quite plainly, to be we – for the other is a manifestation of the ethical-empathetic enactment of the human person. Furthermore, it will be shown how solidarity is not only key to the enactment of the human person, but also crucial to what it means to be in relationship with God, specifically to be a Christian, and to the identity and mission of the church.

Chapter six concludes this dissertation with a reflection on the presence of solidarity within Latin American Liberation Theology. The spirit of solidarity breathes throughout the writings of Liberation Theology. According to this tradition, one cannot believe in God and ignore the human voices crying out for help. One can only follow
Christ by turning to the suffering other in need. Solidarity with those who suffer is a human virtue, thus it is also a Christian virtue. To be in solidarity with others is to witness to God, to pray to God, to worship God. Solidarity with others is the natural response of the ethically enacted person who empathetically encounters these others. It is, according to Liberation Theology, the only way to be in relationship with God.

To conclude this introduction, I will offer a brief description of phenomenology as conceived of by Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology. This description will proceed thematically. That is, I will highlight certain key themes and concepts of phenomenology as opposed to tracing the development of phenomenology historically, a complex and often meandering path that is beyond the scope of this work. As phenomenology took on a life of its own and developed in numerous directions according to the interests of those who applied this philosophical method (and often in ways that Husserl considered a betrayal\textsuperscript{12}), I offer here only the key themes and concepts of Husserl’s particular vision of phenomenology that relate to this thesis of this dissertation. This description is important to this study for it sets the stage upon which Stein’s work was founded and ultimately took its own route, and against which Levinas offers his own unique philosophical project, often in ways radically opposed to many of Husserl’s key concepts and themes. After considering the impetus behind Husserl's quest for a new

philosophical method, his “science of science”,\textsuperscript{13} four concepts and themes will be
presented. These are: intentionality, intuition and presence, overcoming the subject-object
divide, and the issue of intersubjectivity and encountering foreign egos.

\textbf{A Brief Description of Husserlian Phenomenology}

From phenomenology’s formal introduction in the first edition of the \textit{Logical
Investigations} to such late writings as the \textit{Crisis of European Sciences}, Husserl’s writings
stand in opposition to the claims of psychologism and to the naturalistic tendencies of
modern science. Psychologism is a form of reductionism.\textsuperscript{14} It “reduces the universal
being of thought to the factual, conscious processes of thinking”.\textsuperscript{15} In this way the
distinction between what we think, the content of our thought, and the process of thought
itself is lost. Psychologism ultimately reduces “logic, truth, verification, evidence, and
reasoning [to] empirical activities of our psyche”.\textsuperscript{16} A classic example of this confusion is
the Law of Non-Contradiction which states that “we cannot posit a proposition [it is
raining] and its negation [it is not raining] as both true at the same time”.\textsuperscript{17} However, “the
Law of Non-Contradiction states solely that a proposition and its negation cannot both be

\textsuperscript{13} Dermot Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology} (London: Routledge, 2000),
60.

\textsuperscript{14} Robert Sokolowski, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology} (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2000), 114.

\textsuperscript{15} Klaus Held, "Husserl's Phenomenological Method," in \textit{The New Husserl: A

\textsuperscript{16} Sokolowski, 114.

\textsuperscript{17} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 104.
true, and makes no reference to what is actually, subjectively thinkable”.\textsuperscript{18} In other words, while it may be impossible for it to be both raining and not raining outside my window, that does not mean I cannot \textit{think} those thoughts together at the same time. Husserl thus rejects pshychologism as relativistic and subjective. He states: “Psychologism in all its subvarieties and individual elaborations is in fact the same as relativism,… it accepts relativism as its ineluctable fate.”\textsuperscript{19}

In a similar way, Husserl criticizes modern science for being naively naturalistic and reductively empirical, as is found in his \textit{The Crisis of European Sciences}.\textsuperscript{20} According to Husserl, modern science suffers from a “rigorous positivism”: it accepts “nothing that cannot show itself as empirical evidence, quantifiable data”.\textsuperscript{21} In this way it falls prey to “the fallacy of ‘naturalism’” which is “a taking of the real to be equivalent to ‘nature’, and nature to be solely what can be grasped as an object of empirical experience, of measureable sense experience”.\textsuperscript{22} That is, “the exact sciences totalize the standard of experiential or empirical ‘objectivity’” and limit reality to only the “real qua

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., xv.
sensed”.

The result is, according to Husserl, that “merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people”. Another definition claims that naturalism “is the view that every phenomenon ultimately is encompassed within and explained by the laws of nature; everything real belongs to physical nature or is reducible to it”. As science sets itself up as a totality with no alternatives, what is lost is the realm of value, purpose, and meaning. This “prejudice” of science – “that reality is only that which can be known objectively” – “substitutes for the whole of reality a part of reality”. Thus Husserl questions:

But can the world, and human existence in it, truthfully have a meaning if the sciences recognize as true only what is objectively established in this fashion, and if history has nothing more to teach us than that all the shapes of the spiritual world, all the conditions of life, ideals, norms upon which man relies, form and dissolve themselves like fleeting waves, that it always was and ever will be so, that again and again reason must turn into nonsense, and well-being into misery? Can we console ourselves with that?

In this way Husserl claims that Europe and the science upon which it is founded are in a crisis due to the failure of and a misguided use of rationalism:

In order to be able to comprehend the disarray of the present “crisis”, we had to work out the concept of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason; we had to show how the European “world” was born out of ideas of reason, i.e., out of the spirit of philosophy. The “crisis” could then become distinguishable as the apparent failure of rationalism. The reason for the failure

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23 Ibid., xv and xvi
24 Husserl, Crisis, 6.
25 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 142
26 Cohen, xiii.
27 Ibid., xv.
28 Husserl, Crisis, 6-7.
of a rational culture, however, as we said, lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglement in “naturalism” and “objectivism”.  

His answer to this crisis is threefold:

(1) One must not desert or denigrate science, rigorous science, since science alone is the bearer of sound knowledge, universal truth. (2) To know the real scientifically, in its universal truth, one must begin at the beginning, getting to “the things themselves” without the interference of prejudices, without any presuppositions whatsoever. (3) Knowledge of the real can only be presuppositionless, science can only be pure, if it is based on intuition rather than experience. True science is phenomenological not experiential.

This concise summary offers in almost creedal form Husserl’s view of phenomenology.

And so, rejecting psychologism and finding the underlying perspective of modern science to be inadequate, Husserl claimed that “consciousness [is] the condition of all experience, indeed it [constitutes] the world”. He felt that modern science had forgotten its foundation in consciousness. That all knowledge and experience is rooted in consciousness is perhaps the bedrock upon which all of Husserl’s work is laid.

In contrast to the outlook of naturalism, Husserl believed all science, all rationality depended on conscious acts, acts which cannot be properly understood from within the natural outlook at all. Consciousness should not be viewed naturalistically as part of the world at all, since consciousness is precisely the reason why there was a world there for us in the first place. For Husserl it is not that consciousness creates the world in any ontological sense… but rather that the world is opened up, made meaningful, or disclosed through consciousness. The world is inconceivable apart from consciousness.

29 Ibid., 299, emphasis original.
30 Cohen, xiv.
31 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 61.
32 Ibid., 143-144, emphasis original. We will return to this notion of the “natural outlook” below.
Thus, in the name of science, Husserl wanted to create “a science of the essential structures of pure consciousness with its own distinctive method”\(^{33}\). This science would become known as phenomenology. According to Husserl phenomenology would be a “theory of science, a ‘science of science’, a rigorous clarification of what essentially belongs to systematic knowledge as such”\(^{34}\). Furthermore, since “reason, as knowing, determines what is”, Husserl considered his phenomenology as “first philosophy”\(^{35}\). And so phenomenology, as conceived of by Husserl, was meant “to give an absolutely secure philosophical foundation to the natural sciences” through “a stringent reflection on what science does not normally question: the role of the perceiving consciousness in the constitution of the perceived world”\(^{36}\). That is, the “cure” for a science limited to the real qua sensed is “to extend reality to phenomena, to meanings rather than to objects

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 60, emphasis original. See also Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 322. In a seminal article on phenomenology that appeared in the 1927 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Husserl states: “The term ‘phenomenology’ designates two things: a new kind of descriptive method which made a breakthrough in philosophy at the turn of the century, and an a priori science derived from it; a science which is intended to supply the basic instrument (*Organon*) for a rigorously scientific philosophy and, in its consequent application, to make possible a methodical reform of all the sciences” (italicized in the original).

\(^{34}\) Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 60.


alone,… to phenomena qua meant”.37 This is precisely the realm of consciousness, upon which the exact sciences are built. According to Husserl:

In phenomenology all rational problems have their place, and thus also those that traditionally are in some special sense or other philosophically significant… In its universal relatedness-back-to-itself, phenomenology recognizes its particular function within a possible life of mankind at the transcendental level… It recognizes itself as a function of the all-embracing reflective meditation of (transcendental) humanity, [a self-examination] in the service of an all-inclusive praxis of reason….38

Although many definitions and conceptions of phenomenology exist, it is perhaps best defined as:

…a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experriencer.39

With that in mind, we turn now to the selected concepts and themes of Husserl’s phenomenology that relate to the topic of this dissertation. We begin with this foundational issue of consciousness.

**Intentionality – Consciousness of...**

As with all great thinkers, Husserl was influenced by those who had gone before him. Nowhere is this more evident than in phenomenology’s emphasis on the realm and role of consciousness. Here we see the influence of Descartes. Descartes’ argument and method by which he discovered the cogito are quite well known. For Descartes the only

37 Cohen, xvi.

38 Husserl, *The Essential Husserl*, 334, emphasis mine.

39 Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 4, italicized in the original.
thing which I cannot doubt is the fact that I am in doubt. That is, “I cannot deny the stream of my thoughts” which led him to conclude that “[my] conscious experience is given in an absolute manner”.

Husserl agrees with Descartes on this point and upholds that “every mental process is given and can be viewed as it is. It is ‘absolutely given’”. According to Husserl, “this givenness, which rules out any meaningful doubt, consists of a simply immediate ‘seeing’ and apprehending of the intended object itself as it is, and it constitutes the precise concept of evidence understood as immediate evidence”.

In this way, these thoughts are “absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness in the absolute sense”. We will return to this concept of givenness in the section on intuition, below.

For now, it is enough to say that the realm and role of consciousness is the *sine qua non* of phenomenology. It is that which holds the entire phenomenological project together.

What is considered one of Husserl’s most significant achievements or discoveries is the structure of consciousness, that is, intentionality. “Universally it belongs to the essence of every actional cogito to be consciousness of something.”

Consciousness is

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40 Ibid., 129.

41 Ibid., 130, emphasis original.


43 Ibid., italicized in the original.

44 Sokolowski, 216.


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always directed toward something, whether it is an object or a thought or a sensation or even the self – to be conscious is to be conscious of something, even of something quite imaginary or absent to us. Here we find a further clarification of Husserl’s concept of phenomenology:

While it is true, then, that phenomenology turns to consciousness, it is proposing above all to be a science of consciousness based on elucidating the intentional structures of acts and their correlative objects, what Husserl called the noetic-noematic structure of consciousness.

Phenomenology is not only a method used to discover the essential truth about phenomena, it is also a way to analyze the very structure of consciousness itself which apprehends such phenomenal truths. Thus there is the noetic side of the analysis: that which pertains to “the intentional acts by which we intend things”; and there are the noemata: “any object of intentionality, any objective correlate, but considered from the phenomenological attitude, considered just as experienced”. That is, according to Husserl, there is a distinction “between the object as it is intended, and the object... which is intended”. It is crucial to understand that, for Husserl, noesis and noema go

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46 Ibid., 75. Husserl calls intentionality a "directedness-to". See also The Essential Husserl, 323.

47 Robyn Horner, Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 28. See also, Sokolowski, 36-37 where he speaks of intending that which is absent. We will return to this idea in the following section in the discussion on fulfilled and empty intentions.

48 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 16.

49 Sokolowski, 60. Of note, noēsis comes from the Greek meaning “an act of thinking” while noēma means “that which is thought”.

hand in hand – you cannot have one without the other.\textsuperscript{51} Therefore, what Husserl has accomplished here through his recognition of the intentional aspect of consciousness is a breakdown of the subject-object divide. We will return to this topic below, but first we must turn to another structural feature of consciousness that is essential to phenomenology, intuition.

\textit{Intuition, the Principle of Principles, and Presence}

As we have seen consciousness is intentional, it is always consciousness of something. But the question arises: if consciousness is intending something, how does that something come to be perceived by the consciousness? Husserl’s answer is intuition. Intuition brings the intended phenomenon to presence or understanding. Ultimately, the things that will be considered by the phenomenological method are only those phenomena that are \textit{given} to intuition or consciousness. “‘Givenness’ sums up the view that all experience is experience \textit{to someone}, according to a particular manner of experiencing”.\textsuperscript{52} Husserl expresses this by stating that phenomena are given to intentional consciousness, that is, the noemata are given to intentional consciousness which apprehends them through intuition, the noetic side of the equation, and in this way the phenomena are known by consciousness and given meaning. Intentionality and intuition are such key aspects of consciousness that human persons – those particular beings who


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{52} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 11, emphasis original.
have achieved consciousness – can be seen as “datives of disclosure, as those to whom things appear”.53

This brings us to Husserl’s principle of all principles:

*that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak in its “personal” actuality) offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there*.54

Implied within this principle are Husserl’s notions of presence and evidence – key components to understanding intuition. When phenomena give themselves or present themselves to consciousness only as they are in themselves, or as such, this is evidence. “Evidence, according to Husserl, is the presence of the thing in itself in the original”.55

He states: “Evidence is, in an extremely broad sense, an ‘experiencing’ of something that is, and is thus; it is precisely a mental seeing of something itself.”56 Now we must keep in mind that it is still possible to intend something in its absence (to remember my grandmother who had died). However, as an intuition it is unfulfilled or empty. Whereas, when the intended phenomena is here before me (the computer upon which I am typing), the intuition is fulfilled by the evidence given.57 In this way, for Husserl, “evidence is the

53 Sokolowski, 4. See also p. 65.


56 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 12.

57 It is also to be noted that one and the same phenomena can be both present and absent at different times, such as my father who is not with me now but whom I will see in a fortnight. Thus “both the empty and filled intending [can be] directed toward one and the same object”, Sokolowski, 35.
experience of truth, the instantiation of truth itself in the judgment”.\textsuperscript{58} He makes this connection between evidence as primordial givenness and truth quite clear:

*Truth is an Idea, whose particular case is an actual experience in the inwardly evident judgment.* The inwardly evident judgment is, however, an experience of primal givenness…. *The experience of the agreement* between meaning and what is itself present, meant, between the actual *sense of an assertion* and the self-given *state of affairs*, is inward evidence: the *Idea* of this agreement is truth, whose ideality is also its objectivity.\textsuperscript{59}

In this way, Husserl devises as “a first methodological principle” that:

I, as someone beginning philosophically, since I am striving toward the presumptive end, genuine science, must neither make nor go on accepting any judgment as scientific *that I have not derived from evidence*, from “experiences” in which the state of affairs and affair-complexes in question are present to me as “they themselves”.\textsuperscript{60}

When the phenomena present themselves to the intending consciousness in the manner appropriate to them, with full bodily evidence, I know and understand them through this fulfilled intuition – “there is a fulfillment of my meaning expectation in the fullest possible sense appropriate for that kind of experience”.\textsuperscript{61} However, it is important to note that Husserl also recognized that “the presence of a sense object… will always be imperfect, that is, subject to a succession of intuitions that are only partial and that therefore might affect the quality of the evidence”.\textsuperscript{62} Despite this partiality, Husserl

\textsuperscript{58} Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 128-129.

\textsuperscript{59} Husserl, *Logical Investigations: Volume I*, 194-195, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{60} Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 13, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{61} Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 128.

\textsuperscript{62} Horner, 29. See also Sokolowski, 22-41 where he discusses such concepts as parts and whole, identity in a manifold, and presence and absence. Here he notes how phenomena always and only manifest themselves perspectivally, in ways that both reveal and conceal their full identity. This recognition is crucial both to Husserl’s understanding
argues that even though we may need a multitude of intuitions to perceive the full identity of the object, one can yet “grasp the being of the entity… and not just the individual properties”. Husserl calls this grasp of being a categorial intuition, “an intuition that something is the case”. For example, I can see that the car is blue, this is the being of the entity, while ‘blueness’ is simply an individual property of that entity. When such a state of affairs has been recognized by consciousness, the categorial intuition can be said to articulate “the way things are presented to us; we bring to light the relationships that exist in things in the world”, that is, we articulate “the way things disclose themselves” to us. Once a categorial intention has been made, the phenomenon under consideration is then referred to as a categorial object. For Husserl, the most adequate and easily comprehensible form of intuition is found in our daily acts of perception.

of the temporality of objects and to his notion of intersubjectivity, to which we will return shortly.

63 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 121.

64 Ibid., 120. See Husserl, Logical Investigations: Volume II. In chapters six through eight of the sixth investigation (p.773-834) Husserl presents an extended reflection on categorical intuition.

65 Sokolowski, 95 and 93.

66 Ibid., 95.

67 Klaus Held, "Husserl's Phenomenology of the Life-World," in The New Husserl: A Critical Reader, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 37. This section and the following section of Held’s essay provide an in-depth analysis of the act of perception, p.37-43. See also Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 128. As we will see in chapter one, this idea of presence and perception will be heavily criticized by Levinas.
Overcoming the Subject-Object Divide

Husserl’s discovery of the two structural features of consciousness, intentionality and intuition, in turn led to the dissolution of the subject-object divide. For his predecessors (particularly Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke), consciousness is locked up in itself and can only be aware of its own mental impressions. It is trapped in an “‘egocentric predicament’ [where] all we can really be sure of at the start is our own conscious existence and the states of that consciousness.”68 We have already noted Husserl’s indebtedness to Descartes for the absoluteness of consciousness, however here the two men part ways. When considering the question: “how does objectivity get constituted in and for consciousness?”69 Husserl answers with intentional consciousness and intuition. Thus for Husserl, “subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity”. There is not objectivity and subjectivity but only “objectivity-for-subjectivity”.70 Husserl states:

Conscious processes are also called intentional; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something; as a cogito, to bear within itself its cogitatum.71

Returning briefly to Husserl’s critique of modern science, we noted Husserl felt that science had lost sight of the fact that knowledge is rooted in consciousness and conscious processes. Modern science has kept a strict divide between subjectivity and objectivity whereas Husserl saw that objectivity can only be founded upon subjectivity

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68 Sokolowski, 9.

69 Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 15.

70 Ibid.

71 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 33, italicized in the original.
due to the intentional-intuitional structure of consciousness. According to Husserl the naturalist or scientific approach overlooks the crucial role of subjectivity. Thus he declares the need for “a radical inquiry back into subjectivity” which alone “can make objective truth comprehensible and arrive at the ultimate ontic meaning of the world”.\textsuperscript{72}

Through this emphasis on subjectivity, Husserl begins to close the gap between the subject and the object which is a common feature of the naturalist or scientific approach. For Husserl, subjectivity and objectivity are united in lived experience. “Lived experience is the experience of consciousness, and within consciousness, the world is given as my lived experience”.\textsuperscript{73} In Husserlian phenomenology the domain of the subjective and the objective unite to achieve knowledge of the world.

Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me – in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like. Descartes, as we know, indicated all that by the name \textit{cogito}. The world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious \textit{cogito}. It gets its whole sense, universal and specific, and it acceptance as existing, exclusively from such \textit{cogitationes}. In these my whole world-life goes on, including my scientifically inquiring and grounding life. By my living, by my experiencing, thinking, valuing, and acting, I can enter no world other than the one that gets its sense and acceptance or status in and from me, myself.\textsuperscript{74}

In this way Husserl’s phenomenology brought an end to the subject-object divide.

[Phenomenology] focuses on the manner objects are constituted in and for subjects. It focuses on the structure and qualities of objects and situations as they are experienced by the subject. What Husserl calls the \textit{paradox} or \textit{mystery of subjectivity} – as the \textit{site of appearance of objectivity} – is its theme.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} Husserl, \textit{Crisis}, 69.

\textsuperscript{73} Horner, 25, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{74} Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, 21, italicized in the original.

\textsuperscript{75} Moran, \textit{The Phenomenology Reader}, 2, emphasis original.
Finally we come to the topic that is of particular interest to the remainder of this work – the issue of intersubjectivity and the recognition of foreign egos. According to Husserl, phenomenology is an “egology”.\(^{76}\) That is, phenomenology is “the study of the ego and its ‘self experience’”.\(^{77}\) This designation becomes quite important when it comes to the encounter with and reflection upon other persons. According to Husserl, one of the first things that must take place in a phenomenological reflection is to distinguish “between ‘me myself’ with my life, my appearances, my acquired certainties of being, my abiding interests, etc., and others with their lives, their appearances, etc.”\(^{78}\) In this way, Husserl admits that phenomenology “begins accordingly as a pure egology and as a science that apparently condemns us to a solipsism, albeit a transcendental solipsism”.\(^{79}\) Now Husserl believes that this “transcendental solipsism is only a subordinate stage philosophically” and that ultimately it “leads over to a phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity and, by means of this, to a universal transcendental philosophy”.\(^{80}\)

However, there is just one catch, for Husserl himself declares that:

As yet it is quite impossible to foresee how, for me in the attitude of reduction, other egos – not as mere worldly phenomena but as other transcendental egos –

\(^{76}\) Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 30.

\(^{77}\) Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 168. Of note, we will see in chapter one how Levinas uses this idea of phenomenology as an "egology" but in a rather pejorative sense.

\(^{78}\) Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 30.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
can become positable as existing and thus become equally legitimate themes of a phenomenological egology.\textsuperscript{81}

That is, do other human subjects, other intentional egos who are both self-conscious and conscious of the surrounding life-world, exist as such? I can perceive myself as a constituting ego, but can I ever experience others as such? Can I know, beyond doubt, that other egos (like myself) exist? Husserl states “the problem of ‘others’” thus:

To understand how my transcendental ego, the primitive basis for everything that I accept as existent, can constitute within himself another transcendental ego, and then too an open plurality of such egos – “other” egos, absolutely inaccessible to my ego in their original being, and yet cognizable (for me) as existing and as being thus and so.\textsuperscript{82}

There are two ways in which our experience of others comes into play in phenomenology. First, the other ego is \textit{indirectly} perceived when I realize that the world in which I live and the objects I perceive therein are not there simply \textit{for me}, but are there \textit{for others} as well, are held \textit{in common}.\textsuperscript{83} “Our natural life is a life in community, living in a world of shared objects, shared environment, shared language, shared meanings”.\textsuperscript{84} We have spoken already of how phenomena are given perspectivally and require a succession of intuitions. Returning to our example of the cube, to perceive the cube in its fullness I must walk around it, turn it over, see it from all its various perspectives. That is, “this \textit{one} intuition, in which this \textit{one} thing is given to me, contains a multitude of manners of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Sokolowski, 152.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 175.
\end{itemize}
givenness which Husserl calls ‘adumbrations’”. However, I must also recognize that others can perceive the cube as well and with multiple perspectival adumbrations of their own. Most importantly, their intuitions of the cube are not only different from mine but they can never be “mine” in the same way that they are “theirs”. There is more to the cube than I could ever perceive on my own. “The identity of the thing is there not only for me but also for others, and therefore it is a deeper and richer identity for me”.

Husserl states:

I experience other minds in a unique manner. Not only do I experience them as spatial presentations psychologically interlaced with the realm of nature, but I also experience them as experiencing this selfsame world which I experience…. I experience the world not as my own private world, but as an intersubjective world, one that is given to all human beings and which contains objects accessible to all.

However, although Husserl is always keen to admit this communal aspect of the intuition of phenomena, especially so as to avoid phenomenology being negatively seen as a “transcendental solipsism;” there is yet a tension here. While the intersubjective aspect of the world cannot be denied, for Husserl the personal ego, the self, remains first and foremost. Indeed, intersubjectivity is possible “only because I, as ego, can make sense of these directions, encouragements, pointings, and so on. Nothing comes from outside into

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85 Held, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World”, 37-38, emphasis original.

86 Sokolowski, 32. See also Held, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World”, 48-49.


the ego; rather everything outside is what it is already within the inside.”⁸⁹ Husserl makes this point in numerous places throughout his work:

Neither a world nor any other existent of any conceivable sort comes “from outdoors” into my ego, my life of consciousness.⁹⁰

Imperturbably I must hold fast to the insight that every sense that any existent whatever has or can have for me – in respect of its “what” and its “it exists and actually is” – is a sense in and arising from my intentional life, becoming clarified and uncovered for me in consequence of my life’s constitutive syntheses, in systems of harmonious verification.⁹¹

*Transcendence is an immanent mode of being, that is, one that constitutes itself within the ego.* Every conceivable meaning, every thinkable being – regardless of whether it is immanent or transcendent – falls within the realm of transcendental subjectivity. The idea of something outside of this realm is a contradiction: transcendental subjectivity is the universal and absolute concretion. To conceive of the universe of true being as being something outside of the universe of possible consciousness, of possible knowledge, and of possible evidence… is sheer nonsense.⁹²

And so while on the one hand Husserl claims that “I experience the world… as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone”,⁹³ on the other hand he upholds that “the world with all its realities, including my human real being, is a universe of constituted transcendencies – constituted in mental processes and abilities of my ego…; accordingly, this constituted world is preceded by my ego; as the *ultimately constitutive subjectivity*”.⁹⁴ That is, “the world is contintually

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⁸⁹ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 178, emphasis mine.


⁹¹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 91, emphasis original.


⁹³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 91, emphasis original.

⁹⁴ Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 251, emphasis mine.
there for us; but in the first place it is there for me".\textsuperscript{95} In this way Husserl speaks of his method as a “transcendental and phenomenological monadology”.\textsuperscript{96} This tension is also found in the second approach to our experience of others.

The second way in which the other ego is encountered is through direct perception of the other, that is, through “our direct experience of others as other minds, other embodiments of consciousness...[,] as like ourselves, as datives of disclosure, who can reciprocate our recognition and see us as like themselves”.\textsuperscript{97} As opposed to indirectly experiencing the other as someone else to whom the world is given, I can also directly encounter the other as the intended phenomenon of my consciousness. However, the act of directly perceiving the other is, in a certain way, still “indirect” in the sense that, for Husserl, one can never directly experience the foreign ego as such. Husserl conceives of the concrete ego as, borrowing from Leibniz, a monad.\textsuperscript{98} He explains the nature of this monadic ego thus:

As ego, I have a surrounding world, which is continually “existing for me”; and, in it, objects as “existing for me”.... This, my activity of positing and explicating being, sets up a habituality of my Ego, by virtue of which the object, as having its manifold determinations, is mine abidingly.... I exist for myself and am continually given to myself, by experiential evidence, as “I myself”.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 242, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{96} Husserl, \textit{The Paris Lectures}, 36, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{97} Sokolowski, 152 and 154.


\textsuperscript{99} Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, 68, emphasis original.
However, Husserl notes, along with Leibniz, “that within the monad which is given to me apodictically and originally are the reflections of alien monads”.\(^\text{100}\) This awareness of alien monads happens by way of a “peculiar kind of epoché”, or “reduction to my transcendental sphere of peculiar ownness”.\(^\text{101}\) That is, “as Ego in the transcendental attitude I attempt first of all to delimit… what is peculiarly my own”\(^\text{102}\) – what makes me specifically me. What is discovered is not only a world of objects, or things, that are distinct from me, but also the existence of other constituting egos. However this awareness is, for Husserl, always already wrapped up in my own self-perception.

In this pre-eminent intentionality there becomes constituted for me the new existence-sense that goes beyond my monadic very-ownness; there becomes constituted an ego, not as “I myself”, but \textit{mirrored in my own Ego, in my monad}. The second ego, however, is not simply there and strictly presented; \textit{rather is he constituted as “alter ego”} – the ego indicated as one moment by this expression being I myself in my ownness. The “Other”, according to his own constituted sense, \textit{points to me myself}; the other is \textit{a “mirroring” of my own self} and yet not a mirroring proper, \textit{an analogue of my own self} and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense.\(^\text{103}\)

And so I realize that my sphere of ownness does not extend to other persons, they have realms of ownness that are not directly, or originally, accessible to me. Thus there are certain “gaps” or a certain “emptiness” in my experience of the other because I cannot directly experience their ego. The consciousness of the other is necessarily hidden to me, unavailable to my direct experience. I cannot experience the other’s thoughts and

\(^{100}\) Husserl, \textit{The Paris Lectures}, 35, italicized in the original.

\(^{101}\) Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, 93, original emphasis removed.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 95, emphasis original.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 94, emphasis mine.
sensations directly, as my own. The constitution of the world for the other is inaccessible to me. This is important for, as Husserl points out, “if what belongs to the other’s own essence were directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same”. The perception of the other ego thus relies on the aspect of corporeality, empathy, and Husserl’s notion of association – “something reminds me of something” – or “pairing”. In Husserl’s own words:

[T]he problem is stated at first as a special one, namely… that of the “thereness-for-me” of others; and accordingly as the theme of a transcendental theory of experiencing someone else, a transcendental theory of so-called “empathy”. However, I know myself to be an ego and I have a body. In fact, my body expresses or manifests my ego to the world. When I perceive the other, I recognize the other as possessing a body like mine. Just as my body can manifest my ego, so I assume that the

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104 See Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 108-109: "the other is himself there before us 'in person'. On the other hand, this being here in person does not keep us from admitting forthwith that, properly speaking, neither the other Ego himself, nor his subjective processes or his appearances themselves, nor anything else belonging to his own essence, becomes given in our experience originally."

105 Ibid., 109.

106 See Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 175 where he describes empathy as “the manner I am able to read into another’s actions, as an expression of inner states analogous to my own”. The author then gives a very brief analysis of Stein’s concept of empathy. We will not discuss the concept of empathy here as a full analysis of Stein’s concept of empathy will be dealt with in chapter two.

107 Held, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World”, 50. See also Sokolowski, 154; and Horner, 34.

108 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 92, emphasis original. We will speak more directly about empathy and Stein’s differences from Husserl on this and multiple topics in chapter three.
other body indicates something similar. By way of association I thus assume that the other who possesses a body like mine must also be an ego like me. Thus, “we have a direct experience of the other as another body, and only an appresentation, or indirect assimilation, of the other as another ego like me.

Since, in this Nature and this world, my animate organism is the only body that is or can be constituted originally as an animate organism (a functioning organ), the body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an apperceptive transfer from my animate organism, and done so in a manner that excludes an actually direct, and hence primordial, showing of the predicates belonging to an animate organism specifically, a showing of them in perception proper. It is clear from the very beginning that only a similarity connecting, within my primordial sphere, that body over there with my body can serve as the motivational basis for the “analogizing” apprehension of that body as another animate organism.

As we can see, the concepts of “here” and “there” are also important in the perception of the foreign ego. My body is “here”, the other body is “there”. I can imagine myself over “there” where the other body is located and imagine that I have the same bearing and appearance as that body “there”. “When I experience another person, I apperceive them as having the kind of experiences I would have if I was over there. On the basis of these kinds of ‘pairing’ experiences I experience the other as another body like myself”. Thus:

[my perception of the other] reminds me of my own living-bodily behavior through its demeanor. It is only through fantasy that the possibility arises for me to recognize a being similar to myself behind the demeanor of that body…. In this


110 Horner, 33-34.

111 Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 110-111, emphasis original.

112 Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 177, emphasis original on “apperceive”, second emphasis mine.
way, the ego in that body there is transformed for me from a simple, fictive modification of my self into a real “other”, a “foreign” ego, that is, into a being similar to me, into whom I may think myself in my understanding, with whom I may “empathize”, but with whom I am not identical.\footnote{Held, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of the Life-World”, 51, emphasis original on “empathize”, all other emphases mine.}

I realize that my body “here” will never be that body “there”. The other body can never be or become my body. In this way, the other is encountered as “‘other’ because their existence in the world is bound to the absolute Here of each individual’s living-body, and because these living-bodies… can never occupy the same There at the same time”.\footnote{Ibid., 52.} But it is the act of association or analogy that allows me to constitute the other as possessing an ego like me. That body “there” is like my body “here” therefore just as I possess an ego, the other too must have an ego of their own like mine. In the end, the other can only be recognized as being another subject (that is, as a foreign ego) through a reductive comparison to my own ego or self. As Husserl himself stated, “the other is a ‘mirroring’ of my own self”.\footnote{Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, 94, emphasis mine.}

Thus, in the realm of intersubjectivity Husserl reveals that his conception of phenomenology truly is an “egology” or a “monadology”, not in the sense that it is an innocent (unprejudiced) study of the ego as such, but rather that it is a biased analysis from the perspective of one’s own ego as the constituting center of all phenomena. In the realm of the intersubjective constitution of the world, Husserl “always grounds it on the subjective”.\footnote{Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 178, emphasis original.} As we noted above, for Husserl “the world is continually there for us, but
in the first place it is there for me”.\textsuperscript{117} What is more and as we have shown, “Husserl sees the ground for understanding the mental life of the other as lying in one’s own self-understanding”.\textsuperscript{118} For Husserl “the other then is a phenomenological modification of myself…grasped only ‘within my ownness’”.\textsuperscript{119} Husserl sums up his position on this matter quite plainly:

The character of the existent “other” had its basis in this kind of verifiable accessibility of what is not originally accessible. Whatever can become presented, and evidently verified, \textit{originally} – is something \textit{I} am; or else it belongs to me as peculiarly my own. Whatever, by virtue thereof, is experienced in that founded manner which characterizes a primordially unfulfillable experience – an experience that does not give itself originally but that consistently verifies something indicated – is “other”. It is therefore conceivable only as an analogue of something included in my peculiar ownness. Because of its sense-constitution it occurs necessarily as an “\textit{intentional modification}” of that Ego of mine which is the first to be Objectivated, or as an intentional modification of my primordial “world”: the Other as phenomenologically a “modification” of myself (which, for its part, gets this character of being “my” self by virtue of the contrastive pairing that necessarily takes place). It is clear that, with the other Ego, there is appresented, in an analogizing modification, everything that belongs to his concretion: first, his primordial world, and then his fully concrete ego. In other words, \textit{another monad} becomes constituted appresentatively in mine.\textsuperscript{120}

From the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology, the other is considered as a phenomenon for analysis just like any other object of my perception.\textsuperscript{121} Through phenomenological analysis the other is seen as a noema, a correlate to \textit{my} ego’s noetic act. The other is thus constituted and given sense and meaning in and through \textit{my}

\textsuperscript{117} Husserl, \textit{Formal and Transcendental Logic}, 242, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{118} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 179.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 177.

\textsuperscript{120} Husserl, \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, 114-115, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{121} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 178.
consciousness. As we will see in chapter one, Levinas will criticize Husserl for both these views and ultimately reject Husserlian phenomenology as a totalizing system which reduces the other to the realm of the self and contemplates the other as a mere object. We turn now to chapter one.
CHAPTER ONE

Situating Levinas:
From Modernity to Postmodernity – the “climate” from which we must flee

Introduction

This chapter focuses on situating the philosophical project of Emmanuel Levinas. We will consider the philosophical “climate” which both inspired his thought and from which he departed so as to develop his own philosophical voice. As such, the chapter will be divided into two main sections. First we will focus on how Levinas’ project participates in that amorphous trend in philosophy known as the postmodern. It will be shown how Levinas’ work exemplifies such postmodern themes as the critique of Western thought, the rejection of all totalizing forms of thought, the critique of Cartesian subjectivity, the attempt to think difference as such and the turn to the other, the unique role of language, the focus on ethics, etc. In the second section of this chapter we will attend to Levinas’ rejection of Husserlian phenomenology as a return to the totalizing “thought of the Same” which is “a stupefaction, a petrification or a laziness” that ultimately exhibits violence toward the Other.¹ In this section we will also examine Levinas’ critique of Heidegger, through whom he interprets Husserl as the “heir” and “logical successor” to the Phenomenological tradition.² Heidegger’s focus on Being to the exclusion of the Other will come under particular attack. Indeed, in Levinas’ critique


of Husserl and Heidegger can be summarized his negative view of Western philosophy in general as a “totality” that does violence to the Other.³

Part I – From Modernity to Postmodernity

With his earliest writings dating from the late 1920s, Levinas’ corpus extends over six decades.⁴ Although many concepts and themes can be found in their incipient forms in his earliest writings, Levinas’ most important and mature works all date after the Second World War.⁵ A watershed event for all of the Western world, the tumultuous events of the 1930s and 1940s remained an influential fixture for the rest of his life.⁶ Indeed, Levinas along with the rest of the Western world emerged from the carnage of

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⁴ See Roger Burggraeve, Emmanuel Levinas: Une bibliographie primaire et secondaire (1929-1985) (Leuven: the Center for Metaphysics and Philosophy of God, 1986). This is the standard bibliography of works both by and about Levinas.

⁵ Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1997), 39. In particular, Peperzak offers the date for the “maturation of Levinas’ systematic thought” as 1961 with the publication of his first major work, Totality and Infinity. Whether the true peak of Levinas’ thought is found in Totality and Infinity or in his second major publication, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (1974), Totality and Infinity certainly marks a significant moment in the development of Levinas’ thought.

⁶ See Emmanuel Levinas, "Signature," in Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 291. Here Levinas states that the bibliography of his life is “dominated by the presentment and the memory of the Nazi horror”. See also the dedication to Levinas’ second major work Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). Peperzak too notes the harrowing influence of the Holocaust in Levinas’ work. See Beyond, 7. We will return to this point when we discuss Levinas’ rejection of Heideggerian ontology, in part due to the violence and injustice that it seems to too easily espouse. Heidegger himself was, of course, a member of the Nazi party.
the Second World War to find a world changed and an intellectual atmosphere on the brink of a crisis. As the world strove to put itself back together again, the standard modes of thought, political theory, and the presuppositions of Western culture and art in general were questioned, criticized, and often rejected as outmoded and problematic.

Whatever can be said about philosophy and its reflections on human existence, meaning, political order, ethics, etc., before the Holocaust, what must be said after the Holocaust is that not only were all of the West’s philosophical, ethical and religious teachings and reflections unable to prevent Auschwitz, but they also may have provided a certain legitimation to the devaluation and desecration of human life.\(^7\)

Due to this obvious failure of Western thought, it was held by many that a new path must be forged away from the beliefs and truths of the past. Indeed, these beliefs and truths, held dear for many centuries, were perhaps not, in fact, an accurate understanding of reality at all. Thus, although there is much debate over exactly when the phrase was coined and when the phenomenon began, by the 1970s and 1980s postmodernism came to be fully recognized.\(^8\) Levinas’ writings also participate in this phenomenon, echoing many of the key themes and concerns of postmodernism. However, before we turn our gaze directly upon Levinas’ place within the postmodern, it is important to briefly discuss

\(^7\) Manning, 187, emphasis mine.


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this intellectual, political, and cultural trend that indeed defies description. Indeed, it should be noted that there is no formal agreement on precisely what postmodernism is—nor, perhaps, should there be as precious to the postmodern seems to be an eschewing of all that smacks of the universalizing thought of modernism. Yet there are certain common themes and concerns which we will address. One last caveat, the postmodern influence can be found in numerous arenas: philosophy, linguistic theory, politics, theater, art, literature, architecture, music, social theory, etc. For the purposes of this work, we will only focus on those aspects that relate most directly to the realm of philosophy. Also, we will selectively highlight those trends that can be found in Levinas’ work which, in its own way, participates in the postmodern movement.

From Modernity...

And so what is postmodernism? How are we to understand the meaning of this ‘post-’? Does it simply mean “after” as in a time period proceeding from the modern era? If somehow following upon the modern era, is it in continuity with modernism or does it represent a radical break with the precepts of modernism? For Jean-François Lyotard, one of the most well-known voices of postmodern thought, the postmodern is

9 Best and Kellner, 2. Here they claim that “there is no unified postmodern theory, or even a coherent set of positions”. While this may be, there are certainly some common themes to be found in “postmodern” texts, even if they are not universally accepted among advocates of the postmodern. Indeed, with its emphasis on difference, such a consensus would be ironic if not self-contradictory.

10 See Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Explained, ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 75-80. This essay, “Note on the Meaning of ‘Post-’”, ends with Lyotard’s statement that the ‘post-’ of postmodern refers to “a procedure in ‘ana-’: a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an ‘initial forgetting’” of modernism.
“undoubtedly part of the modern”. However, it is “that which inhabits and disrupts modernity”. This of course leads one to question what is modernity? Certain words and concepts immediately jump to mind which characterize the modern era: reason, the subject, objectivity, realism, science, industrialization, progress or development, etc. Many names and famous personages also jump to mind. Here we will mention only two: Réné Descartes and Isaac Newton. Very succinctly, the modern world can be viewed as “Newton’s mechanistic universe populated by Descartes’ autonomous, rational substance”. According to Newton and the scientists of his time, the world was seen as a vast and well-oiled machine, working quite smoothly according to certain laws and principles. What is more, this world was understood as objectively available to the human subject and able to be mastered by human reason. According to Descartes, the human being is a “thinking substance” and the human person is an “autonomous rational subject”. In this way, for the modern person human reason was seen as “the final arbiter of truth”. And so the modern outlook can be understood as based upon two assumptions. The first assumption is that “the universe is an orderly realm governed by the laws of nature;” the second assumption is that human reason has the “ability to gain cognition of the foundational order of the whole universe”. The result of these two

11 Ibid., 12.
12 Horner, 16.
13 Grenz, 67.
14 Ibid., 64.
15 Ibid., 62.
16 Ibid., 68.
assumptions was the quest for universal knowledge of the world that came to mark the modern era. This rather bold quest was considered to be quite attainable especially in light of another assumption.

Enlightenment theorists assumed that a correspondence between the structure of the world and the structure of the human mind enables the mind to discern the structure inherent in the external world.¹⁷

According to the modern view, the mind was seen as a pure and unbiased prism, able to accurately reflect the reality of the universe. This view is known as the correspondence theory of truth. “Operating on objectivist assumptions, the realist defines truth as the correspondence between our assertions and the objective world about which they are made.”¹⁸ Thus it is raining outside and my mind recognizes this and articulates the thought ‘it is raining’. Or I feel myself firmly rooted to the earth and my mind comprehends and articulates the concept of ‘gravity’. These thoughts are understood to accurately correspond to the reality of the world and to truthfully articulate it. Indeed, “most of us assume that the human mind is capable of more or less accurately mirroring this external, nonhuman reality; most of us also assume that language, as a product of the human mind, provides an adequate means of declaring to ourselves and to others what the world is like”.¹⁹ As we will see, not only is this realist, objectivist view of the world called into question by postmodernism, but this view of language is also rejected. However the modern mind, working with the two anchoring poles of the autonomous human mind and the objectively knowable world and the assumptions associated with

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Ibid.
them, embraced “the drive to clarity, the turn to the subject, the concern with method, [and] the belief in sameness” – for if the world is objectively knowable, true knowledge will be the same for all people everywhere.\textsuperscript{20} According to the realist, objectivist view there is “a simple one-to-one relationship… between the bits of language we use to describe the world and the bits of the world we seek to know”.\textsuperscript{21} This trend toward universal knowledge was even extended to the human person. Over one hundred years after Descartes declared \textit{cogito ergo sum}, Immanuel Kant developed a universal concept of human nature.\textsuperscript{22} With Descartes the autonomous thinking self takes center stage, with Kant the thinking self is universalized. According to Kant, at their core all humans are understood to be essentially the same – autonomous rational subjects. In this way, the individual mind can come to know not only itself, but every other self.\textsuperscript{23} In the introduction we noted how Husserl rejected the ability to directly know the other person as such; however, as we will see, the postmodern era will reject this modern universalizing view of the human person to a much more radical degree than Husserl. But in the modern era we find the autonomous individual subject enthroned, crowned with reason and living in the palace of science.

What is more, all the knowledge that was gained about the universe and the scientific and technological progress made at this time was optimistically understood as

\textsuperscript{20} David Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," \textit{Theology Today} 51, no. 1 (April 1994): 104.

\textsuperscript{21} Grenz, 41-42.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 78-80.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 79.
working for the good of all humanity. That is, knowledge of the universe necessarily implied progress and the emancipation of the human race. This aspect of the modern era needs to be brought to light in this brief explanation for, as we will see, it comes under harsh criticism under the scrutiny of the postmodern, especially as much of its development took place in the wake of the horrors of World War II. But for the modern person there was a utopian optimism toward the capacity of the human mind to not only come to a comprehensive understanding of the universe, but to use this knowledge for the good of all humankind. In this way the history of the world was seen as progressive and emancipatory. However, ultimately for the modern person this quest for knowledge, even if its positive consequences were for the benefit of all, was seen as a private affair. The modern era is marked by a distinctly “radical individualism” where “the knowing process is fundamentally a relationship between the autonomous knowing self and the world waiting to be known through the creative power of the active mind”. Such individualism will be seen as almost laughable under the critical eye of postmodernism.

One last aspect of the modern era must be mentioned for in it we find, perhaps, the very spirit of modernism. Speaking now in more philosophical terms, this is the concept of metaphysics. “The modern is the culmination of a metaphysical tradition” which emphasizes “foundations and causes”. The modern mind’s quest for absolute comprehensive knowledge of the world belies a view that all being is objectively,
exhaustively knowable thus objectively, exhaustively systematizable. Metaphysics is this “attempt at a systematized understanding of what ‘is’ – metaphysics aims to uncover the ultimate nature of reality”. 28 In the history of philosophy Aristotle is generally credited with the emphasis on metaphysics that came to characterize all of Western philosophy into the modern era. Aristotle is also credited for granting metaphysics the prized place of “first philosophy”, that is, metaphysics deals with those aspects of philosophy that are most essential and primary. 29 The concerns of metaphysics can be shown to relate directly to the two poles of modernism:

Metaphysics as it emerges in modernity relates to the priority of epistemology, that is, to dependence on the thinking subject and its capacity to found knowledge of what is. Being becomes being-known. 30

Thus the metaphysical tradition adheres to the two assumptions of the world (all that ‘is’) as objectifiable and knowable and the rational subject as capable of knowing this world. We have already seen how Husserl claimed the primary place of first philosophy for phenomenology, it being foundational not only for philosophy but also for all fields of natural science. As such, Husserl’s project concerns itself with metaphysical issues. As we will see, the modern emphasis on metaphysics will receive harsh criticism from and ultimately be rejected by postmodernism. Husserl’s phenomenology too will be called into question, in part, for its metaphysical tendencies. This said, let us now turn our attention to the postmodern critique and rejection of modernism.

28 Ibid., 18.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 20.
... to Postmodernity

If modernity is marked by the turn to the subject, metaphysics and the quest for universal knowledge, and sameness; postmodernity is thus marked by the turn to the other, the rejection of metaphysics, the impossibility of universal knowledge, and difference. With such characteristics, it has been stated that there are two key tasks undertaken by the philosophical field of postmodernism: first, to overcome metaphysics “as conceived in modernity as the correlation of Being and reasoning”; and second, “the thinking of difference”.\(^{31}\) As we will see, Levinas certainly takes these two tasks to heart. We recall that Jean-François Lyotard declared the postmodern to be “that which inhabits and disrupts modernity”.\(^{32}\) In a longer passage Lyotard comments that:

The postmodern would be that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations – not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable.\(^{33}\)

As we have seen the modern quest for universal knowledge relies on the belief that the world is objectifiable thus knowable. However, this claim relies upon an even deeper assumption that the true nature and essence of the world is revealed to the mind capable of grasping it. According to the modern tradition, the world is present to us in its fullness, all we need do is seek out and grasp that which can be known (which is everything). However, this belief falls under heavy criticism for perhaps the world is not objectively knowable and perhaps the mind cannot comprehend the world in its fullness. Indeed,

\(^{31}\) Horner, 15. Horner is citing Graham Ward here.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 16.

perhaps there is as much absence in the world as there is presence and perhaps the mind is not the pure, unbiased prism it was once thought to be…. And so the critique of modernism begins.

It was noted above how the spirit of modernism can be found in metaphysics. For a definition of this philosophical tradition we offered that metaphysics is the “attempt at a systematized understanding of what ‘is’ – metaphysics aims to uncover the ultimate nature of reality”.

If the metaphysical tradition is the bedrock of the modern era, then Friedrich Nietzsche can perhaps be upheld as its first true antagonist. Working at the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche is famous (or infamous, depending on what circles one frequents) for announcing both the “death of God” and the “will to power”. Indeed, Nietzsche called into question just about all that modernism held dear: realism, objectivism, the autonomous rational subject, the neutrality of reason and the mind’s ability to thus achieve absolute truth, etc. For Nietzsche metaphysics “fails because the framework for ultimate reality that it provides can be shown to be nothing more than a construction, a construction in which we have heavily invested”. Nietzsche attacks the modern view of truth as a correspondence between reality as objectively “out there” and the mind’s capacity to mirror or correspond to that reality. Nietzsche boldly claims that truth is but an illusion created by humans.

34 Horner, 18.

35 Grenz, 5 and 83. See pp. 88-98 for a very accessible summary of Nietzsche’s main concepts and themes.

36 Horner, 35.

37 Grenz, 89.
of language. For Nietzsche language is not the articulation of truth and knowledge but a purely human construct.\(^\text{38}\) What is more, humans not only construct language, but construct “reality” for themselves through this language. Thus as “[truth] is but] a function of the language we employ… truth [therefore] ‘exists’ only within specific linguistic concepts”.\(^\text{39}\) In this way Nietzsche came to be known as a nihilist for he claimed that the human subject has no access to reality as such. Nietzsche adamantly upheld that “reality” is nothing more than a “perspectival appearance” created by human persons.\(^\text{40}\) Thus:

To a metaphysical cosmos ordered by truth, the real, and a reasoned moral framework, Nietzsche brings the chaos of judgement and perspective, chaos that at times threatens to be overwhelming, given the vitriolic style with which it emerges in his work.\(^\text{41}\)

However, even Nietzsche, the nihilistic antagonist of metaphysics, is unable to fully depart from modernism. He is criticized, particularly by Heidegger, for maintaining the modern trait of an overarching or fundamental value that orders reality: the will to power.\(^\text{42}\) As such, Heidegger interprets the will to power as belying a certain type of metaphysics. Postmodern thought, however, wishes to do away with any and all ties to metaphysics, even one as radical as Nietzsche’s. Be that as it may, Nietzsche was certainly instrumental in the burgeoning attack on the modern metaphysical tradition that

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 91.

\(^{41}\) Horner, 36.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
blossomed into postmodernism in the mid to late twentieth century. This cursory glance hardly does justice to one of the most influential and controversial figures within the history of philosophy. However, for the purpose of this work, it suffices to point to his radical critique of modernism as crucial to the development of postmodernism and thus influential of the environment in which Levinas developed his own philosophical project.

[Nietzsche] attacked philosophical conceptions of the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system, replacing Western philosophy with a perspectivist orientation for which there are no facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various individuals or groups…. He insisted that all language was metaphorical and that the subject was only a product of language and thought.43

We have claimed that the modern tradition can be marked by two poles: that of the autonomous knowing subject and that of the knowable world. The project of modernity can thus be understood as the subject’s quest for knowledge of the world for the betterment of humanity. Such knowledge or truth is achieved when the thoughts of the mind correspond to or mirror the objective reality that is “out there”. In this way universal knowledge can be attained by all rational subjects. However, the postmodern tradition points out that “the quest for certainty and foundation is not innocent”.44 Indeed, as hinted at above, the two poles of the modern are perhaps not as firm as once believed. Postmodernism thus marks an end of the objectivist and realist outlook that adheres to the correspondence theory of truth.

Epistemologically, postmodernists refuse the modern belief that we have unmediated access to reality. All postmodernists reject the metaphor of the mind

43 Best and Kellner, 22.
44 Ibid., 231.
as a mirror of nature, the object as a neutral datum, and the subject as an aloof observer of the world.  

If the modern era was marked by faith in human reason and the belief that reason could achieve certainty about how the world actually is, the postmodern is marked by the exact opposite belief. With the unbiased, knowing human subject and the objective world as knowable called into question, one finds that “the basic attitude of postmodernists [is] a scepticism about the claims of any kind of overall, totalizing explanation”. This is because it is determined that the “mind is constitutive not reflective of reality”. Not only would Nietzsche agree with this point, but we have already come across this idea in our introductory comments on Husserl with his discovery of the intentional consciousness and his overcoming of the subject-object divide. As ground-breaking as this discovery of intentionality was however, postmodernism goes even a step further than Herr Husserl who yet upholds the transcendental ego as capable of discovering the true essence of phenomena. For the postmodern mind, all is contextual and thus all requires interpretation. There is no certain and absolute knowledge that can be universally discovered and accepted by all people. As opposed to the correspondence theory of truth, postmodernism argues “that we do not simply encounter a world that is

45 Ibid., 287.


47 Best and Kellner, 287.

48 We will comment directly upon Husserl and the postmodern critique of his version of phenomenology when we consider Levinas’ critique of Husserl, below.
‘out there’ but rather that we construct the world using concepts we bring to it”. 49 This approach to reality is due in part to the radically new understanding of language as developed by structuralism and then sublimated by poststructuralism. 50 Although well beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is sufficient to note that, thanks to the work of such giants as Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Wittgenstein, language is no longer considered to articulate the truth of reality but is rather an arbitrary cultural phenomenon. Language is both a human construct and that which shapes the human person and their approach to “reality”. 51 One common emphasis of the postmodern era is that the human subject is socially and culturally constructed, a product of the time and place in which the subject lives. All “reality” is thus contextual and requires interpretation which means there can be no absolute truth or meaning – at least none that can be discovered by the contextual, perspectival subject that the human person necessarily is.

Reason, truth, systematic knowledge, foundations, representation, universality, totality, macroperspectives, coherence, consensus, the “rational unified subject” – such are the words and concepts that correspond to modernism. Perspectival, relativism, linguistics, interpretation, microtheory, multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, indeterminacy, contextuality, the other – these are the concepts that apply to postmodernism. 52 Postmodernism thus rejects the modern “search for a foundation of

49 Grenz, 41.

50 For a concise overview of this development of linguistic theory see Grenz, 112-150. See also chapter one of Best and Kellner.

51 Grenz, 117.

52 These concepts and ideas of the modern and postmodern are taken from Best and Kellner, 4-5.
knowledge, for its universalizing and totalizing claims, for its hubris to supply apodictic truth, and for its allegedly fallacious rationalism”.\textsuperscript{53} In this way, “postmodern theory abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by much modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentered and fragmented subject”.\textsuperscript{54} Such was the intellectual atmosphere and an all too brief sampling of the concepts and ideas being debated and developed at the time when Levinas was fashioning his own philosophical project. In the following section we will comment briefly on Levinas’ place among these developing philosophical trends. As we will see, Levinas too exhibits many of the “common” postmodern traits we have been discussing here, though focused in his own unique way via the lens of ethical responsibility.

\textit{Levinas and the Postmodern}

In his text \textit{The Will to Power}, Nietzsche re-envisioned the task of the philosopher from the “traditional aspiration to knowledge” to that of engaging in “experimental critique in which all truths hitherto would be considered types of ‘errors’”.\textsuperscript{55} That is, according to Nietzsche, the task of philosophy is to question philosophy itself and all the truths it has claimed to discern. From our comments above, one can easily agree that this was a task embraced by what became known as the Postmodern philosophers. Levinas too can be seen to participate in this critique of philosophy. Now it is true that in his texts

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 5.

up to and including *Totality and Infinity* Levinas still used the language of metaphysics.\(^{56}\) For this he was roundly critiqued.\(^{57}\) However, by the time of *Otherwise than Being* Levinas was doing all in his power to abandon the metaphysical language of *Totality and Infinity*.\(^{58}\) Indeed, as with other postmodern thinkers, Levinas exhibits a real skepticism toward traditional philosophy for its reduction of alterity to the comprehensive vision of the autonomous self. Levinas’ ethical philosophy is a skeptical critique of the “totalizing propensity” of Western philosophy.\(^{59}\) His philosophy

> calls into question the freedom of the exercise of ontology [thus leading] beyond theory and ontology: critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same…. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics.\(^{60}\)

What is more, the meaning Levinas ascribes to language assists him in this critique of philosophy. We will discuss this in much greater detail in our following section below and in chapter two. For now we will state that language, for Levinas, is always already

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\(^{56}\) See for example the section of *Totality and Infinity* entitled, "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology", 42-48.

\(^{57}\) See for example, Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). It was very much in response to Derrida’s harsh critique that Levinas endeavored to truly abandon metaphysical language. The result of which was his text *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.

\(^{58}\) See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, "*Totality and Infinity: Preface to the German Edition,*" in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 197. Levinas states: “Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence already avoids the ontological – or more exactly, eidetic – language which Totality and Infinity incessantly resorts to…”

\(^{59}\) Atterton, 9.

\(^{60}\) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.
ethical because it is a response to the Other. Language is the turn to the Other par excellence. And in responding to the Other, my spontaneous autonomy is called into question. Thus “language is already skepticism”. And so it is fair to say that, while Levinas might have resorted to metaphysical language in certain of his works, he was certainly participating in the postmodern critique of the metaphysical tradition of modernity that prioritizes the autonomous subject.

Indeed, where Levinas can, perhaps, most be seen to participate in the postmodern tradition is in his critique of Western philosophy as a totalizing “egology”. Throughout his work Levinas notes the domination of Western thought by the concept of totality which is most clearly manifested in how “Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being”. The concepts, for Levinas, that most clearly represent this Western, ontological thought and philosophy are consciousness,


62 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 170.

63 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 44.

64 Ibid 43 and 21. See also Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2002), 16. Here Critchley states: “As well as being critique, Levinasian ethics bears a critical relation to the philosophical tradition. For Levinas, Western philosophy has most often been ontology, of which Heidegger’s work is only the most recent example, and by which Levinas means any attempt to comprehend the Being of that which is… For Levinas, the ontological event that defines and dominates the philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger consists in suppressing or reducing all forms of otherness by transmuting them into the same.”
intentionality, representation, identification, comprehension, knowledge, and above all, being.\textsuperscript{65} These are words common in Husserlian phenomenology which Levinas sees as “faithful to the essential teachings of European civilization both in its themes and its treatment of them”.\textsuperscript{66} Indeed, Levinas considers Husserl, and even more so Heidegger, whom he views as the “heir” and “future” of phenomenology,\textsuperscript{67} to be two of the best (modern) representatives of this totalizing philosophical tradition. We will look more closely at Levinas’ assessment specifically of Husserl and Heidegger in the following section. For now, we will focus briefly on Levinas’ critique of Western philosophy in general.

Western philosophy and culture are, for Levinas, an egocentric comprehending of the universe where all is grasped by the intentional consciousness of a subject who reduces all to its comprehending totality. As such, Western thought is an “egology”. It is manifested in “a universe centered around an ego that not only functions as subject of the ‘cogito,’ but also as the center and end of the world and the course of all its meaning”.\textsuperscript{68} Since the time of Socrates, Levinas notes that the primacy of the self (or as Levinas terms it “the same”) has dominated Western civilization.\textsuperscript{69} This self is a free being who

\textsuperscript{65} See Adriaan Peperzak, "Levinas' Method," in Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, ed. Claire Katz and Lara Trout (London: Routledge, 2005), 343, where he gives a much longer laundry list of words.


\textsuperscript{67} Manning, 27.

\textsuperscript{68} Peperzak, Beyond, 8.

\textsuperscript{69} Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 43.
“receives nothing from the Other” but instead neutralizes the Other into a theme or object so as to identify and comprehend the Other in the totalizing sphere of the same. As we will see, Levinas is quite opposed to the autonomous subject of modernity. “Against the primacy of freedom, upheld by modern philosophy, [Levinas] insists on the alterity of my own responsibility from which I cannot escape.” However it is interesting to note that, as opposed to many Postmodern thinkers, Levinas does not entirely do away with subjectivity but rather rethinks it along ethical lines. Levinas’ master-work, *Totality and Infinity*, is in part a defense of subjectivity.

This book then does present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it 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.

This brings us to two key concepts in Levinas’ philosophy, totality and infinity, which can be seen in relation to the concerns of postmodernity. For Levinas “totality” represents Western culture as an “egology” and Western philosophy as its theoretical counterpart. It is the realm of the intentional consciousness or ego. It is the realm of the constituting subject that reduces all to its comprehending gaze, the realm of “the Same”. “Infinity”, on the other hand, designates the realm of the Other and alterity that is irreducible to the realm of the Same. We will address these concepts in much greater detail in chapter two. For now, let it suffice to say that Levinas’ work is a critique of the totalizing aspect of Western culture and philosophy and an affirmation of “the

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70 Ibid.


philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity". In Levinas’ work we see the turn to the Other par excellence that features so prolifically in postmodern texts. This turn to the Other is found in Levinas’ insistence that ethics is first philosophy. It is giving the priority of place to the Other and subjecting the autonomous self of modernity to the infinite responsibility of the ethical relationship. As seen in the quote above, while Levinas may be defending subjectivity, it is not the autonomous subjectivity of modernity, but an ethically sublimated subjectivity enacted in responsibility for the Other. In this way, Levinas’ philosophical project can be seen to break up the homogeneity of Western thought.

Perhaps one of the best texts within Levinas’ corpus that addresses this issue of the nature of Western philosophy is his 1957 essay “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity”. In this essay one can clearly see “how Levinas’s works sprang from a profound meditation on the very roots of Western philosophy; it also indicates the path by which his thought separates itself from the Husserlian and Heideggerian versions of phenomenology” – a point to which we will return below. We will also see how Levinas reveals Western philosophy to be the realm of totality due to its quest for knowledge that reduces all otherness to that which can be comprehended by the

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 304. For a more detailed discussion of why Levinas insists on ethics as first philosophy, see chapter two below.


77 Adriaan Peperzak, To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 38.
autonomous subject. Almost as if echoing Nietzsche’s disparaging claim that traditionally philosophy aspires to gain knowledge, Levinas states in the opening line of his essay: “Every philosophy seeks truth.”78 This quest however can proceed in one of two ways: either the way of heteronomy (concern for and thus a movement toward what is beyond the self which is a true “experience” or relationship with what is other than the self) or the way of autonomy (“free adherence to a proposition” by the investigator who preserves his or her nature and thus “[remains] the same despite the unknown lands into which thought seemed to lead”).79 If the quest for truth adheres to the way of autonomy then “philosophy would thus be tantamount to the conquest of being by man over the course of history”.80 A choice must then be made for which path the quest for truth will take. Levinas states:

The choice of Western philosophy has most often been on the side of freedom and the same…. Thus Western thought very often seemed to exclude the transcendent, encompass every other in the same, and proclaim the philosophical birthright of autonomy.81

However, one might ask why is the quest for truth a “conquest of being”? That is, what is the link between truth and being? Throughout Levinas’ works, he aims to show how in the tradition of the West, truth and being, or knowledge and existence, are inseparable. For Levinas, “To understand being is to exist”.82

78 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity", 47.

79 Ibid., 47-48.

80 Ibid., 48.


82 Emmanuel Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 3.
The whole of man is ontology… It is not because there is man that there is truth. It is because being in general is inseparable from its disclosedness; it is because there is truth, or, if you like, it is because being is intelligible, that there is humanity.\(^83\)

To be, to exist (according to the tradition of Western philosophy) is to manifest oneself – this is truth. To seek the truth is to understand the being (existence) of things. This is the task and goal of philosophy. “Thus, the analysis of existence… is nothing but the description of the essence of truth, of the condition of the very intelligibility of being.”\(^84\)

To seek the truth specifically by way of autonomy (the way of the West), is for the subject, free and unhindered by any other, to seek to understand the being of things under the penetrating gaze of its all-encompassing vision. “Freedom will triumph when the soul’s monologue will have reached universality, will have encompassed the totality of being.”\(^85\) Western philosophy is thus an “egology” because the quest for truth consists of knowledge of being by way of conquest, domination, and possession – to know the truth is to possess it, free and unhindered. It is to neuter, dissolve, and domesticate what is other than the self.\(^86\) “To know amounts to grasping being out of nothing or reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity.”\(^87\) It is the reduction of the other to the same. What is particularly damning is how this theoretical reflection on truth and being at the level of philosophy is manifested in an attitude of egocentrism that is fundamental in Western

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 2, emphasis original.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{85}\) Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity”, 49.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 50. In Totality and Infinity, 46, Levinas states: “Possession is preeminently the form in which the other becomes the same, by becoming mine.”

\(^{87}\) Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 44.
civilization and realized in a particular way of life: “Objectification, material enjoyment, and the privilege accorded to seeing, manipulation, planning, and exploitation”.  

It is not only to reduce the other to the same, but to murder the other.  

On the level of philosophy, such a world expresses itself in a systematic vision according to which the universe appears as a totality of beings unfolding their features, essences, and relationships before a panoramic cogito as wide as the horizon of that totality.  

Against this situation, the totalizing, egological tradition of the West, Levinas offers an alternative that is the “turn to the other” so well documented in the postmodern tradition. It is, for Levinas, the turn to the other par excellence; it is the ethical relationship. In this relationship, the-one-for-the-other,  

[a] new situation is created; consciousness’s presence to itself acquires a different modality, its positions collapse. To put it just in formal terms, the same does not find again its priority over the other, it does not rest peaceably on itself, is no longer the principle.  

Levinas will spend the rest of his career reflecting upon this relationship of transcendence that exceeds all thought and all Being. It is the quest for truth by way of heteronomy or experience – the relationship with what is beyond the self and irreducible to the self, the social relationship. Ethics. However, before we can proceed to reflect upon Levinas’

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89 See for example, Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental"?, 9-11; and *Totality and Infinity*, 198.


92 Ibid., 47 and 54. He goes on to state how the Other is irreducible to the realm of the same precisely as the one who “resists identification, [and] does not enter into the already known”, 55.
philosophical project itself, to explain its main thesis of ethics as first philosophy and the themes contained therein, we need first to consider how Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s ontology fit into this overall critique of Western philosophy in general. For, as stated above, Levinas’ philosophy can be seen, in part, as offering an alternative to the thought of these two former masters.

Part II – Levinas’ Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology and Heideggerian Ontology

Levinas was first known as “a historian of philosophy, or analyst of other philosophers,” specifically of Husserl and Heidegger.93 However, in time Levinas developed his own unique philosophical voice and project. “De l’évasion”, an essay published in 1935, and his book Existents to Existence (De l’existence à l’existant), published in 1947, are considered the first works in which Levinas’ own voice rings out.94 While the influences (both positive and negative) behind Levinas’ philosophical project are numerous and varied,95 we will focus here on Levinas’ indebtedness to and differentiation from Husserl and Heidegger. As we will see, Levinas, perhaps due more to historical situatedness, is noted for reading and critiquing Husserl through the lens of

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93 Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 47. See also Peperzak, Beyond, 204.

94 Peperzak, Beyond, 2-3 and 204.

95 See Samuel Moyn, Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). While Husserl and Heidegger are discussed, Moyn also spends much time discussing the influence of Kant, Kierkegaard, Bergson, Barth, and Rosenzweig. See also Peperzak, To the Other, 11-12 where he offers a list of various authors who influenced Levinas.
Heidegger’s influence, and especially that of Heidegger’s ground-breaking text, *Being and Time*. This critique includes the problem of Husserl’s intellectualism or prioritizing of theory such that his phenomenology is ultimately ahistorical. However, as Levinas’ own philosophical project began to take shape and flourish, he also raised concerns over Husserl’s method that were specific to his own direction of thought. As for Heidegger, he is well noted as Levinas’ arch-nemesis. Indeed, it is claimed that Levinas’ entire philosophical project is an attempt to offer an (ethical) alternative to Heidegger’s thought. Numerous texts and articles have been written on this theme of Levinas’ critique of his famous predecessors. Representing this study in full is not the concern of the work here, however, it is important to note Levinas’ critical relationship to Husserl’s phenomenological tradition and Heidegger’s ontological project as they were key in the development of Levinas’ own thought. Thus we will focus on a few key points of Levinas’ critique here before moving on to a presentation of the major themes of Levinas’ own work in the following chapter.

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96 See Adriaan Peperzak, "Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics: Levinas' Perspective on Husserl and Heidegger," *Man and World* 16 (1983): 113 and 115. He notes how Levinas spent a year studying in Freiburg in 1928-1929. While Levinas did attend the final course offered by Husserl, this was a time where Husserl was already in retirement and Heidegger was “at the peak of his career and had already become famous as the man who was accomplishing a far more radical revolution in philosophy than that of Husserl”. Thus it is no doubt that Levinas’ views of Husserl and his version of phenomenology are cast with a rather Heideggerian bent. See also Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 9 and 14; and Manning, 17-29.

97 Moyn, 96 and 103-105. It can also be noted how Manning’s entire text (*Interpreting Otherwise than Heidegger*) presents Heidegger as Levinas’ main sparring partner, the one whom Levinas was continually arguing through and against.

98 Manning, 9.
We noted above how Levinas’ philosophical project can be seen to offer an alternative to that of Heidegger. Indeed, “Levinas’s philosophy is a constant arguing against and an interpreting otherwise than Heidegger so as to propose alternative interpretations and to construct an alternative philosophy, an ethical philosophy”. However, Heidegger was also once considered, by Levinas, to be the “true heir and rightful successor to Husserl” and that “the future of phenomenology [was seen to lie] in the interpretation of Being as it is opened up by Heidegger”. Thus we must first consider Levinas’ evaluation of Husserlian phenomenology before turning to his even louder critique of Heidegger. What must be kept in mind though, is that Levinas’ critique of both Husserl and Heidegger can be situated within his overall critique of Western philosophy, or European thought, in general. As we stated above, for Levinas the history of Western philosophy is dominated by the concept of totality. For Levinas, “[Western] philosophy is an egology”. Husserl, as we have said, is seen to continue this tradition. Levinas clearly states in the opening sentence of “The Work of Edmund Husserl” (one of his most well-known texts on the founder of phenomenology), “Edmund

99 Manning, 9.

100 Ibid., 27. Davis too notes how Levinas’ earlier articles, such as ‘Martin Heidegger and Ontology’ (1932), attest to his view that "Heidegger's work appears as a new departure for phenomenology", 16. See also Moyn, 51.

101 See Moyn, 96 where he offers that Levinas’ one time positive association with Heidegger’s thought may have been the cause of a "guilty conscience" in Levinas after Heidegger's devastating collaboration with the Nazi movement in 1933. This personal unease can thus be seen as one of the motivations behind Levinas’ intense need to refute and “transcend his old master” to a profound and quite personal degree.

102 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 21.

103 Ibid., 44.
Husserl’s work, as revolutionary in its content as in its influence, nonetheless appears
faithful to the essential teachings of European civilization both in its themes and its
treatment of them”  

Levinas claims that Husserl’s phenomenological method “remains
faithful to the ontic model of truth” that, in Levinas’ opinion, had failed. Husserl is
seen to participate in the same totalizing tradition for which Hegel is famous (or in
Levinas’ case, infamous):

The first person present, in the cogito which was recognized by Hegel and Husserl
as being fundamental to modern philosophy, vouchsafes knowledge its congenital
aggregative urge and its self-sufficiency, prefiguring the systematic unity of
consciousness and the integration into the system – into the present, or the
synchrony, or the timelessness of the system – of all that is other.  

Heidegger is likewise seen to participate in and represent the Western tradition in all its
ontological glory. In his essay “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite”, Levinas
affirms this view when he states:

…let us first observe that this supremacy of the same over the other seems to be
integrally maintained in the philosophy of Heidegger… When Heidegger traces
the way of access to each real singularity [a particular being] through Being… he
is not destroying, but summing up a whole current of Western philosophy.  

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105 Levinas, "Philosophy and Awakening", 80-81.

106 Emmanuel Levinas, "From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time," in
Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New

107 See for example Levinas' essay "Is Ontology Fundamental?" This is one of
Levinas' most well-known critiques of Heidegger's work. We will take a closer look at
some of these criticisms in our section on Heidegger below.

108 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite", 51, emphasis mine. See also
Totality and Infinity, 44-46, where Levinas states that Heidegger’s philosophy
“presupposes the primacy of the same, which marks the direction of and defines the
whole of Western philosophy".
As we noted above, one of the main goals of Levinas’ philosophical project was to overthrow the totalizing Western tradition of ontology that prioritizes the Same over the Other, or Being over ethics. One could say it is a question of priority. What in the end is most important to philosophy, to humanity? What is the best lens through which to understand the meaning of the universe we live in, ourselves, and the others with whom we live amongst? What best allows us to view reality as such and without any preconceived biases? What, in the end, deserves the name of first philosophy? Is it through the lens of the intentional consciousness thus placing phenomenology first, as Husserl himself contended? Or was Heidegger correct in his elevation of Being and ontology to the place of first philosophy? Levinas will answer “no” to both options (and in the end it is really only one option as phenomenology is, for Levinas, ultimately within the ontological tradition – we will return to this point below) and instead offers his own candidate: the Other and ethics as first philosophy. And so, with Husserl and Heidegger seen as key representatives of this tradition (and as former masters whom he once upheld), Levinas focuses much of this critique on these two men and their philosophical thought. We will now look briefly at some of the key criticisms that Levinas raises against Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology.

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109 See Manning, 8 and 88-102. He envisions the argument between Levinas and Heidegger as over the question of priority. Which has the primacy of place: ontology (Being) or ethics? Heidegger answers for the former while Levinas most emphatically upholds the latter. As he states in *Totality and Infinity*, 304, "Morality is not a branch of philosophy but first philosophy."
Levinas’ Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology

Levinas’ relationship to Husserl and his phenomenological method is far from straightforward. While critical of the founder of phenomenology almost from the outset, Levinas also describes himself throughout his career as a phenomenologist and professes to be in some way faithful to the phenomenological tradition. He notes in the preface to his early work, *Time and the Other*, that his concerns there are basically phenomenological. While in many ways arguing against Husserl’s method, Levinas notes in the German preface to *Totality and Infinity* that this, his first major work, “wants to be and feels itself to be of phenomenological inspiration”. Many commentators on Levinas’ work agree with this estimation. In a different preface to the same text Levinas states quite clearly how the concepts he is dealing with “owe everything to the phenomenological method”. In his other ground-breaking work, *Otherwise than Being*

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113 See the Introduction to *Totality and Infinity* where the author, John Wild, comments that this text "is basically phenomenological in character", 12. See also Manning, 16, where he too notes how Levinas insists that he follows in the tradition of Husserl (and Heidegger). Manning quotes Levinas as saying in 1977: “In spite of everything, I think that what I do is phenomenology, even if it is not according to the rules laid down by Husserl, even if the entire Husserlian methodology is not observed.” See note 3, p.212.

or Beyond Essence, Levinas again states “Our analyses claim to be in the spirit of Husserlian philosophy, whose letter has been the recall in our epoch of the permanent phenomenology, restored to its rank of being a method for all philosophy”.\textsuperscript{115} In a radio interview of 1981 Levinas reminisces that “it was with Husserl that [he] discovered the concrete meaning of the very possibility of ‘working in philosophy’”.\textsuperscript{116} And even as late as 1982 and 1983, Levinas continues to insist that he is doing phenomenology: “I have attempted a ‘phenomenology’ of sociality starting from the face of the other person.”\textsuperscript{117} However, while these statements cannot be denied, it has also been noted how in many ways Levinas is in fact “striking out along new lines to formulate a general position which is opposed to Husserl’s transcendental idealism”.\textsuperscript{118} We noted above how Levinas acknowledges his carrying on in the spirit of Husserl in his major work, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence; however only a few sentences following that proclamation Levinas also states how his work “ventures beyond phenomenology”.\textsuperscript{119} In the end, while it is obvious that Levinas is indeed indebted to Husserl and his phenomenological method,\textsuperscript{120} Levinas ultimately finds it insufficient. Thus Levinas critiques Husserl for

\textsuperscript{115} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 183.

\textsuperscript{116} Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 28.

\textsuperscript{117} Emmanuel Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," in \textit{Time and the Other}, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 109. See also “From the One to the Other”, 148, where Levinas makes the same claim.

\textsuperscript{118} This is another comment by John Wild in his Introduction to \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 12.

\textsuperscript{119} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 183, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{120} See Emmanuel Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness," in \textit{Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other}, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York:
what he considers to be certain inadequacies in Husserl’s thinking, but he also manipulates Husserl’s phenomenological method, turning it on itself (or perhaps even against itself) to work for the ends Levinas desires. He proclaims that “it is necessary to think the Husserlian formulas beyond their formulations”. Let us now take a closer look at these criticisms before we then turn to Levinas’ unique transformation of Husserl’s method.

In 1930 Levinas published his dissertation, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology. As noted above, Husserl was obviously deeply influential in the development of Levinas’ own thought. While it is mostly an explication of Husserlian phenomenology, in the conclusion to his dissertation, Levinas offers one of his first concentrated criticisms of Husserl. Thus we can consider “Levinas’ first attempt to confront Husserl’s thought [as] also his first attempt to confront his own thought”. In sum, Levinas criticizes Husserl for “theoreticism, intellectualism and overlooking the

Columbia University Press, 1998), 123. Here he states: “Doubtless is it Husserl who is at the origin of my writings.”

See Peperzak, "Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics", 114 where he comments on how, after 1959, Levinas "discovers, re-evaluates, and exploits certain possibilities and suggestions of Husserl's work”.


That is, an explanation of phenomenology to the point at which Husserl had developed it at that time. See Peperzak, "Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics", 114-115 for which texts were available and used by Levinas in his dissertation.

See Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 153-158.

See the "Translator's Foreword" by Richard A. Cohen to Levinas' The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, xxxiv.
existential density and historical embeddedness of lived experience”. Already we see here the influence of Martin Heidegger, as Levinas himself admits. “In conformity with our goal [the study and presentation of Husserl’s philosophy], we shall not fear to take into account problems raised by other philosophers, by students of Husserl, and, in particular, by Martin Heidegger.”

The problem, for Levinas, seems to stem from how Husserl’s method unfolds. As we noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Husserl understood phenomenology to be a study of the structure of consciousness as such and how things in the world are presented to and so understood by this consciousness, for consciousness is necessarily “consciousness of…”, that is, intentionality. However, to gain access to the intentional consciousness that perceives phenomena as they are in themselves one must perform the phenomenological reduction, or epoché, which removes (brackets out) the biased “natural attitude” of everyday life. Levinas states:

“Philosophy [for Husserl] begins with the reduction. This is an act in which we consider life in all its concreteness but no longer live it.”

That is, the reduction only allows for a

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126 Critchley, "Introduction", 7. See also Moyn, 51, where he offers the same assessment.

127 Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, lv. See also the “Foreword to the Second Edition” of this text by Richard A. Cohen, xxiv. He comments that Levinas “appropriated certain of Heidegger’s basic criticisms of Husserl,… specifically the charge that the Husserlian phenomenology is biased in favor of theoretical consciousness, objectification, material things”.


129 Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 155, emphasis mine.
theoretical approach to life and the phenomena encountered therein. Levinas had noted earlier in his dissertation this potential problem with Husserl’s reduction. He notes that:

for Husserl, intuition is a theoretical act, and that inasmuch as other acts can reach being they must… be based on a representation… We must, therefore, observe that, for Husserl, being is correlative to theoretical intuitive life, to the evidence of an objectifying act. This is why the Husserlian concept of intuition is tainted with intellectualism and is possibly too narrow. None of Husserl’s attempts to introduce into the constitution of being categories which do not come from theoretical life succeeds in suppressing the primacy or the universality of the theoretical attitude.\(^\text{130}\)

The purpose of the reduction is to “neutralize” life as it is lived, human life as participating in the world and thus approaching the world with preconceptions and biases.\(^\text{131}\) Husserl saw that the “natural attitude” had to be put aside (bracketed) so one could indeed “get back to the things themselves” – the phenomena that present themselves to the intentional consciousness that intuitively perceives them.\(^\text{132}\) However, Levinas felt that this only “undermines the historicity of consciousness and gives intuition an intellectualist character”.\(^\text{133}\) Indeed, Levinas felt that for Husserl “the

\(^{130}\) Ibid., 94, first emphasis in the original, second emphasis mine. Peperzak too notes in “Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics”, 116 (emphasis original), that Levinas’ critique here is not so much of intentionality per se but of the “particular mode of intentionality and being as a primacy of theory” that Husserl favors that is problematic. This is an important point for, as we will see below, Levinas will take the concept of intentionality and rework it according to the parameters of his own thought later in his career.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 157.

\(^{132}\) See Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, 20.

\(^{133}\) Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 157. Peperzak helps to make this point clear in “Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics”, 117. He states (emphasis original): “The primacy of theory which, according to Levinas, is the secret of Husserl’s attitude towards Being, goes together with an ahistorical conception of Being. Empirical consciousness and history are looked at from a transcendental
superhistorical attitude of theory supports... all our conscious life." However, as opposed to this theoretical and ahistorical approach to life, Levinas offers that:

It is in life [as lived] that we must search for the origin of reality... This life has a historical character... Moreover, this historicity is not a secondary property of man as if man existed first and then became temporal and historical. Historicity and temporality form the very substantiality of man’s substance.

In a later work, Levinas notes how “Husserl describes theoretical knowledge in its most accomplished forms – objectifying and thematizing knowledge – as fulfilling the intention – empty intentionality fulfilling itself”. But, as the quote above reveals, Levinas disagrees with Husserl that the reduction to the level of theoretical life gives us true access to life as lived and the objects encountered therein. As we will see below, Levinas will come to question if the structure of intentionality (accessed by way of the reduction) is in fact the best way to approach things in the world; if it really enables us to get back to the things themselves. Already we see him leaning toward his definitive answer: “no”.

It has been noted how Levinas’ critique of Husserl has a particularly Heideggerian flavor to it. As if to make that connection explicit, Levinas immediately notes after his standpoint, the attainment of which is made possible by the phenomenological reduction."

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134 Ibid., 157.

135 Ibid., 156, emphasis mine.

136 Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness", 126.

137 See for example these essays: "Philosophy and Awakening", 81; "Nonintentional Consciousness", 127; and "From the One to the Other", 140.

138 See Davis, 14. He states: "The criticism of Husserl's intellectualism and the abstraction of the transcendental Ego from history derives from the fact that, even in his
call in favor of the historicity of consciousness how this historically situated understanding of consciousness “occupies a very important place in the thought of someone like Heidegger”.

Indeed, Levinas leaves one, ending his dissertation with a leading question, with the feeling that “he intends to philosophize beyond Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology toward and after the manner of the phenomenological ontology of Heidegger”. As we will see, Heidegger’s ontological project is certainly historically situated with his understanding of Dasein as being-in-the-world. Against Husserl’s preference for an ahistorical, theoretical consciousness, Levinas does here agree with Heidegger that life should be approached by philosophy as it is lived, that is, in all of its historical situatedness (although he will ultimately find Heidegger’s conception of Dasein just as inadequate as Husserl’s intentional consciousness).

In a later essay, “The Work of Edmund Husserl”, Levinas continues to uphold his assessment of Husserl’s phenomenology as overly theoretical and ahistorical. This is again, for Levinas, due to Husserl’s concept of intentionality as the preeminent character of consciousness and thus of phenomenology as the analysis of the structure of earliest written work, Levinas is reading Husserl through the powerful lens of Heidegger’s Being and Time.”

139 Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 156.

140 Ibid., 158. “But isn't the possibility of overcoming this difficulty or fluctuation in Husserl's thought provided with the affirmation of the intentional character of practical and axiological life?”

141 Manning, 27. He also states here that Levinas saw Heidegger as “the true heir of and rightful successor to Husserl”, as we noted above.
consciousness. “Phenomenology is intentionality.” As we know, Husserl emphasizes that consciousness is “consciousness of something”. What is more, intentionality “is essentially the act of bestowing a meaning (the Sinngebung)” which indicates that the intentionality of consciousness is involved in identifying phenomena, which is to represent them to the intentional consciousness. To think is to identify the being of things. However, as we know, for Husserl the only way to truly know a thing for what it is (as it appears to consciousness) is through the phenomenological reduction which suspends the “thesis of existence of objects” Levinas states:

The consciousness of which phenomenology supplies the analysis is in no way engaged in reality, or compromised by things or by history. It is not man’s psychological consciousness, but unreal, pure, transcendental consciousness. This pure, transcendental consciousness is, for Husserl, free. The phenomenological reduction liberates one from the “narrowness” of the natural attitude. Thus intentionality “becomes in Husserl the very liberation of man vis-à-vis the world. Sinngebung, the fact of thinking and bestowing a meaning, intellection, is not an involvement like any other; it is freedom”. This is nowhere made more clear, perhaps,

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144 Ibid., 59.

145 Ibid., 73.

146 Ibid., 71.

147 Ibid., 72.

148 Ibid., 75.
than in Husserl’s positing of the subject as a “monad”. For Husserl, “thought is an absolute autonomy” for the subject is answerable only to itself and is thus absolute and self-sufficient.\(^{149}\) Levinas notes how for Husserl, “in its inner recesses, the subject can account for the universe”.\(^{150}\) Thus:

There is in me a possibility of solitude, despite my actual sociality and the world’s presence for me. Precisely as a thought, I am a monad, an always possible monad in an always possible remove from my involvements. I am always in the process of going toward the whole in which I am, for I am always outside, entrenched in my thought.\(^{151}\)

Levinas concludes that “Husserl’s phenomenology is, in the final analysis, a philosophy of freedom, a freedom that is accomplished as, and defined by, consciousness”.\(^{152}\) But this is specifically for Husserl an intentional consciousness and “intentionality… characterizes a monad”.\(^{153}\) Far from viewing Husserl’s assessment positively, Levinas sees Husserl’s intentional consciousness as living in a monadic universe where solipsism is a very real possibility.\(^{154}\)

Human consciousness would be a perfect modality: the consciousness of an ego identical in its I think, aiming at and embracing, or perceiving, all alterity under its thematizing gaze. This aiming of thought is called intentionality.\(^{155}\)

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^{152}\) Ibid.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{155}\) Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation", 97, emphasis original.
Levinas contrasts this monadic subject who is alone in the world, for he or she is constituting the world with his or her intentional gaze, with Heidegger’s much more historically situated subject who is:

neither free nor absolute; [who] is no longer entirely answerable for itself. It is dominated and overwhelmed by history, by its origin, about which it can do nothing, since it is thrown into the world and this abandonment marks all its projects and powers.\(^{156}\)

Although Levinas will ultimately come to reject Heidegger for also envisioning the subject as a solitary ego, alone in the world; at this point, the picture of the world and the subject within it as offered by Heidegger is much more favorable to Levinas than Husserl’s solitary ego locked in its monadic universe. For in the end, can this solitary ego even encounter other subjects? Or, under the penetrating gaze of the intentional consciousness, are all others reduced to phenomena, objects for the consciousness to perceive, identify, and possess? As Levinas warned, solipsism has true potential here. Levinas alludes to this problem of intersubjectivity as early as his dissertation for it seems to him that Husserl’s phenomenological method with its reduction to the theoretical realm (thus leaving the concrete world behind) will have great difficulty encountering other persons. This is, for Levinas, the truly tragic consequence of Husserlian phenomenology.

Concrete life is not the solipsist’s life of a consciousness closed upon itself. Concrete being is not what exists for only one consciousness. In the very idea of concrete being is contained the idea of an intersubjective world. If we limit ourselves to describing the constitution of objects in an individual consciousness, in an ego, we will never reach objects as they are in concrete life but will reach only an abstraction. The reduction to an ego, the egological reduction, can be only

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\(^{156}\) Levinas, “The Work of Edmund Husserl”, 84. See also Peperzak, “Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics”, 118 where he states that Levinas’ critique of Husserl in “The Work of Edmund Husserl” is “wholly Heideggerian”.

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a first step toward phenomenology. We must also discover “others” and the intersubjective world.\textsuperscript{157}

Although Levinas then goes on to claim that “the intersubjective reduction and all the problems that arise from it have much preoccupied Husserl,”\textsuperscript{158} he ultimately will find Husserl’s treatment of the other person as far from adequate for in the end the other person remains for Husserl a phenomenological object – a noema of the corresponding noetic act of the subject’s constituting ego.\textsuperscript{159} We noted earlier in our explanation of Husserl’s phenomenology how the transcendental ego cannot account for other subjects but can only assume they exist via analogy to itself. Is this not the very picture of a monadic ego gathering all otherness into itself and reducing it to itself?

The assimilatory activity of transcendental constitution, in which disparate data of consciousness are brought to synthetic unity via categorical schematization, is presented in [Levinas’ work] as the epitome of the ontological reduction of the other to the same.\textsuperscript{160}

We will return to this point when we consider how Levinas rethinks Husserl’s reduction and intentionality so as to be able to account for alterity and the other person. However, first we would like to present one additional criticism Levinas offers against Husserl – his concept of time.

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Levinas, \textit{The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology}, 150, italicized in the original.
\item Ibid., 151.
\item See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma," in \textit{Collected Philosophical Papers}, ed. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987). In this essay he argues against conceiving of the Other as a mere phenomenon, to which the intentional consciousness reduces it; but rather as an enigma, “the intervention of a meaning which disturbs phenomena”, 70.
\item Atterton, 12, emphasis mine. Although Atterton is here refering to Levinas' critique of Kant, we find this point also agrees with Levinas' critique of Husserl.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
For Husserl, temporality is understood as essential to the very structure and existence of consciousness. For Husserl, “even before time is related to objects, it already characterizes transcendental consciousness itself in its effective accomplishment”. While temporality is part of the essence of phenomena that give themselves to consciousness over a period of time; it is more specifically because phenomena are given to an intentional consciousness that has temporality as its own self-constitutive structure that time relates to objects at all. Husserl envisions the temporality of the consciousness as in a permanent “flux” of the past, present, and future. Husserl also gives priority of place to the present, the precise moment in which objects are given to consciousness, though they are always linked to their past and future moments of givenness. Thus “consciousness of the present is always intertwined with consciousness of the past and of the future”, but the past and the future are always related to the present via retention and protention. For Husserl, we could say, time is also a matter of the monadic self,

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162 Bernet, “Levinas’ Critique of Husserl”, 84. See also Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 75.

163 Ibid.

recalling and anticipating all things in the present and into the presence of its own intentional consciousness.\textsuperscript{165}

Levinas finds this all quite objectionable. His critique of Husserl’s conception of time can be summed up in three points.\textsuperscript{166} First, as with intentionality, Levinas finds Husserl’s view of time to be overly theoretical and thus ahistorical. This is also a criticism he borrows from Heidegger. Second, Husserl’s conception of the future as \textit{protention} does not allow him to “take sufficient account of novelty, unpredictability and impossibility”.\textsuperscript{167} This is due to how the consciousness conceives of the future as merely “the fulfillment of a preceding anticipatory intention, which means that the new is never truly new”.\textsuperscript{168} Third, Husserl’s conception of the past as \textit{retention} is also unable to do justice to alterity. As with the future, the past is, for Husserl, always able to be “recuperated” or “retained” in the present moment of my consciousness. Again, there is no place for alterity which, for Levinas, “has to do with temporal distance, interruption and loss”.\textsuperscript{169}

We can try to summarize the three objections expressed by Levinas – the appropriation of the presence of things and person, the subjective possibilization of the present and the future, and the recuperation of the past – by citing the following sentence from \textit{Otherwise than Being}: ‘A subject would then be a power

\textsuperscript{165} See Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation", 102, where he gives an excellent summary of Husserl's phenomenology of time as a flux always and essentially related to the re-presentation of the living present - that is, still as the re-presentation of presence".

\textsuperscript{166} These three points are taken from Bernet, "Levinas' Critique of Husserl", 87-88.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 88.
for re-presentation in the quasi-active sense of the word: it would draw up the
temporal disparity into a present, into a simultaneousness’ (OB 133).170

Levinas will spend a great deal of time developing and explaining his unique conception
of time as always already and only that which comes from the Other – a conception of
time that stands in direct opposition to that of Husserl and Heidegger. We will look
briefly at Heidegger’s understanding of time below. We will also more thoroughly reflect
upon Levinas’ alternate conception of time there and again, briefly, in chapter two. For
now, suffice it to say that, for Levinas, Husserl’s internal time-consciousness that reduces
all to the present and presence of my intentional consciousness must

rest on a prior sociality with the Other where the interlocutors are distinct… This
sociality is irreducible to the immanence of representation, is other than the
sociality that would be reduced to the knowledge one can acquire about the Other
as a known object, and would already support the immanence of an ego having an
experience of the world.171

In his foreword to The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, Richard
Cohen suggests that “certain insights” can be seen in this early text by Levinas that point
to the future development of his thought.172 Two in particular catch his attention: the
pluralism of phenomenological analyses and the problem of breaking with naïveté. From
Husserl’s phenomenology “Levinas learns to account for a variety of levels of meaning in
a variety of ways, without reducing one to another”.173 However, for Husserl this
plurality of ways of analyzing phenomena all return to the constituting ego for “intuition

170 Ibid., 89.

171 Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation", 102-103.

172 Cohen, "Foreword to the Second Edition" of The Theory of Intuition in
Husserl’s Phenomenology, xxv.

173 Ibid.
is the final evidential court of appeal for all meaning”.  

This will ultimately be insufficient for Levinas because it does not truly appreciate any other approach to phenomena. He will critically question Husserl:

Is intentionality always based on a representation...? Or: Is intentionality the only mode of the “gift of meaning?” Is the meaningful always correlative to a thematization and a representation?...  

Levinas will, of course, answer in the negative – which brings us to Cohen’s second point. Husserl proposes the need to bracket or break away from the naïveté of the natural attitude. He does this, as we know, by means of the reduction. However the problem for Levinas (as for many others) is that Husserl never bothers to explain the motivation behind the reduction. It is (or at least seems to be) “entirely unmotivated” such that “nothing in the natural attitude leads to or produces a break with the realist naïveté which is the essence of the natural attitude”. Levinas states the problem in this way in the conclusion to his dissertation:

But by virtue of the primacy of theory, Husserl does not wonder how this “neutralization” of our life, which nevertheless is still an act of our life, has its foundation in life. How does man in the naïve attitude, immersed in the world, the “born dogmatic,” suddenly become aware of his naïveté? Is there here an act of freedom which is metaphysically important for the essence of our life?... [T]he freedom in question here... is the freedom of theory.

So not only does Husserl fail to show what motivates the move toward the reduction, this failure only furthers Levinas’ estimation of Husserl’s overly theoretical approach:

174 Ibid., xxvi.

175 Levinas, ”Nonintentional Consciousness”, 127.

176 Cohen, ”Foreword to the Second Edition” of The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, xxix, emphasis original.

Consequently, despite the revolutionary character of the phenomenological reduction, the revolution which it accomplishes is, in Husserl’s philosophy, possible only to the extent that the natural attitude is theoretical. The historical role of the reduction and the meaning of its appearance at a certain moment of existence are, for him, not even a problem.  

And so the question remains as to what does in fact motivate the break with the naïveté of the natural attitude? As we will see below, the answer for Heidegger is death, specifically, my own death. Levinas will reject both Husserl and Heidegger, proposing instead that it is “the encounter with the alterity of the other person” that “effects an irretrievable break from naïve immersion within the world”. It is this encounter with alterity that also inspires Levinas to rearticulate Husserl’s notion of intentionality and the reduction.

We noted above how Levinas always saw himself as working within the phenomenological tradition but yet felt the necessity “to think the Husserlian formulas beyond their formulations”. That is, Levinas’ treatment of the method created by Husserl “is a case of expanding the scope of phenomenology and reconsidering the very nature of phenomenality”. This expansion is of course by way of the ethical

\[\text{178} \text{ Ibid.}\]

\[\text{179} \text{ See Cohen, "Foreword to the Second Edition" of The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, xxx. Here he asks: “what does break the everyday self of its naïve realism, its vision of itself as within a given world,” which is, in fact, the “emergence of philosophy”? See also Peperzak, “Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics”, 118 and 121, where he too notes how this is a concern for Levinas that Husserl leaves unanswered.}\]

\[\text{180} \text{ Ibid., xxxi.}\]

\[\text{181} \text{ Levinas, "Hermeneutics and the Beyond", 66, emphasis mine.}\]

\[\text{182} \text{ Purcell, 33. See also Peperzak, Beyond, 8 where he comments on how Levinas’ method can be understood as “a personalized version of the phenomenological}\]
relationship with the other which, we will see, cannot be approached as a mere phenomenon if the other’s alterity is to be respected and remain intact. Jean-Luc Marion, a former student of Levinas, offers three innovations that Levinas’ ethical lens brings to the phenomenological method. "First, the parallelisms between noema and noesis, between meaning and signification, or between intention and fulfillment suffer an exception." As discussed in the introduction, for Husserl noema (the objects presenting themselves to consciousness) go hand in hand with their corresponding noesis (the intentional act of consciousness that perceives them) – you cannot have one without the other. There is a “parallelism” between them. Phenomena are given to the intentional consciousness, that is, the noema are given to the intentional consciousness which apprehends them through intuition, the noetic side of the equation, and in this way the phenomena are known by the consciousness and given meaning. However, Levinas claims that the Other is precisely that which eludes consciousness, is not a phenomenon but an “enigma”; and the relationship enacted with this Other, the ethical relationship that Levinas refers to as a “saying”, cannot be reduced to intentionality (which is meaning-giving, the Sinngebung). Thus “against the Husserlian parallelism, signification (as techniques inaugurated by Edmund Husserl and transformed by Martin Heidegger”.

Moyn too notes that “Levinas felt he could return to Husserl’s project and renew it from within”, 240.


184 Ibid., 317.

185 See Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma", 66, where he speaks of the Other who manifests him/herself without manifesting him/herself as an enigma. Also on p.65, Levinas describes the relationship with this Other as "a relationship that would not create
signifyingness) is imposed before and therefore without intuitive fulfillment, without noema, without meaning.”

Second, and directly resulting from the first point, “the intentional structure loses its primacy.” As we will see, Levinas will emphatically claim that “alterity occurs as a divergency and a past which no memory could resurrect as a present”. The Other, who is alterity and, as such, an enigma, is beyond all cognition because the Other is “already too old for the game of cognition, because it does not lend itself to the contemporaneousness that constitutes the force of the time tied in the present, because it imposes a completely different version of time”. What is more, the ethical relation also comes from a time preceding that of intentional consciousness.

“Responsibility is anterior to all the logical deliberation summoned by reasoned decision…. In the ethical anteriority of responsibility, for-the-other, in its priority over deliberation, there is a past irreducible to a presence that it must have been.” Because the time of the Other and ethical responsibility are irreducible to the time of intentionality, intentionality, so claims Levinas, no longer holds primacy of place. Third, because the ethical relationship with the Other is prior to intentionality, it does not therefore require the evidence of a phenomenon given to the intentional consciousness,

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186 Marion, "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference", 317.
187 Ibid.
188 Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma", 68.
189 Ibid., 71.
190 Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation", 111.
but rather requires “the sincerity of the I”. \(^\text{191}\) Sincerity, according to Levinas, “is not an attribute of saying; it is saying that realizes sincerity”. \(^\text{192}\) In saying, the ethical relationship, the self (the I) manifests itself as sincere toward the other – not trying to comprehend or possess or reduce the other to the self, but respecting the alterity of the other and subjecting oneself to the responsibility it bears for the other even before its intentional consciousness comes to bear upon the world. Sincerity is “the accomplishment of the straightforward relation between my open face… to another face”. \(^\text{193}\) As such, sincerity for Levinas liberates us from and destroys the terms of the ontological difference. \(^\text{194}\) This is a far cry from the phenomenological method as envisioned by Husserl.

It is perhaps nowhere more evident how Levinas moves beyond Husserl than in Levinas’ reformulation of the concept of intentionality and the technique of the reduction. Levinas calls into question the “dominant conception of the received philosophy, according to which thought is fundamentally knowing, that is to say, intentionality”. \(^\text{195}\) He believes that intentionality must be “saved from Husserl” but also “deployed against

\(^{191}\) Marion, "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference", 318, italicized in the original.

\(^{192}\) Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 143.

\(^{193}\) Marion, "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference", 318, emphasis original.

\(^{194}\) Ibid.

\(^{195}\) Levinas, "From the One to the Other", 140.
Levinas makes it quite clear that, for him, “intentionality, where thought remains an *adequation* with the object, does not define consciousness at its fundamental level,” but rather that “all knowing qua intentionality already presupposes the idea of infinity, which is preeminently *non-adequation*.” This is because, as we will more fully explain below, for Levinas consciousness, time, the very subjectivity of the *I*, comes not through intentional consciousness but in the encounter with the Other who is not a phenomenon but an enigma. As we saw above, Levinas’ reworking of phenomenology breaks down the parallelism or *adequation* between the *noema* and the *noesis*, between the object (specifically here, the Other) and the intentional consciousness (or simply, the self). This is because the Other is not a phenomenon but an enigma who overwhelms the consciousness.

The Other is not an object but a distance revealed in the non-adequation between my idea of the Other and the Other itself…. The Other exceeds what I say of him or her as the disengagement of every form of representation I may have in place to comprehend him or her….. An enigma comes to pass as the overwhelming of consciousness, the taking of consciousness by surprise. The Other surprises and interrupts consciousness because it does not conform to what was expected…

In this way, Levinas shows that, far from being the source and foundation of all knowledge and understanding, “the *cogito* is not the secure foundation it was first made

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196 Moyn, 243. See also Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 32, where he briefly comments on how intentionality can be developed beyond Husserl. “The relationship with the Other can be sought as an irreducible intentionality, even if one must end by seeing that it ruptures intentionality.”

197 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 27, emphasis original.

out to be” because there is something that exceeds its all-encompassing grasp.\(^{199}\) And so, if intentionality cannot account for the Other, Levinas proposes that perhaps “nonintentionality” can. Levinas questions whether “beneath the gaze of reflective [intentional] consciousness understood as self-consciousness, the nonintentional gaze, lived contrapuntally to the intentional, retains and renders up its true meaning”.\(^{200}\) But how does he come to discern this nonintentional consciousness beneath and prior to the intentional conscious? Husserl actually points the way for Levinas.

In two articles from 1959, “The Ruin of Representation” and “Intentionality and Metaphysics”,\(^{201}\) Levinas proposes that “the transcendental movement Husserl discovers in intentionality, concealed by the naïve vision of the object, accomplishes metaphysical, ontologically irreducible, original or ultimate relations”.\(^{202}\) The transcendental movement of intentionality is the fact that, through intentionality, consciousness is not simply aware of objects, but aware of objects that are beyond or transcendent to it.\(^{203}\) The phenomena consciousness encounters are not “made up” within the consciousness and projected outward into a fabricated world, rather, as Husserl insists, they are quite “real”. Levinas focuses on this transcendental aspect of intentionality so as to manipulate his use of it to his own ends. While it is true that “intentionality means that all consciousness is

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 394.

\(^{200}\) Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness”, 128.


\(^{202}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{203}\) Levinas, "The Ruin of Representation", 114.
consciousness of something,” Levinas insists “above all that every object calls forth and as it were gives rise to the consciousness through which its being shines and, in doing so, appears”. That is, Levinas focuses not on the intentional consciousness, as Husserl does, but instead on that which calls consciousness forth – the things, events, people, etc. which are beyond, or transcendent to, consciousness. Eventually, Levinas will focus in on the face of the Other as that which(par excellence), exceeds and overwhelms consciousness. However that is many steps later. At this point, in his struggle to break away from Husserl, Levinas takes a first step through sensibility where “the sensible is given immediately, before being sought”. That is: “Before thinking or perceiving objects, the subject is steeped in it.” Levinas locates this pre-intentional (pre-theoretical) consciousness at the level of the body because for Husserl (and it would seem that at this point, Levinas agrees with him) “the whole of the sensible is essentially kinaesthetic” and “kinaestheses are the sensations of the body’s movement”. Thus there is a pre-intentional, incarnate sensibility. However, although Husserl does acknowledge this pre-intentional level of consciousness, Levinas finds that still for Husserl “the idea of intentionality dominates all of his analyses of sensibility”. While Husserl insists on giving priority of place to the theoretical, intentional consciousness; Levinas here finds the possibility to move beyond Husserl by moving beneath or deeper than intentionality to a pre-theoretical, incarnational level founded upon sensibility. Levinas states: “This

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204 Ibid., 119, emphasis original.

205 Levinas, “Intentionality and Metaphysics”, 124, emphasis mine.

206 Ibid., 125.

207 Ibid.
phenomenology of kinaesthetic sensibility brings out intentions that are not at all objectifying, and reference points that do not function as objects.\footnote{208} He then concludes:

But this new way of understanding the body presupposes that the ultimate event in consciousness is not produced as a sort of an objectifying intentionality, and that other forms of \textit{transcendence toward being} (or of truth) are produced without being interpretable in terms of the logic of objects.\footnote{209}

And so Levinas has found a way, through Husserl, to move beyond or deeper than Husserl. What is more, it is here, in the breakdown of intentionality, that Levinas finds an opening to the possibility of ethics.

To put an end to the conception that thought and the subject-object relation are coextensive, is to offer a glimpse of a relationship with the other that is neither an intolerable limitation of the thinker; nor a simple absorption of this other into an ego, in the form of a content. Where all \textit{Sinngebung} was the work of a sovereign ego, the other could in fact only be absorbed in a representation. But in a phenomenology where the activity of totalizing and totalitarian representation is already exceeded in its own intention, where representation already finds itself placed within horizons that it somehow had not willed, but with which it cannot dispense, an ethical \textit{Sinngebung} becomes possible, that is, a \textit{Sinngebung} essentially respectful of the Other.\footnote{210}

This move to ethics is given as a tantalizing hint at the end of “The Ruin of Representation”, alluding to what will come in the development of Levinas’ thought.\footnote{211} In

\footnote{208} Ibid., 126. 
\footnote{209} Ibid., 128, emphasis original. 
\footnote{210} Levinas, "The Ruin of Representation", 121. 
\footnote{211} See Craig R. Vasey, "Emmanuel Levinas: from Intentionality to Proximity," \textit{Philosophy Today} 25, no. 3 (Fall 1981). This article offers an excellent commentary on Levinas’ progression from recognizing the incarnational consciousness upon which intentionality lies to his concept of proximity which is “pure sensation and irreducible to consciousness of… or to knowledge”, 186. Ultimately for Levinas, proximity is understood as characteristic of the manifestation of the face of the Other as irreducible alterity and characterizes the ethical relationship of the one-for-the-other. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Language and Proximity," in \textit{Collected Philosophical Papers}, ed. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univeristy Press, 1987), 121 and123. See also, Bernet,
two later essays, both published in 1983, “Nonintentional Consciousness” and “From the One to the Other: Transcendence and Time”, Levinas returns to this notion of a pre-intentional (nonintentional) consciousness, giving it a specifically ethical thrust. As we know, Levinas calls into question whether intentionality truly is the fundamental structure of consciousness. And as we have seen, Levinas also questions if the structure of intentionality itself must always be based on representation and thematization, if thought is “devoted from the start to adequation and truth”.\(^{212}\) Even beyond sensibility, Levinas notices a curious aspect of consciousness in that, while it is directly aware of sensations and objects in the world, it is also indirectly aware of itself and its own mental activities.\(^{213}\) However, as indirect awareness, this form of consciousness has no intentional aim; it is thus “nonintentional”.\(^{214}\) Intentional consciousness is directly aimed at phenomena whose self-given presence fulfills the intentional aim; whereas nonintentional consciousness of the self is:

> without any voluntary aim; nonintentional consciousness exercising itself as knowledge, unbeknownst to itself, of the active self that represents world and objects to itself…. A consciousness of consciousness, “indirect” and implicit, without initiative, proceeding from a nonintending I.\(^ {215}\)

What is more, as with the intentionality of sensation which Levinas locates “beneath” intentional consciousness; this indirect consciousness is found “beneath” or prior to the

\(^{212}\) Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness", 127.

\(^{213}\) Ibid.

\(^{214}\) Ibid., 127-128.

\(^{215}\) Levinas, "From the One to the Other", 141, italicized in the original.
direct consciousness of intentionality. In this way Levinas calls the intentional
consciousness *active* while this indirect, nonintentional consciousness is *passive*, “being-
without-having-chosen-to-be”.\(^{216}\) Levinas goes a step further and indicates that at the
level of intentional consciousness we find our conscience, or “knowledge of self”; while
at the level of nonintentional consciousness we find our “bad conscience”:

> without intentions, without aims, without the protective mask of the character
> contemplating himself in the mirror of the world, self-assured and affirming
> himself. Without name, position, or titles. A presence that fears presence, stripped
> bare of all attributes. A nakedness that is not that of unveiling or the exposure of
> truth.\(^{217}\)

This bad conscience, which is passive and timid, puts the intentional consciousness
(conscience) into question, but it also puts it to the question – “having to answer for its
right to be”.\(^{218}\) Finding inspiration in Pascal, Levinas notes how the self becomes hateful
to itself when it realizes that “my ‘being in the world’ or my ‘place in the sun’ [is] ‘the
beginning and the prototype of the usurpation of the whole earth’”.\(^{219}\) Levinas sees in the
bad conscience that is prior to the “good conscience”, which is consciousness and
preservation of self, a questioning of this very self-assertion, an accusation against itself

\(^{216}\) Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness”, 128-129.

\(^{217}\) Ibid., 129.

\(^{218}\) Ibid., 130. See also Levinas, “From the One to the Other”, 144, italicized in the
original: “Here is being as bad conscience, in this questioning; being-put-in-question, but
also put to the question, having to answer – the birth of language in responsibility; having
to speak, having to say *I*, being in the first person. Being precisely myself; but,
henceforth, in the assertion of its being as myself, having to answer for its right to be.”
We see here not only the crumbling of the intentional consciousness and intentionality in
general; but also Levinas’ claim that language and subjectivity itself are founded upon
the encounter with the other and the ethical relation. We will consider these themes more
fully below.

\(^{219}\) Ibid.
for its very existence. This is due to nothing in myself per se but due to the encounter with and recognition of the other person whose “place in the sun” my very being usurps. The other comes close to me (proximity) and is encountered in the face.\textsuperscript{220} When I perceive the face of the other person I hear “a demand made of me from the depths of an absolute solitude; a demand addressed to me or an order issued, a putting in question of my presence and my responsibility”.\textsuperscript{221} Struck by this realization, I become afraid. But I am not in any way afraid for myself, rather I fear for the other person. Specifically, I fear for their death.\textsuperscript{222} Morality is thus awakened in this fear for the other person’s death.

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. Its meaning begins in the inter-human. Death signifies primordially in the very proximity of the other man or in sociality.\textsuperscript{223}

And so, no longer concerned for myself, my bad conscience reveals “an ethical disturbance of being, beyond its good conscience of being ‘with respect to that being itself’”.\textsuperscript{224} What is more, this is what, for Levinas, makes us truly human: “the return to the interiority of nonintentional consciousness, to bad conscience, to its possibility of fearing injustice more than death, of preferring injustice undergone to injustice

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\textsuperscript{220} Levinas, “From the One to the Other”, 145.
\textsuperscript{221} Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness”, 130.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 130-131. This fear for the death of the other person is also in direct opposition to Heidegger’s insistence on the anguish over my own death. We will look more fully at the different approaches to death that Heidegger and Levinas take below.
\textsuperscript{223} Levinas, "From the One to the Other", 146.
\textsuperscript{224} Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness”, 131.
\end{flushright}
committed, and what justifies being to what guarantees it”. Levinas concludes: “To be or not to be is probably not the question par excellence.” Thus has Levinas shown that intentionality is not only not the foundational structure of consciousness, but beneath and deeper than intentionality is a nonintentional consciousness that manifests itself as a “bad conscience”, questioning the very existence of the self in the name of ethical responsibility for the other.

We now must ask, if the realm of the intentional consciousness is reached via the phenomenological, or egological reduction; how does one come to the realm of the nonintentional consciousness, which Levinas actually states is a “reduced consciousness”?

Levinas had claimed in his dissertation that “the reduction to an ego, the egological reduction, can be only a first step toward phenomenology. We must also discover “others” and the intersubjective world”. And so Levinas proposes an “intersubjective reduction”. While admitting that “this is no longer Husserl” for whom the reduction “remained to the last a passage from a less perfect to a more perfect knowledge,” that is on the level of “knowledge of being and the Same”, Levinas

225 Ibid., 148. These are also the concluding words of “Nonintentional Consciousness”, 132.
227 Levinas, “From the One to the Other”, 141.
228 Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology, 150, italicized in the original.
229 Levinas, “Philosophy and Awakening”, 86.
230 Ibid., 87.
231 Ibid., 84.
sees in the concept of the reduction the possibility for something much more profound. In what Levinas coins “the intersubjective reduction”, “the subjectivity of the subject shows itself in the traumatism of wakefulness”. In what Levinas coins “the intersubjective reduction”, “the subjectivity of the subject shows itself in the traumatism of wakefulness”.232 A wakefulness that is traumatic to the subject because it is an awakening to the realization that “my place in the world” is a usurpation of the place for the other, is in fact injustice. It is a traumatizing awakening, like a slap in the face, to the fact that the self-centered picture of reality painted by the intentional consciousness is far from adequate and is quite possibly terroristic. In this traumatic awakening:

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\text{[t]he explication of the meaning that an I other than me has for me – primordial me – describes the way in which the Other Person tears me away from my hypostasis, from the here, at the heart of being or the center of the world in which, privileged, and in this sense primordial, I place myself. But the ultimate meaning of my “mineness” is revealed in this tearing away. In conferring the meaning of “I” to the other,… the here and there come to be inverted into one another…. I see myself from the other’s vantage point; I expose myself to the other person; I have things to account for.}^{233}
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If Husserl conceived the reduction as the means of breaking away from the naïveté of the natural attitude so to “get back to the things themselves” as they present themselves to consciousness; Levinas rather sees Husserl’s reduction as unable to grasp life in all its reality for life is that which is lived; it is not theoretical but historical. And so if we are to truly “get back to the things themselves” we must break with the naïve attitude that

\[^{232}\text{Ibid., 86.}\]

\[^{233}\text{Ibid, emphasis original. Two things are of note in this quotation. Not only is Levinas here offering a radical restructuring of Husserl's epoché, he is also aiming a critique of Heidegger's notion of "mineness" (to which we will turn shortly). In addition, we would like to note the curious notion of "inversion" offered here where "I see myself from the other's vantage point". We will return to this issue in chapter four where we argue for a point of connection between Levinas' ethical relationship and Stein's concept of empathy, particularly here, reiterated empathy.}\]
believes the self occupies the sovereign place of centrality and priority in the universe. A true epoché suspends the sovereignty of the self. It is “a suspension of its [the subject’s] ideal priority, with its negation of all otherness through murder or through encompassing and totalizing thought”. It is in this “laying aside by the self of its sovereignty [that] ethics signifies”. And so the intersubjective reduction is, for the self, the trauma of sobering up and awakening to one’s responsibility for the Other, that is, ethics. The reduction is, as Husserl envisioned it, the way to free oneself from the natural attitude; but here, through Levinas’ reworking of these concepts, the “natural attitude” is that which conceives of the self as sovereign and “freedom” is actually liberation from the self so as to serve the Other. And so what the reduction enables is not knowledge of things but responsibility for the Other.

[T]he Intersubjective Reduction describes the astonishing or traumatizing… possibility of a sobering up in which the I, facing the Other, is freed from itself, and awakens from dogmatic slumber. The Reduction, repeating as it were the disturbance of the Same by the Other who is not absorbed into the Same… describes the awakening, beyond knowledge, to an insomnia or watchfulness… of which knowledge is but one modality…. It is the psychism of responsibility for the other…

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234 See Vasey, 185-186, where, in commenting on Levinas’ essay "Language and Proximity", he offers how for Levinas "the return to the things themselves does not take place first in consciousness of..., but in sensation which is immediate contact". As we saw above, sensation is irreducible to the intentional consciousness. What is more, for Levinas, "proximity is pure sensation" and "proximity par excellence is the proximity of the Other", which is ethics.

235 Levinas, "From the One to the Other", 147.

236 Ibid.

237 Levinas, "Philosophy and Awakening", 87, emphasis original.
Marion sums up Levinas’ reconstitution of the reduction in two points. First, the reduction for Levinas is not, as for Husserl, to the realm of theory and knowledge, but to the realm of ethics, “to the one-for-the-other of responsibility… the reduction to restlessness”. Second, the “referential pole” to which the reduction refers is not the autonomous I of intentional consciousness but rather “the subject subjected to a subjection, subordinated to the call which summons it to expose itself”. It is a subject who does not say “I” at all, but rather says “me” as in “me voici” (here I am). That is, “the subject remains a subject only by subjection; in no way by domination; the nominative I yields to the accusative me”. And so Levinas rethinks both the structure of intentionality and the technique of the reduction showing both his indebtedness to Husserl but also the necessity he feels to move beyond Husserl so to account for alterity, the other person, intersubjectivity, and ethics.

There is but one last brief comment we would like to offer by way of a bridge from Levinas’ critique of Husserl to that of Heidegger. We have of course commented on how, at least in his first encounter, Levinas saw Heidegger as the true heir to Husserl and Heidegger’s work as the future of phenomenology. And we know that, in the end, Levinas rejected Heidegger’s ontological project as a continuation of the Western philosophical project Levinas finds so inadequate. However, there is a further link that is worth mentioning between Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s ontology that is

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238 See Marion, "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference", 318-320.
239 Ibid., 319. Marion is here quoting from Otherwise than Being, 45.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid, italicized in the original.
realized in a point of critique that Levinas’ raises against them. For Levinas, Husserl’s phenomenological project participates in the ontological project of the West which finds its culmination in Heidegger. For Levinas, Husserl’s phenomenology is just as ontological as Heidegger’s project. As early as his dissertation, which was of course influenced by Heidegger’s interpretation of Husserl, Levinas endeavors to show how Husserl’s phenomenology is actually a “full-fledged ontology”. It can be argued that this assessment of Husserl is due, in part to Levinas’ reading of Husserl through Heidegger, but perhaps it is also a fair assessment from the perspective of what Husserl himself claims phenomenology allows us to do. We have already discussed how the traditional task of (Western) philosophy is presented by Levinas as the quest for the truth of the being of things. Husserl claims that phenomenology is the method alone which gives us access to these things as they are in themselves – is this not an ontological claim? To perceive things is to perceive the being of things. Levinas states that the questions raised by phenomenology concern, in fact, “the meaning of the very existence of being”.

What is more, consciousness itself is seen as a mode of being and as that

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242 Cohen, Translator's Foreword to The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, xxxv. Levinas himself confirms this in his interview with Philippe Nemo. See Ethics and Infinity, 39. See also Peperzak, "Phenomenology-Ontology-Metaphysics", 115. Manning too comments that one of the goals Levinas had for his dissertation was “to demonstrate not only that Husserl’s phenomenology is not nearly so opposed to Heidegger’s investigation of Being as it may appear, but also that it actually lays the important groundwork for Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology”, 19.

which “carries in itself the guarantee of its being”. And so, it would seem, “Husserl’s phenomenology is at its heart actually an ontology, a study of Being”. Levinas states:

The thesis of the ontological value inherent to subjectivity and to its intrinsic meaning constitutes the true basis of all Husserl’s thought. To be is to be experienced or to have a meaning in life. The phenomenological reduction has no other goal than to present us with our genuine self, although it presents it only to a purely contemplative and theoretical sight which considers life but is distinct from it.

We are by now well aware of Levinas’ critique that Husserl is too theoretical and that thus “Husserlian phenomenology can reveal only a truncated version of human being, one that focuses on the relation of cognition between human being and the world that it constitutes in consciousness at the expense of all other ways in which this relation may manifest itself”. However, phenomenology is still (at least in Levinas’ estimation), at heart, an explanation of the meaning of being, albeit not the fullness of being, but only a theoretical version of it. This is where Heidegger enters the picture, picking up at the point where Husserl ends, considering life as it is actually lived, in its historical situatedness. Levinas states: “Only Heidegger dares to face this problem deliberately”. Heidegger can thus be seen as developing Husserl’s phenomenology

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244 Ibid., 34.

245 Manning, 25.

246 Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 149.

247 Manning, 28.

248 Ibid., 26 and 28.

“along existential pathways”.  

Indeed, this is yet another way to point out how phenomenology can be understood as ontology. However for Heidegger, as opposed to Husserl, “consciousness does not constitute Being but is simply the means Being has to reveal itself”. Rather than limiting himself to the issue of consciousness, Heidegger addressed the “question of the meaning of Being” itself in all its fullness. At least at first Levinas applauded this endeavor. However in the end, as with Husserl’s phenomenology and perhaps even more so, Heidegger’s ontology had to be sublimated by ethics. To return to our original point, if in the end Heidegger’s ontology is “weighed in the scales and found wanting”, so too is Husserl’s phenomenology and, here, for the very same reason – both of their philosophical projects are ontologies. We turn now to Levinas’ critique of Heidegger.

Levinas’ Critique of Heideggerian Ontology

If Levinas’s relationship with Husserl is not direct and clear-cut, his relationship with Heidegger might be even more complex. We noted above how in many ways Levinas is “striking out along new lines to formulate a general position which is opposed to Husserl’s transcendental idealism” but he is also and perhaps even more so forging

\[\text{\footnotesize 250 Michael Purcell, Levinas and Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 78.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 251 Ibid, emphasis original.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 252 Manning, 26.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 253 Ibid., 29.}\]
new paths in opposition “to Heidegger’s hermeneutic philosophy of Being”\textsuperscript{254}. Indeed, “Levinas’s philosophy is a constant arguing against and an interpreting otherwise than Heidegger so as to propose alternative interpretations and to construct an alternative philosophy, an ethical philosophy”.\textsuperscript{255} A point by point elucidation of Levinas’ philosophy in relationship to Heidegger’s philosophy is beyond the scope of this work, thus we will consider only a few key areas and themes where Levinas diverges from and in response to Heidegger.

As noted above, one of Levinas’ key criticisms against Husserl, à la Heidegger, is how overly theoretical and ahistorical his phenomenology is. At least at first, as we know,\textsuperscript{256} Levinas found in Heidegger’s existential development of Husserl’s phenomenology a way to approach life as it is truly lived, in the world.\textsuperscript{257} From Heidegger Levinas gained an appreciation of the “verbality” of Being – that being (existence) is not a substantive, but a verb, an event.\textsuperscript{258} And this event of being happens precisely \textit{in the world}. This is exactly how Heidegger conceives of \textit{Dasein} – as ‘Being-in-the-world’.\textsuperscript{259} \textit{Dasein} is that being for whom its Being is a concern for it, and its

\textsuperscript{254} See the Introduction to \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 12.

\textsuperscript{255} Manning, 9.

\textsuperscript{256} As alluded to in his dissertation. Levinas, \textit{The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology}, 154.

\textsuperscript{257} For an excellent and assessable overview of Heidegger's key themes and concepts see the two chapters (6 and 7) dedicated to him in Dermot Moran's, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}.

\textsuperscript{258} Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 38.

\textsuperscript{259} Moran, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 238.
Being, its existence, is an event that happens in a world into which it always and already ‘thrown’. Concern, or care (Sorge), for its own Being marks the structure of Dasein because this world into which it is thrown contains things and others that Dasein always considers in relation to itself – as to how they may affect Dasein or be used by Dasein for its own self-actualization. In this way, we see that Dasein is also characterized by potentiality.

Dasein is an existential project, a project charged with immense possibilities. “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself... and comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility”...260

Here is where we easily see Heidegger’s acquaintance with phenomenology.

Dasein assigns meaning to things. Objects encountered within the world are interpreted in terms of possibility, but in terms of possibility for Dasein. Dasein is the centripetal point of significance, and the world is a referential totality which beings from, and returns to, Dasein. In short, the Heideggerian environment is instrumentalised.261

Just as with Husserl’s intentional consciousness, Dasein gives meaning to things. This brings us to Heidegger’s designation of the ‘present-at-hand’ (Vorhandenheit) vs. the ‘ready-to-hand’ (Zuhandenheit).262 Let us elaborate with an example.263 Hiking through the woods I come across a fallen branch. As merely an object lying there which I observe, it is ‘present-to-hand’, “simply there”. However, when I realize that it is the perfect shape and size for me to use as a walking stick, it becomes “available” to me, ‘ready-to-hand’,

260 Purcell, 75-76, italicized in the original.

261 Ibid., 76, italicized in the original.

262 See Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 233.

263 Heidegger's famous example is, of course, the hammer. See Purcell, 76-77.
as something “useful” and (this is the crucial part) its meaning changes. “In relation to me, it acquires significance and possibilities…. It acquires another significance in view of my concerns...” Phenomenologically, the stick is never just a stick. “It is what it is because of the meaning-structure in which it is situated, a meaning structure which I assign.” This is of course similar to Husserl’s view of the intentional consciousness as that which constitutes the world. And, as with Husserl, for Heidegger the referential point is not the world but the self, Dasein.

In other words, things are what they are in terms of their significance for Dasein and its possibilities. Thus is it that the task ‘towards-which’ the [stick] is directed [helping me hike], and ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ it is used [so to get through the woods more easily] is ultimately ‘for-the-sake-of’ Dasein, whose concern is for its own Being. Thus does Heideggerian phenomenology have ontological intent.

Now of course Dasein is not the only being (not the only Dasein) in the world. Heidegger recognizes that being-in-the-world also necessarily means ‘being-with’ (Mitsein) others. The world we live in is one we share with others – a ‘with-world’ (Mitwelt). However, and this is an interesting point that Levinas will find problematic, while ‘being-with-others’ is considered by Heidegger as an “a priori existential category of Dasein,” it does not require that any others actually exist. That is, even if there are no others, Dasein still exists as ‘being-with’ but in this case these others are experienced

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264 Purcell, 76-77.
265 Ibid., 76, emphasis original.
266 Purcell, 77, emphasis original.
268 Ibid., 242, italicized in the original.
Another curious aspect of Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s interaction with others brings in the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity.\(^{270}\)

Depending on how Dasein actualizes the potentiality of itself and depending on how it relates to others, Dasein exists either authentically or inauthentically. Authentic existence is directly related to Heidegger’s concept of ‘mineness’ (Jemeinigkeit). My existence is always and only my own, I possess and “own” it. I can say ‘I’ because my Being is my own and not ‘yours’. But I can also say ‘I’ because I have been given my Being to own as my own. That is, Heidegger conceives of Being as generously bestowing itself so that beings may come into existence. He does this by thinking of Being through the expression es gibt – it gives (itself).\(^{271}\) Dasein realizes and owns this beingness as its very own. When I live in and from this realization of ‘mineness’, I am living authentically. “Being authentic is a kind of potential-to-be-whole: humans have the urge to get their lives together, to collect themselves, to gather themselves into wholeness.”\(^{272}\)

However in Heidegger’s estimation, rather than living authentic lives, most of the time we live inauthentically. When we live inauthentically, our lives are characterized by a neutral ‘mood’ of ‘everydayness’. “In this everyday mood, we are not really ourselves at all, we are simply the same as everyone else; we are in the state of ‘das Man’ or ‘the

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\(^{269}\) Ibid.

\(^{270}\) Ibid., 239-240.

\(^{271}\) Peperzak, To the Other, 18.

\(^{272}\) Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, 240.
If Dasein allows itself to get lost or sucked into this anonymous collective, it understands itself and lives its life as defined for it by others. What is so tragic for Heidegger about this inauthentic life is that “Dasein’s lostness in the they constitutes its fallenness; Dasein has lost its hold upon itself and its own possibilities and potential for its own authenticity.” The only way to amend this problem, this ‘fallenness’, is for Dasein to withdraw from the they, from others who cloud and distort Dasein’s self-comprehension. This withdrawal can be understood as a form of individualization.

Thus, Dasein achieves itself or actualizes itself… by retrieving itself from its lostness in the they by resolutely individualizing itself, which enables Dasein to actualize its authentic possibilities… Dasein can retrieve itself from its fallenness and come to comprehend itself truly only within “the solitude of authentic existence.”

And so, for Heidegger, life with others is plagued with the potential of inauthenticity. Dasein can live authentically with others, but then “sociality is completely found in the solitary subject”. Dasein must actualize its own life authentically, that is as a radical and solitary individualization, and maintain this separateness even when in relation with others. And so Heidegger analyses the social relation, as with everything in his philosophical framework, from the referential point of Dasein. The social relation can

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273 Ibid., 242, italicized in the original. 'Das Man' is also referred to as 'the they' or 'they-self'. See Manning, 46.

274 Manning, 46 and 51.

275 Ibid., 46, italicized in the original.

276 Ibid., 47, italicized in the original.

277 Ibid., 50.
either help or hinder *Dasein* “in its solitary task of actualizing its own possibilities”.\footnote{Ibid., 52.} *Dasein*’s concern here is, as always, for itself and its own potential for being. Levinas will of course raise quite the ‘red flag’ over this conception of the social relation, as we will see. For Heidegger, it is a matter of choice – ‘to be’ authentically or not.\footnote{Ibid., 51.} For Heidegger the better choice is of course the former, which is a life of radical individualization.

*Dasein*’s self-concern is nowhere more evident than in Heidegger’s interpretation of death.\footnote{Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 240-241.} It is also here where the notion of *authenticity* achieves its most profound level. ‘Mineness’ comes into play here too. We are finite creatures. We are all going to die. In this way our Being is actually a ‘being-toward-death’. For Heidegger, my death is *my own*. No one can die for me and I cannot experience another person’s death. Now, if I approach death in an inauthentic way (living from the interpretation of the *they*), death will really not concern me very much. Either it isn’t a concern because it is someone else’s death, or my death isn’t much to bother about because it is so far in the future.\footnote{Manning, 67-68.} However, if one approaches death in an authentic way a proper understanding of death and even of one’s self becomes possible. Four things become evident in the authentic approach to death.\footnote{Ibid., 68-69.} First, death is indeed appreciated as one’s own death, as ‘mine’. It is one of the many potentialities in the project of my Being. I accept it as truly my own.
Second, and as a direct consequence of owning my own death, *Dasein* also comes to appreciate and own itself as ‘Being-toward-death’. Naturally a little anxiety might ensue as one faces up to the true potential of one’s own death. Anxiety is an important theme for Heidegger.

[Anxiety is] a structural possibility of our existence which brings us face to face with the problematic nature of our lives and the meaning we attach to living. Anxiety is distinctive in its world-disclosing possibilities…. Anxiety shows up precisely the way in which we are free to choose and take hold of ourselves.  

That is, when *Dasein* accepts (faces up to) death as its own, appreciates it as ‘mine’, what opens up before *Dasein* are all the possibilities of its Being that it can realize as its own.\(^{284}\) It may seem paradoxical, but for Heidegger, the acceptance of my ultimate demise is not a resignation toward that over which I have no power. Rather, acceptance of my eventual impotence actually confers upon me a profound power – the power to embrace and (eventually) actualize all the potentiality of my being. Thus is death the “*possibility of impossibility*”.

[F]or Heidegger the sense of my imminent possible impotence is a power and indeed constitutive of all my existence qua potentiality-for-being. It brings me forth unto all the potentiality-for-being that I am [and] it is the very basis of all the power in me, indeed of my life qua power.\(^{285}\)

\(^{283}\) Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 241.

\(^{284}\) See the Translator's Introduction to *Time and the Other*, 7-8, where Heidegger's notion of death is coined as the "possibility of impossibility". Death so understood thus "makes possibilities possible by making them the possibilities of a finite subject, making them the subject's ownmost possibilities, its projection as a being destined to die". Levinas will sharply critique this positive account of death and contrast the "possibility of impossibility" with death as really the "impossibility of possibility". We will consider this development more fully below.

\(^{285}\) See the Translator's Introduction to *Collected Philosophical Papers*, x, note 7.
Third, this ownership of its own death allows *Dasein* to truly individualize itself and embrace its Being authentically. The possibilities for being that *Dasein* becomes aware of via acceptance of its own death are possibilities for its own being.

Death reveals to authentic *Dasein* its identity as a separate and unique individual…. Death individualizes *Dasein* by calling it back from its lostness in the they to realize itself as a solitary being.286

Fourth, *Dasein* realizes that not only is death its own possibility, it is its most certain possibility. *Dasein* will die. Now indeed is *Dasein* living life authentically, standing alone to face the inevitable actualization of its potential for death, steadfastly bearing itself toward that which truly individualizes it. It is this acceptance of one’s death that, *par excellence*, breaks with the everyday attitude of ‘*das Man*’ and allows one to truly live authentically. This is Heidegger’s answer to what motivates the turn away from our naïve realism and allows the philosophical project to emerge – the answer that Husserl failed to provide for the reduction.287

Heidegger’s notion of death, the “possibility of impossibility”, leads us into his understanding of time. Death is not only that which individuates me and opens up my potential for being, death is also that which opens up the horizon of the future. Death is a potentiality that will be actualized some day in the future. The possibilities that death opens up to *Dasein* are also future possibilities.

Death reveals to authentic *Dasein* its own identity as a temporal being, as a being thrown into time and projected ecstatically toward the future. Thus, for Heidegger, it is death that bestows a future upon authentic *Dasein*, and it is death

286 Manning, 69, italicized in the original.

that reveals the very essence not only of the future, and, consequently of time itself, but also of *Dasein* as Being-toward-death.\(^{288}\)

Thus for Heidegger, the future is that which comes from *Dasein*’s authentic acceptance of itself. The future is enacted from the self. It is also that toward which *Dasein* is constantly moving or projecting itself as its potentialities are actualized. “Time marches on” for *Dasein* because *Dasein* chooses to enact its own future. The past and the present are likewise understood from the perspective of *Dasein*.

The past, like the future, is understood in and through *Dasein*.\(^{289}\) The past is always *Dasein*’s past, which it can appropriate for itself (if it is living authentically) or not. Because the event of *Dasein*’s existence is in a constant flow of becoming, movement toward the future, the past is linked to the future. If *Dasein* is authentic, it can see in its past future possibilities that were never enacted in the past.\(^{290}\)

The present is, for Heidegger, also always already connected to the future.\(^{291}\) The event of Being is manifested as a constant movement outward or forward toward another moment. Being is never static or stationary, it is constantly pulsing forward. Existence (which is temporal) is an “ecstacy”.\(^ {292}\) *Dasein*, as possessing Being, is thus always moving toward the future. Each present moment in *Dasein*’s existence is but a moment

\(^{288}\) Manning, 70, italicized in the original.

\(^{289}\) Ibid., 80.

\(^{290}\) Ibid.

\(^{291}\) Ibid., 64.

flowing into a future moment in a never-ending temporal flow (that is, until its potentiality for death is at last actualized).

And so temporality for Heidegger comes from and is accomplished by *Dasein*. The structure of *Dasein* is intrinsically temporal – the unfolding of the event of its Being is a temporal event. Thus “*Dasein* always conceives of Being in terms of and through time”. Time is the horizon upon which Being is manifested – the Being of *Dasein*. Therefore, not only is *Dasein* the referential pole of the world, bestowing meaning as it pleases; authentic *Dasein* is that very being which moves the world forward, enacting the temporal flow as it accepts its own ‘being-toward-death’ and grasps at the potentiality of its own Being. For Heidegger, Being and time are inseparable, thus temporality is conceived of ontologically.

Levinas could not disagree more with Heidegger! Famous is Levinas’ claim in the beginning of *Existence and Existents* regarding his desire to flee from his former master’s ontological thought.

If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian.294

But if Levinas cannot return to what came before Heidegger, then he must forge ahead on his own into new territory and unchartered waters.295 Of course he does this by proposing

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293 Ibid., 59-60, italicized in the original.

294 Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 4, emphasis mine.

295 Although it is true that Levinas’ project is not wholly new for, as we know, he borrows from and reformulates Husserl’s phenomenological concepts and themes and, as we will see, he also borrows from certain giants that have gone before him like Plato and
and then exploring ethics as first philosophy. Exploring the key themes and concepts of Levinas’ ethical philosophy is the task of our next chapter, keeping in mind that what Levinas writes is not only in refutation of the Western philosophical tradition in general, but also specifically a point by point critique of Heidegger. For now, we will conclude this chapter by considering some of the general criticisms that Levinas raises against Heidegger.

Michael Purcell proposes three related criticisms that can summarize Levinas’ stance against Heidegger.\(^{296}\) First, Levinas finds fault with Heidegger’s privileging of ontology. Levinas published a key essay in 1940 entitled “Is Ontology Fundamental?” Although Levinas first sought a way out of Heidegger’s thought with his lengthy essay “On Escape” (De l’évasion) in 1935 and Totality and Infinity (1961) is considered the culmination of his refutation of Heidegger, Levinas’ “anti-Being and Time,”\(^{297}\) this smaller essay offers a succinct view of Levinas’ disregard for Heidegger’s privileging of ontology.\(^{298}\) After first addressing how the whole of the Western Philosophical project, to

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\(^{296}\) Purcell, 78-80.

\(^{297}\) Peperzak, Beyond, 204.

\(^{298}\) See also Emmanuel Levinas, “‘Dying for...’,” in Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). This later essay was originally given as a lecture in 1987. It offers a concise presentation of Levinas’ general criticisms of some of Heidegger’s key ideas such as the priority of ontology, Being as being-there and being-in-the-world, authenticity vs. inauthenticity, the “they” (das Man), being-for, the meaning of death, etc.
include Heidegger, is an ontology.\textsuperscript{299} Levinas questions this primacy of ontology on the basis of language.

No meaningful language can argue in favor of a divorce between language and reason. But we may legitimately wonder whether reason, posited as the possibility of meaningful language, necessarily precedes it – \textit{whether language is not based on a relationship that is prior to understanding}, and that constitutes reason.\textsuperscript{300}

For Levinas, language is always first and foremost about \textit{communication} – something is said \textit{by someone} to \textit{someone else} – language is about speaking \textit{to others}.\textsuperscript{301} Western philosophy, according to Levinas, has forgotten this very important fact and Heidegger has especially. For Heidegger, first we must understand the other (their Being) and only then can we communicate with them. However Levinas states: “The other is not first an object of understanding and then an interlocutor…. To understand a person is already to speak to him…. Speech delineates an original language.”\textsuperscript{302} For Heidegger, communication is merely a question of participation. Speaking is “reduced to the universality and fundamental sameness of all human beings who recognize one another as participants in a common culture or ethos”.\textsuperscript{303} That is, because we are all beings-in-the-world, there is a commonality between us. What is important for Heidegger is not that in speaking two people encounter one another, face to face, but that these interlocutors participate in the same ground of Being which instills a common understanding between

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{299} Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 1-4 See also p.5 where Levinas states that “in Heidegger, understanding rejoins the great tradition of Western philosophy”.
\item \textsuperscript{300} Ibid., 4, emphasis mine.
\item \textsuperscript{301} Peperzak, \textit{Beyond}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{302} Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 6.
\item \textsuperscript{303} Peperzak, \textit{Beyond}, 63.
\end{itemize}
them. For Heidegger there is, thus, “nothing radically new” in communicating with another or in that other with whom I am communicating.\textsuperscript{304} What is important for Heidegger is not \textit{to say something to someone} but to understand the other, the being of who they are which is merely a participation in the universal horizon of Being.

Thus the understanding of a being consists in going beyond that being… and perceiving it upon the \textit{horizon of being}. Which is to say that, in Heidegger,… to understand the particular being is already to place oneself beyond the particular. To understand is to relate to the particular, which alone exists, through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal.\textsuperscript{305}

Also, keep in mind that, as we saw above, for Heidegger, \textit{Dasein} is the “meaning-bestower” upon what he or she encounters in the world. The world encountered by \textit{Dasein} “is a world which is already predetermined by \textit{Dasein}’s understanding… of that world”.\textsuperscript{306} This includes the other person with whom I am communicating, thus the encounter with the other is, for Heidegger, about comprehension and meaning-bestowal just as it is when \textit{Dasein} encounters any \textit{thing} in the world. But for Levinas, the other is not simply a thing like any other thing encountered in the world. The other “does not affect us by means of a concept” thus “the relationship with the other is… not ontology”.\textsuperscript{307} When I speak to another “I have overlooked the universal being he incarnates in order to confine myself to the particular being he is”.\textsuperscript{308} For Levinas, communication is not about participation in a common source of Being that is manifested

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{305} Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 5, emphasis original.
  \item \textsuperscript{306} Purcell, 78.
  \item \textsuperscript{307} Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 5 and 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 7.
\end{itemize}
and comprehended, rather, it is about this particular person, here, now, to whom I address myself and who appears before me as a face. Levinas states:

It is primarily a matter of our finding a vantage point from which man ceases to concern us in terms of the horizon of being, i.e., ceases to offer himself to our powers. The being as such (and not as an incarnation of universal being) can only be in a relation in which he is invoked. That being is man, and it is as a neighbor that man is accessible: as a face.

Levinas rejects Heidegger’s understanding of the other in terms of Being and ontology for he sees it as devolving into “techniques that absorb [the articulation of the event of being] and that... pervert man”. Rather, he offers that the other person is that which defies comprehension, defies my possession of him or her, defies confinement within the horizon of Being. For Levinas, Dasein does not simply encounter a world where the things (and people) in it are merely useful to Dasein (ready-to-hand). Rather Dasein encounters a world in which other people exist who both resist and transcend the meaning and purposes Dasein would try to impose upon them. Levinas indicates this resistance of the other to the stifling fixation upon the horizon of Being through the concept of murder.

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309 See also Levinas, "Language and Proximity", 115, where he makes a similar point. He states (emphasis original): "For us the difficulty lies elsewhere: the hypothesis that the relationship with an interlocutor would still be a knowing reduces speech to the solitary or impersonal exercise of a thought, whereas already the kerygma which bears its identity is, in addition, a proximity between me and the interlocutor, and not our participation in a transparent universality. Whatever be the message transmitted by speech, the speaking is contact."

310 Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 8-9.

311 Levinas, "Dying for...", 210.

312 See Levinas, "Dying for...", 212-213 and 214-215. Levinas notes how for Heidegger’s Dasein others are most often reduced to “they are what they do” and thus approached “in terms of occupations and works in the world, without encountering faces…” Dasein’s encounter with others is mechanical and pragmatic, not ethical.
The face signifies otherwise. In it, the infinite resistance of a being to our power is affirmed precisely in opposition to the will to murder that it defies, because, being completely naked – and the nakedness of the face is not a figure of speech – it means by itself…. I set the signifying of the face in opposition to understanding and meaning grasped on the basis of the horizon [of Being].

The other “signifies” by itself – it does not need any meaning bestowed upon it by Dasein. Indeed, such a bestowal would “murder” the other, reducing him or her to Dasein’s grasp, enslaving him or her to a mere thing useful to Dasein. As we will see in our next chapter, Levinas will further develop this notion of language into “the saying” which is ethical responsibility. In it are contained such notions as election, accusation, persecution, substitution, obsession, and the hostage.

The second criticism raised by Purcell is that, due to Heidegger’s privileging of ontology, Levinas finds that his work actually has an ethical deficit. Levinas takes great offence to this. As we discussed in point one above, Heidegger’s emphasis on ontology means that he approaches the other from the stance of pragmatic comprehension. The other is comprehended and given meaning by Dasein, especially in ways that make the other useful to Dasein. While Levinas emphasizes that the other can “signify” by itself, “Heidegger’s understanding of existence and of understanding does not permit another human being… to present him/herself as he or she is”. The other is instead reduced to something grasped and understood by Dasein. This is not ethics or responsibility, this is violence. And so this ethical deficit found in Heidegger’s ontology

313 Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 10, emphasis original.


315 Purcell, 79.

provokes Levinas to counter it with “a fundamental ethics of responsibility” that is prior to comprehension and deeper than the horizon of Being.\(^{317}\)

For Levinas, Heidegger’s analysis cannot account for the excess of the other person who ethically interrupts ontology, and thereby displaces ontology as fundamental. [While] Heidegger correctly argued that phenomenology cannot pass over the significance of the world;… in making ontology fundamental, he does not simply bypass but paradoxically passes over the other person whose significance is other than that projected by understanding. The other person interrupts the ‘circuit of understanding and reality’. Ethics, not ontology, is fundamental.\(^{318}\)

While Heidegger may remain for Levinas one of the most important philosophers in history,\(^{319}\) in the end his work is “structurally deficient and phenomenologically inadequate”.\(^{320}\) This is most apparent to Levinas in Heidegger’s treatment of the other person and the intersubjective relationship. And so the ontological “climate of Heidegger’s thought” must be left behind for that which offers a more complete, or perhaps it would be better to say, more profound picture of reality which is that of a world where I encounter others who cannot be reduced to my violent, all-encompassing gaze. Levinas’ philosophy describes a world where others are not there for the benefit of \textit{Dasein}, for \textit{Dasein}’s actualizing potential, but where \textit{Dasein} is there \textit{for others}. It is this meaning of \textit{for}, contesting and reversing the Heideggerian \textit{for-Dasein}, that Levinas articulates in his proposal of ethics as first philosophy.\(^{321}\) Heidegger emphasizes the care

\(^{317}\) Purcell, 79.

\(^{318}\) Ibid.

\(^{319}\) See Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 37.

\(^{320}\) Purcell, 79.

\(^{321}\) Ibid., 76.
Dasein has for itself. Levinas will emphasize the responsibility we must have for others. Dasein must be replaced with ‘me voici’ – here I am – the subjected subject.

For Heidegger, the subject is designated by Dasein, the being whose Being is of concern to it. For Levinas, being a subject means being there for others. “The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone.” 322 That is, “the subject remains a subject only by subjection; in no way by domination; the nominative I yields to the accusative me”. 323 We noted above how Levinas offers this notion of a subjected I to counter Husserl’s intentional consciousness. Here, against Heidegger, it is used to counter self-centered Dasein who is only concerned for itself. When speaking of this notion of the self as an accused and subjected I who responds to the other, Levinas likes to quote a line from Dostoyevsky’s Brother’s Karamazov: “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others”. 324 This perfectly sums up the attitude of the ethical self who stands before the other, accused and responsible. We can sum up the difference between Dasein and the here I am by considering the different focus each one has:

Dasein is exposed to Being, here I am is exposed to the Other; inversely, Dasein neglects the originary access to the Other, while here I am accomplishes this access by passing outside Being. 325

322 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 114, italicized in the original.

323 Marion, “A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference”, 319, italicized in the original.

324 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 146. He also mentions this line in his interview with Philippe Nemo in Ethics and Infinity, 101.

325 Marion, "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference", 322, italicized in the original.
In Levinas’ estimation, Heidegger’s *Dasein* is always and only for-itself, thus it is unethical, as is the entirety of Heidegger’s work. This is made quite clear in the different emphases Heidegger and Levinas place on death. As we have seen, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is most authentically itself when it has embraced death not only as its own death, but as that which makes *Dasein*’s existence full of possibilities, “the possibility of impossibility”. For Heidegger, death is *my* death and so I am ultimately concerned for *my* life. For Levinas, on the other hand, acceptance of my death does not awaken me to my potentialities. Death is not the “possibility of impossibility” but rather the “impossibility of possibility”. Death for Levinas is where:

> the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering. It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive. Death is in this sense the limit of idealism.  

As opposed to Heidegger’s positive view that *Dasein* can embrace and ‘own’ its own death, thus enacting the authentic possibilities of its life; for Levinas, death is a mystery that comes to me from beyond me.  

Death is wholly other than me, irreducible alterity that I cannot master. Indeed, “death announces an event over which the subject is not master, an event in relation to which the subject is no longer a subject”. Rather than a possibility for actualization, death is what undoes me – it is the impossibility of my possibilities. What is more, death signifies most profoundly *not* as *my* death but as the death of the other. According to Levinas, the other’s death is more important than my own and in the face of the other’s death I realize the profundity of *being-for-the-other*,

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326 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 71.

327 Ibid., 41.

328 Ibid., 70.
the depth of my responsibility for the other realized as a “devotion to the other” even unto death. Levinas complains that there is no room for such sacrifice in Heidegger’s work and so it is ethically deficient. Levinas offers an ethical alternative to Dasein’s being-for-itself that, in his estimation, actually precedes Dasein’s self-interest – “a disinterested humanity”:

The priority of the other over the I, by which the human being-there is chosen and unique, is precisely the latter’s response to the nakedness of the face and its mortality. It is there that the concern for the other’s death is realized, and that “dying for him” “dying his death” takes priority over “authentic” death. Not a post-mortem life, but the excessiveness of sacrifice, holiness in charity and mercy.

Lastly, Purcell notes the critique Levinas raises against Heidegger’s view of the significance of the world. We discussed above how, for Heidegger, Dasein is not just a being-in-the-world; but that being in the world constitutes a form of ‘fallenness’. Unless Dasein separates itself from the anonymity of ‘das Man’ and individualizes itself against all these others (and especially through embracing its own death), Dasein will continue to live a ‘fallen’, inauthentic life. Authenticity, as Levinas reads Heidegger, thus requires a “dissolution of all relations with the other”. However Levinas finds our existence here, in the world “essentially, and not as a result of a fall or a degradation”, but rather as

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330 Ibid., 217.
331 Ibid, emphasis original.
332 Purcell, 76.
333 Levinas, ”Dying for...”, 214.
334 Levinas, Existents and Existence, 65.
something much more positive and profound. “[W]e are in the world,” Levinas boldly states in *Totality and Infinity*. What is more, being in this world is not the temptation to inauthenticity, but the very “place” where we are enabled to transcend ourselves in the encounter with the Other who calls us to our true humanity, enacted in ethical responsibility. Rather than requiring the dissolution of our relations with the other, authentic human life for Levinas is the “surpassing of the *conatus essendi* of life – an opening of the human through the living being:… the human, that,… would awaken in the guise of responsibility for the other man”.

Robert Manning also offers a summary of criticisms raised by Levinas against Heidegger. He highlights five points of contention that he derives from a key passage in Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*. The points are as follows. First, Heidegger prioritizes Being over particular beings thus raising ontology to the level of first philosophy. Second, Heidegger follows in the Western tradition by prioritizing knowledge, specifically of Being. He thus “gives priority to the subject’s understanding of the other’s

335 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

336 See both "Nonintentional Consciousness" and "From the One to the Other", where Levinas depicts true humanity as that engaged in ethical responsibility.

337 Levinas, "Dying for...", 215-216, emphasis original. See also p. 213 where Levinas offers that *being-there* is actually most authentic when it is *being-for-the-other*. He states (emphasis original): "The there of *being-there* is world, which is not the point of geometrical space, but the concreteness of a populated place in which people are *with* one another and *for* one another. The existential of *Miteinandersein* is a being-together with others in a reciprocity of relationship." This is offered as an "alternative" to Heidegger, and even a refutation of him.

338 Manning, 93-94. He assesses and fleshes out these criticisms throughout the remainder of the chapter on pages 95-135.

339 Levinas *Totality and Infinity*, 45-47.
being over the subject’s obligations toward the other”. Third, Heidegger “neutralizes the alterity of the other” by having the other “always comprehended with the always already established boundaries of Being,” that is, against the horizon of Being.

Fourth, thematization and conceptualization are ways in which one gains knowledge of the other thus making Heidegger’s ontology a “philosophy of power, wherein the subject dominates and controls the other”. Fifth, because it is a philosophy of power, ontology as first philosophy “insulates and protects itself from the other’s capacity to criticize and to challenge it”. This means that “Heideggerian ontology ‘leads inevitably’ to the tyranny and injustice of the state”.

The first three points are similar to those raised by Purcell, addressed above. The last two points bring us to a more personal aspect of Levinas’ rejection of Heidegger. It is well known that Heidegger joined the Nazi party in 1933. Also infamous is Heidegger’s address, also of 1933 and only a few weeks after his enacted membership, upon his appointment as rector of Freiburg University where he loudly praised not only the Nazi party and Hitler himself, but advocated their ideology. Heidegger’s actions of 1933

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340 Manning, 93.
341 Ibid., 94.
342 Ibid.
343 Ibid.
344 Ibid.
345 Moyn, 93.
were devastating to Levinas\textsuperscript{346} and colored his interpretation of the inadequacy and even
 danger of Heidegger’s philosophy that has little to no regard for the Other. The question
 of course is whether or not there is in fact something inherent in Heidegger’s philosophy
 that allowed him to place his allegiance with the Nazi party in 1933.\textsuperscript{347} Certainly it didn’t
 prevent him! Indeed if Heidegger is, as Levinas portrays him, a key representative of the
 Western philosophical tradition in general, the entire tradition becomes somewhat
 suspect. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter:

 Whatever can be said about philosophy and its reflections on human existence,
 meaning, political order, ethics, etc., before the Holocaust, what must be said after
 the Holocaust is that not only were all of the West’s philosophical, ethical and
 religious teachings and reflections unable to prevent Auschwitz, but they also may
 have provided a certain legitimation to the devaluation and desecration of human
 life.\textsuperscript{348}

 It is not our task here to consider the Western tradition in its entirety, however for

 Levinas certainly Heidegger’s complicity with the Nazi party was never viewed as

 \textsuperscript{346} See Emmanuel Levinas, "Signature," in \textit{Difficult Freedom: Essays on
 this brief autobiographical note, Levinas comments on how the whole of his life and
 work was “dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror”. Haunting
 too is his dedication to \textit{Otherwise than Being}: “To the memory of those who were closest
 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 man,
 the same anti-semitism.”

 \textsuperscript{347} Heidegger claimed that he abandoned the Nazi party in 1934. It is of much
 debate whether or not this is true. What is undeniable is that, for a certain period of time,
 Heidegger was a member of the party and a staunch advocate of Nazism in general, as is
 seen in the speeches given by him during his rectorship in Freiburg, 1933-1934. What is
 also noted is how, after the war, Heidegger remained mostly silent on the topic of the
 Holocaust and never once renounced or repudiated the horrific events of the Holocaust.
 See Manning, 127-130. See also Moyn, chapter 3, "Nazism and Crisis: The Interruption
 of a Tragectory", 88-112.

 \textsuperscript{348} Manning, 187.
merely “extrinsic or irrelevant to his thought”.

As late as 1989 Levinas still wondered about Heidegger’s magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit*, if “we can ever be assured… that there was never any echo of Evil in it?” If it is true, as Levinas claims, that his “life was dominated by the memory of the Nazi horror, then [one can appreciate] his philosophical life [as] animated by the question of how a philosopher as undeniably brilliant as Heidegger could have become a Nazi, for however short a time”.

We will now return briefly to Levinas’ critique of Heidegger as summarized by Manning’s five points. As we have seen, Heidegger does indeed insist upon ontology as first philosophy and focus on the acquisition of knowledge, particularly knowledge of Being, as the focus of philosophy. This focus does indeed cause him to consider others within and against the horizon of Being, thus reducing their alterity to more of the same within an encompassing whole. The problem with this, as far as Levinas is concerned, is that Heidegger’s philosophy ends up being a philosophy of power and dominion over the other. When enacted in the realm of the political, the results are tyranny and injustice.

The problem, it seems, stems from the different ways Heidegger and Levinas understand the concept of truth. Levinas insists that “the meaning of metaphysical truth” is “respect

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349 Moyn, 93. See also Peperzak, *Beyond*, 205. He states: “For Levinas, Heidegger’s philosophy is the clear expression of a paganism that ignores the essential demands of morality and does not resist Nazi ruthlessness but rather is prone to collaborating with and even promoting it.”

350 Emmanuel Levinas, "As If Consenting to Horror," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 488. He also comments how, upon learning of Heidegger’s complicity with the Nazi party, he felt “a shadow over [his] firm confidence that an unbridgeable distance forever separated the delirious and criminal hatred voiced by Evil on the pages of *Mein Kampf* from the intellectual vigor and extreme analytical virtuosity displayed in *Sein und Zeit*”, 485.

351 Critchley, "Introduction", 8.
for being”.352 Truth for Levinas is ethics. However Heidegger also proclaims the need to respect being. For Heidegger truth is found in the comprehension of being but to know being one must allow being to manifest itself as it truly is. Heidegger’s respect for Being is thus “the passive letting be of Being”.353 However, and this is what Levinas finds problematic, this “passive letting be of Being” is for Heidegger but a “component in the process of comprehending Being”.354 That is, Heidegger considers the respect for Being as only a part of, thus secondary to, the more important task of the comprehension of Being; whereas for Levinas respect for Being is truth and thus must come before any understanding of Being. Heidegger thus “subordinates ethics to ontology”.355 Indeed, one could even claim that Heidegger’s passive letting be of Being is not so much a passive act as actually a demand for Being to come to presence before Dasein so that it might comprehend Being.356 For Levinas, such respect as Dasein shows for Being is not sufficiently respectful because Dasein’s desire for knowledge always outweighs its responsibility for the other. Thus “Dasein will always be in danger of thinking that its own comprehension of the Other is more important than its relation with the Other”.357 What is more, if knowledge of Being holds priority of place for Dasein then anything

352 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 302.

353 Manning, 121. This passive “letting be of Being” seems somewhat reminiscent of Husserl’s “back to the things themselves”.

354 Ibid.

355 Ibid., emphasis mine.

356 Ibid., 122.

357 Ibid., 123-124.
which it cannot comprehend is relegated to secondary status. In this way “the Other is always reduced to the same when it is comprehended by *Dasein*, reduced to that which *Dasein* can comprehend”.$^{358}$ For Levinas what is most important is not necessarily to know the other but to truly respect and protect the other. “To really be truth, thought must abdicate its place of primacy and subordinate itself to ethics, which means that it must allow itself to be directed by the highest truth, namely the Good”.$^{359}$ However, when philosophy is not directed by the Good, when ethics is not first philosophy, the Other is always in danger of being manipulated and controlled by *Dasein* who knows the other.

Such is the case with Heidegger.

Heidegger’s ontology may respect Being, but since its respect for being is at the service of comprehending being, even its respect for being is not only insufficiently respectful, but it is also unethical and potentially violent.$^{360}$

As we have already discussed above, the fact of 1933, at least for Levinas, would seem to confirm this rather tragically.

The view that different phenomenological descriptions result in different moral prescriptions can be of help here.$^{361}$ Levinas and Heidegger have two different starting points: for Heidegger it is a “pre-understanding of Being” whereas for Levinas it is “a relationship that both distinguishes between and connects ‘the Other’ (i.e., the human Other) and me”.$^{362}$ Due to these different points of departure, the end result is also vastly

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$^{358}$ Ibid., 124.

$^{359}$ Ibid., 122.

$^{360}$ Ibid., 124.

$^{361}$ Moyn, 248.

$^{362}$ Peperzak, *Beyond*, 207
different between Heidegger and Levinas. For Heidegger the result is the Other thematized “as merely a coconstituting moment of the *Dasein* that is always mine” thus the Other’s particularity is reduced “to the status of an instance or moment” within the totality of the *I*.\textsuperscript{363} This is not only problematic for Levinas, but constitutes a false picture of reality. As we saw above, Levinas considers the fact that we are beings-in-the-world as the situation of always already greeting the other when I encounter him or her before I ever come to know anything about him or her.\textsuperscript{364} “Before all exteriorizations of the will and before any possibility of recognition, agreement, or convention, another’s factual existence requires me to admit him into my dwelling and world…”\textsuperscript{365} This is why for Levinas, “‘Being-(responsible)-for-the-Other’ is the basic definition of ‘me’.”\textsuperscript{366} And so with his different phenomenological description of the Other, for Heidegger, both the Other and the intersubjective relationship between humans plays “no decisive role within the development of his thinking”.\textsuperscript{367} For Levinas, on the other hand, the Other and the ethical relationship hold the place of priority. Levinas of course believes that he is correct and Heidegger quite inaccurate, in fact, dangerously so. And this is why Levinas does not want to merely criticize Heidegger, but even more importantly, he wants “to convince us that it is not knowledge of Being but ethics that is most essential, that ethics alone merits

\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., 209, italicized in the original.

\textsuperscript{364} See Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?"

\textsuperscript{365} Peperzak, *Beyond*, 208, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{366} Ibid, italicized in the original.

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 209.
the status of first philosophy”. If Levinas fails to convince us of this very important fact, the consequences are dire. Indeed, the consequences were already made manifest during the 1930s and 40s. And so Levinas’ view of Heidegger’s philosophy and the dangerous consequences it houses within can thus be summed up:

For Levinas, Heidegger’s philosophy is the clear expression of a paganism that ignores the essential demands of morality and does not resist Nazi ruthlessness but rather is prone to collaborating with and even promoting it. To this end Levinas reads and criticizes Heidegger’s philosophy as the expression of a view which is not true to the ethical phenomena as they present themselves, since it submits them to a certain ontological schema.... According to Levinas, the very suspension or epoche of the ethical, the seemingly neutral decision to postpone philosophical ethics until the foundational questions of philosophy have been treated, testifies to a false understanding of reality.

And this is why, beginning with his essay, “De l’évasion”, in 1935, Levinas proclaimed the need to escape from Being which, on a philosophical level, is the need to escape from the ontological thought of Martin Heidegger. Indeed, the question for Levinas became how to philosophize after the horrors of the Holocaust, the horrors of Auschwitz, which Heidegger’s philosophy, as brilliant as it may be, not only failed to prevent or even address but might even be held accountable for somehow legitimizing. And so Levinas leaves us with a choice: either anonymous Being or the individual being, either dominance and reduction of the Other through comprehension of being or respect for and

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368 Manning, 105-106, emphasis mine.
369 Peperzak, Beyond, 205, emphasis mine.
370 As stated in Existents and Existence, 19.
371 See Maurice Blanchot, "Our Clandestine Companion," in Face to Face with Levinas, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 50. He ends this essay by stating that the question of how to philosophize after Auschwitz is the “thought that traverses, that bears, the whole of Levinas’ philosophy and that he proposes to us without saying it, beyond and before all obligation".
protection of the Other, either the primacy of ontology or ethics as first philosophy, 

*either* Martin Heidegger *or* Emmanuel Levinas.\(^{372}\)

To conclude this chapter, we offer a juxtaposition of Heidegger and Levinas.\(^{373}\) For Heidegger the other person is not considered in their unique particularity but is merely one of many while for Levinas the other is approached in their unique particularity. Because for Heidegger the other person is considered as merely part of the anonymous crowd (*‘das Man’*), the other is knowable; whereas for Levinas the unique particularity of the other makes them absolutely unknowable, incomprehensible, beyond my grasp and my comprehending gaze. If the other is knowable, then Heidegger’s other is neither challenging nor traumatizing. For Levinas the other of course *is* that very traumatizing event that disturbs and disrupts my being and questions “my place in the sun”. Thus for Heidegger what is most important is not to encounter the other in their incomprehensible alterity that disrupts my very being, but is the quest for ontological truth. Others are not primary for Heidegger, Being is. For Levinas, on the other hand, the other comes before me from an immemorial past that will never be (my) present and obliges me far into the future, even beyond my own death. Thus for Levinas the other not only comes *before me* but *before Being* itself. The other holds the position of priority over me and ethics is first before ontology. In this way for Levinas, and as opposed to Heidegger, the problem with philosophy is not that it has forgotten Being, but that it has forgotten the Other.\(^{374}\) And so Levinas’ assessment of Heidegger’s philosophy is that it

\(^{372}\) See Moyn, 185.


\(^{374}\) Ibid., 19.
offers an inadequate and ultimately false account of reality because it fails to take proper account of the Other and the ethical relation underpinning all our knowledge and being. Levinas himself states that the first question – “the question par excellence or the question of philosophy” – is not “‘why being rather than nothing?’, but how being justifies itself”. \(^{375}\) Levinas states:

The real question is, can we speak of an absolute commandment after Auschwitz? Can we speak of morality after the failure of morality?\(^{376}\)

In the next chapter we will attempt to show how Levinas answers these questions by presenting the key concepts and themes of Levinas’ philosophical project, the “waves” of Levinas’ thought.\(^{377}\)

\(^{375}\) Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in The Levinas Reader, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 86, emphasis mine. See also Purcell, 29; and Critchely, “Introduction”, 19 where these authors also comment on Levinas’ striking question.


\(^{377}\) See Cohen's Introduction to Time and the Other, 3.
CHAPTER TWO

Emmanuel Levinas:
Subjectivity through Selflessness – Ethics as First Philosophy

Introduction

In our previous chapter we saw how Levinas’ work is situated within the general postmodern critique of modernity and specifically how he focuses his arguments against Husserl and Heidegger, whom he regarded as the quintessential models of the Western philosophical tradition. This chapter focuses more directly on Levinas’ philosophical project itself. Although a variety of routes are possible, this presentation of Levinas’ work will proceed thematically, thus offering the reader a general overview of his thought. Such key concepts as Levinas’ understanding of “ethics” and why it must be first philosophy, the idea of the Infinite, alterity and the Other, the face, the saying vs. the said, diachronous time vs. synchronous time, the trace, subjectivity as enacted in ethical responsibility, substitution, the coming of the third party, and God will be covered. However, it must be noted that proceeding thematically presents its own unique challenges. Being somewhat “allergic” to thematization, 1 Levinas’ thought defies neat categorization. This is illustrated by the famous metaphor for Levinas’ thought with which we ended our previous chapter. Levinas’ thought has been likened to waves on the

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1 See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 301, where he states: "Thematization does not exhaust the meaning of the relationship with exteriority." See also, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 11, where he comments on how the ethical subject "can not thematize or comprehend". Furthermore, "the [ethical] saying overflows the very being it thematizes", Otherwise than Being, 18. These ideas will be made clearer in our presentation of Levinas' thought below.
beach – incessant, overlapping, advancing and yet receding, shifting and uncontainable. Levinas’ thought resists simple categorization and definition. This is due in great part to the task he set himself: analyzing precisely that which eludes and overwhelms all thought and consciousness – the alterity of the other, the subjectivity enacted in the encounter with this other, and the ethical relationship between the self and the other. It is, as one author states, “an effort at translating incommensurables”. If Levinas’ task is that substantial, so much more challenging is the exposition of his thought. Questions arise as to how to categorize Levinas’ dense concepts and in which order to present them. For example, should one start with the separated subject from whom the ethical relationship proceeds, or rather must we begin with the other whose coming enacts the self in his or her ethical subjectivity? There is no simple answer to this conundrum. Indeed, the terms only have meaning in relationship to one another thus to split them into separate and neatly defined categories is, to use Levinas’ own word, a “betrayal”. However, for the sake of an attempted (if somewhat superficial) clarity, certain categories have been erected and the concepts that seem most relevant to those specific categories placed therein. Needless to say certain concepts will be discussed in more than one category due to the interrelatedness of Levinas’ thought. In the end, we echo Levinas’ own warning

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3 The reader is undoubtedly aware that this dilemma is simply a Levinasian version of the age-old question: Which came first...? It is a simple question that harbors no simple answer.

4 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 6. "In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal."
placed at the end of his preface to *Totality and Infinity* that whatever has been said here must ultimately be unsaid.  

The “Waves” of Levinas’ Thought: Key Concepts and Themes

We closed the preceding chapter making a distinction between Heidegger and Levinas. For Heidegger the problem with philosophy is that it has forgotten Being whereas for Levinas the problem, not only with philosophy but with the entirety of the Western tradition, is the forgetting of the Other. Thus for Levinas the question of philosophy, indeed the question *par excellence*, is not the question “why is there something – aka: being – rather than nothing?” but *how does being justify itself?* His endeavor to answer this question led him on a remarkable journey that began with his attempted escape from Being in 1935 with the publication of his essay *On Escape* and brought him all the way to the very enucleation of subjectivity in the substitution of the hostage in 1974 with the publication of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (and the publications following thereafter). We turn now to certain key concepts and themes of Levinas’ ethical philosophy, revealing his radical rethinking of human personhood and the very meaning of what it is to be “human”.

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6 See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 49, emphasis mine, where he speaks of the passivity of the subject’s exposure to the other as “a fission of the nucleus opening the bottom of its punctual nuclearity”. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 223, emphasis mine: “The referral to the other is an awakening to nearness, which is responsibility for the neighbor to the point of substitution, which is the enucleation of the transcendental subject.”
Ethics as First Philosophy – a radical vision of ethical-subjectivity-as-enucleated

What perhaps must first be addressed when considering Levinas’ ethical philosophy is what precisely he means by ethics and why he proposes that it is, indeed must be, first philosophy. Levinas officially proclaimed the primacy of ethics in 1961 when he published *Totality and Infinity*. “Morality [ethics] is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.”

Indeed, he states there that establishing the “primacy of the ethical, that is, of the relationship of man to man… a primacy of an irreducible structure upon which all the other structures rest…, is one of the objectives of the present work”.

Several years later, Levinas continued to insist on this special role for ethics, even blatantly entitling an essay “Ethics as First Philosophy”. He concluded this work stating that the very dimension of the human is found in ethics as the encounter with the other who puts my very being into question.

In this question [the question of my right to be which is already my responsibility for the death of the Other, interrupting the carefree spontaneity of my naïve perseverance] being and life are awakened to the human dimension. *This is the question of the meaning of being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice.*

For Levinas, “ethics as first philosophy” can be seen as an underlying thesis running throughout his work since the publication of *Totality and Infinity*. Beginning with his desire to escape from the stranglehold of being and ontology in 1935, his work can be

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7 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 304.

8 Ibid., 79, emphasis mine.


10 Ibid., 86, emphasis mine.
seen as gradually building up to this remarkable position from which, once obtained, he
never turned back. However, it is crucial to point out that in proclaiming ethics as first
philosophy Levinas is not merely advocating some systematic code of behavior, the
social “do’s” and “don’ts” particular to cultural mores. He states:

    The ethical language we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral
    experience, independent of the description hitherto elaborated. The ethical
    situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics.\textsuperscript{11}

Rather, when Levinas speaks of “ethics” he is referring to something much more
profound and, to use his own word, “an-archical”.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, in Levinas’ hand this simple
word – ethics – is his attempt to translate an “incommensurable” that requires thousands
of pages and decades of reflection to write about and which, in the end, is always,
ultimately inadequate. Throughout his later text, Otherwise than Being, Levinas insists on
the need to “unsay” whatever has been, can, or will be said about the ethical relation that
defies the attempt at a standardized definition.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, in the closing pages of this text
he briefly reflects upon skepticism, leaving the reader in the uncomfortable position of
realizing that one can never settle into the smug position of having “figured it out”.\textsuperscript{14}
However, one must say something, albeit, as we commented above, at the price of a
betrayal.

\textsuperscript{11} Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 120, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. See, for example, 101: "This movement [the ethical response of the self
for the other that he terms an obsession] is, in the original sense of the term, an-archical."

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 7. Peperzak comments on how this “unsaying of the said” can be seen, in
part, as the method employed by Levinas. See To the Other: An Introduction to the
Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 36-37.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 165-171.
And so “ethics”, for Levinas, is not a code of behavior. Indeed our human codes of behavior and the institutions that regulate them, the justice system, are *derived from* this prior realm of ethics of which Levinas speaks.\(^{15}\) Attempting a concise definition, one commentator proposes that ethics, as Levinas uses the term, is “a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person”.\(^{16}\) Another claim is that it is perhaps more adequate to speak of “the ethical” rather than “ethics” which has the danger of leading the reader to think of “an ethics” (as in a code of behavior).

In most contexts, the French word used by Levinas, *l’éthique*, might just as well be translated by ‘the ethical’ as by ‘ethics’; and the ethical… refers to a domain from which nothing human may be excluded. Levinas’s ethics, as an enquiry into the nature of the ethical, analyses and attempts to maintain the possibility of a respectful, rewarding encounter with the Other; and it endeavors to discern the sources of a humane and just society in this encounter.\(^ {17}\)

Still elsewhere it is commented on how Levinas “does not write an ethics, but shows, by means of subtle descriptions and analyses, that the ethical perspective must be the starting point of every philosophy that hopes to be true to the facts”.\(^ {18}\) And so we may say that for

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Levinas “ethics” is more akin to some type of relationship, the domain of the ethical, or an ethical perspective underlying all thought and consciousness.

In Totality and Infinity Levinas speaks of the ethical relationship as “metaphysics”.\(^{19}\) Now while Levinas eventually drops this rather problematic word in his future writing,\(^{20}\) his conception of “metaphysics” in Totality and Infinity points directly to his reasoning why ethics must be first philosophy. Levinas claims the desire to trace back “to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the totality itself”.\(^{21}\) This conditioning situation is, for Levinas, “the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other”.\(^{22}\) Metaphysics is the movement towards or desire for the absolutely other.\(^{23}\) For Levinas, this metaphysical desire precedes and conditions ontology.\(^{24}\) He calls it metaphysics but it would be better to render it “meta-physics” to indicate how his ethical thought transcends or is beyond (meta-) the ontological thought of the Western tradition (physics).\(^{25}\) This is further elaborated by his allusion to the

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\(^{19}\) Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 52: "Such a relationship is metaphysics itself."

\(^{20}\) Problematic due to its ontological overtones for which Levinas was criticized. See chapter one above.

\(^{21}\) Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 24. Remember our comments from chapter one that "totality" refers, in part, to Levinas' view of Western culture and the Western philosophical tradition that is centered upon the constituting consciousness of the ego, reducing all to its realm of "sameness" thus creating a "totality". We will say more about this “totality” below.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 33-35.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 48: "Ontology presupposes metaphysics."

\(^{25}\) See Adriaan Peperzak, "Levinas' Method." In Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, ed. Claire Katz and Lara Trout, 337-351 (London:
Platonic concept of the “Good beyond Being”. For Levinas, metaphysics, the desire for the absolutely other, that which transcends the ontologizing totality of the West, is “the disinterestedness of goodness” and the good is precisely that which is beyond being and thus conditions it.

In his later texts Levinas often used words such as “anarchical”, “immemorial”, “hither side”, “incommensurable”, “beyond”, “presynthetic”, “prelogical”, etc. in an attempt to describe how and why ethics holds this place of primacy. Levinas attempts to show that ethics is not merely foundational – a word far too encumbered with ontological resonance – but prior to all foundations and beginnings thus “an-archical”. He states:

*It is in a responsibility that is justified by no prior commitment*, in the responsibility for another – in an ethical situation – that the me-ontological and metalogical structure of this anarchy takes form, undoing the logos in which the apology by which consciousness always regains its self-control, and commands, is inserted…. The consciousness is affected, then, before forming an image of what is coming to it, affected *in spite of itself*.

Thus ethics is prior to all structures, concepts, and themes that take form in the realm of being and consciousness. Indeed, as soon as we think or conceive of ethics, we have

Routledge, 2005), 341-342. He also makes this point in his text, *To the Other*, 41 and 131.


27 Ibid., 35.

28 These words were all taken from chapter four of *Otherwise than Being*.


30 Ibid., 102, first emphasis original, final two emphases mine.
already betrayed it, reducing it to a theme that resides in the realm of ontology. Thus ethics is first philosophy because philosophy is this betrayal of what is beyond and incommensurable into a concept or theme. Philosophy is “the indiscretion with regard to the unsayable”. As we will see in greater detail below, it is the ethical encounter between the self and the other that not only enacts language, meaning, and truth, but enacts me as a self – as a human self. Humanity, as human, is oriented by this anarchical encounter. For Levinas, the relationship with the other is language. The way in which the other presents him or herself is the face. The face speaks – it is the first signification, signifying by and for itself. What the face signifies is the questioning of my freedom and is thus a summons to ethical responsibility; it is an invitation “to a

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31 Ibid., 7, "... as soon as it is conveyed before us it is betrayed in the said that dominates the saying which states it".

32 Ibid.

33 Emmanuel Levinas, "Beyond Intentionality," in Philosophy in France Today, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 107. After a brief consideration of Husserlian intentionality, Levinas turns to elaborate on the ethical relationship that is beyond intentionality, commenting how a “deeper reflection on what is specifically human” calls Husserl’s line of thought into question. Obviously for Levinas what is “specifically human” is enacted in the ethical encounter of non-indifference for-the-other. See also Otherwise than Being, 184 and Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 172-173 and 175. We will look more deeply at this point below.


35 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 39.

36 Ibid., 50.

37 Ibid., 208, 92, and 74-75. See also "Meaning and Sense", 96.
relation incommensurate with a power exercised”. As Levinas himself says: “To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom.” Truth is not founded on freedom, freedom is founded on truth, and truth is revealed in the ethical relation with the other prior to all knowledge, choice, and commitment. Thus the relationship with the other founds meaning and truth. Thus subjectivity is enacted in ethical responsibility. Thus ethics precedes ontology and is first philosophy.

The Same vs. The Other – a general comment

Two key concepts that must be discussed when considering Levinas’ thought are the same and the other. Closely related to these two concepts are those of totality and infinity. It was briefly mentioned in chapter one how Levinas links the notion of totality with that of Western culture and the Western philosophical project, both seen as forms of an “egology”. Levinas of course rejects this tendency of the Western world as not only self-centered but even violent for, in his estimation, according to the tradition of the West all that is other than the self is reduced to the totalizing realm of the same. In the Western tradition all reality is perceived, grasped, possessed, molded, and contained by the same. Levinas insists that this is in part due to the inordinate (in his view) emphasis placed on

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38 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 198. See also "Beyond Intentionality", 111.
39 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 85.
40 Ibid., 303.
41 Ibid., 72 and 99. See also Otherwise than Being, 122, emphasis mine: “This antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the Goodness of the Good: the necessity that the Good choose me first before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome its choice…. The Good is before being.”
Being and ontology. For Levinas, this problem is nowhere more evident than in the thinking of Martin Heidegger, his arch-nemesis. And so Levinas desires to break out of the all-encompassing grasp of the same, the neat totality created by the controlling ego where all aspects of reality are categorized and shelved according to the intentionality of the consciousness. He desires, as we know, to escape from the suffocating presence of Being, which is not the generous donation of Heidegger’s *es gibt* (it gives), but the waking horror of *il y a*, the *there is*.\(^{42}\) Levinas wants to reflect upon that which eludes the totalizing realm of the same, that which transcends its possessive and constitutive gaze and is thus *infinite*. That is, Levinas focuses on the realm of the *other* – the alterity (which is infinite) of the other and, in turn, how the other thus affects the realm of the same, stripping the ego bare, placing the intentional consciousness in question, and in this way enacting the subjectivity of the self.\(^{43}\) The other is precisely that which is not the same, that which eludes and exceeds the same with a transcendence that Levinas calls infinite.\(^{44}\) However, there is one modality of the other that receives special attention from Levinas, that is the *Other* – the *human* Other who presents him or herself to the subject

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\(^{43}\) See *Otherwise than Being*, 102-113. On these pages are found Levinas’ discussion of recurrence, the ethical "undoing" of the subject through the encounter with the other, and the self where "this recurrence by contraction... is the self" (108). We will discuss this in much further detail below.

\(^{44}\) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 24-25, emphasis original: "The rigorously developed concept of this transcendence is expressed by the term infinity.... What remains ever exterior to thought is thought in the idea of infinity.... The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in this overflowing."
by the way of the face. Here we are already beginning to overlap into our following section and so we will pause a moment to reflect a little deeper upon Levinas’ development of these notions of the same and the other and their relative counterparts, totality and infinity.

As noted above, in 1935 Levinas first expressed the need to escape from being in his extensive essay “On Escape”.

Thus, to the need for escape, being appears… as an imprisonment from which one must get out.

Existence… is identity. In the identity of the I [moi], the identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment, for it appears in the form of suffering and invites us to escape.

This is a sentiment he will carry throughout his work, resurfacing even as late as Otherwise than Being: “The task is to conceive of the possibility of a break out of essence.” But what, we might ask, is wrong with being, with existence? Why, or how, does being reveal itself as an imprisonment? Why should one, indeed does one, desire to flee from oneself?

Levinas answers this question very simply in the text following “On

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45 See Totality and Infinity, 39 and 50: "The absolutely other is the Other.... The way in which the other presents himself... we here name face." As Levinas is not always consistent with his use of capitalization, the reader must often refer to the context (which is also frequently unclear!) to determine to which form of the other Levinas is referring. Matters will be further complicated when we reflect upon Levinas’ ideas of God and how God relates to the other and the self. However, moments of stark clarity can indeed be found. See for example, "The Paradox of Morality", 169, emphasis mine: "Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face."


47 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 8.

48 See Levinas, On Escape, 55. He states (emphasis original): "Thus, escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [moi] is oneself [soi-même]...."
Levinas makes this tragedy of our existence quite clear in “On Escape” as he offers what was then a radically new interpretation of five commonplace phenomena: need, malaise, pleasure, shame, and nausea.

Traditionally, need has been interpreted as fulfillment of something lacking: my stomach is empty, I need food to fill and fulfill it. Need thus indicates “some weakness of our human constitution, or the limitation of our being”. Levinas, however, turns this traditional interpretation on its head. Need, for him, is not due to some lack in our being but rather due to the “plenitude of being”. Our being weighs heavily upon us, we find ourselves chained to it, riveted to it, and it causes us to suffer. This suffering is manifested as malaise. Thus need “is not oriented toward the complete fulfillment of a limited being, toward satisfaction, but toward release and escape”. But how to escape from this malaise, this suffering of our enchainment to being? A first attempt is made through pleasure. Levinas finds in pleasure “an abandonment, a loss of oneself, a getting out of oneself, an ecstasy:… pleasure opens a dimension in the satisfaction of a need in which malaise glimpses an escape”. Sadly, this escape from oneself through pleasure is

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50 Levinas, *On Escape*, 58.

51 Ibid., 69, emphasis mine.

52 Ibid., 58.

53 Ibid., 69.

54 Ibid., 61-62.
short lived. Pleasure is “a deceptive escape”, it is “an escape that fails”.\(^{55}\) Pleasure lasts but for a moment and when it has passed the weight of being comes crashing down around us once again, suffocating us in its burdensome presence. The satisfaction I derive from food filling my belly is only temporary – I will be hungry again. The result of this failed attempt to flee from being through pleasure is shame. “Shame does not depend… on the limitation of our being,… but rather on the very being of our being, on its incapacity to break with itself.”\(^{56}\) What follows from this shame at our failed attempt to flee from ourselves through pleasure is nausea which causes us to despair for nowhere are we more trapped in our being, more chained to ourselves, than in the experience of nausea. “And this despair, this fact of being riveted, constitutes all the anxiety of nausea. In nausea… we are… riveted to ourselves…”\(^{57}\) And so we find ourselves back where we started – feeling the burdensome weight of our being and needing to escape from it. Ultimately, “the nature of nausea is nothing other than its presence, nothing other than our powerlessness to take leave of that presence”.\(^{58}\) And yet escape \textit{is} possible. However Levinas only gives a tantalizing allusion to this possibility at the end of his essay.

\begin{quote}
It is a matter of getting out of being by a \textit{new path}, at the risk of overturning certain notions that to common sense and the wisdom of the nations seemed the most evident.\(^{59}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 66. Anyone who has suffered the experience of being nauseous cannot but agree with Levinas’ claim that, in nausea, one is chained to the self and desires nothing so much as to escape from oneself!

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 73, emphasis mine.
We know that Levinas will find this new path through the transcendence of the ethical encounter, but that development is yet to come. What does follow the conclusion of “On Escape” is an analysis of the emergence of the human existent from the anonymous rumbling of being that Levinas calls *il y a*, the *there is*. This analysis is found in his text, *Existence and Existents*. It is important to reflect on this concept of the *there is* for a moment for it further indicates why Levinas desires to escape from being through, ultimately, the encounter with the other.

While ethics has yet to make its appearance, in this early text, we see Levinas grappling with a reversal of Heidegger’s procession from beings to Being. Levinas wants to analyze an even “earlier” point – the emergence of beings (existents) from impersonal Being (existence). 60 Levinas states:

>This work will be structured as follows: it sets out to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality so as to then be able to analyze the notion of the present and of position, in which a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being, through a hypostasis. 61

While Heidegger saw the emergence of beings as a positive donation of Being (*es gibt*), Levinas has a much darker and troubling view of the existence from which existents struggle to arise. For Levinas, before there is a world and before there are existents in that world, *there is*...

>This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable “consummation” of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The *there is*, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is “being in general”. 62

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60 See Translator’s Foreword to *Existence and Existents*, xi.


62 Ibid., 52, italicized in the original.
The impersonal and anonymous form found in “it rains” is similar to the there is. Levinas likens the there is to the heavy presence one senses in the absence conveyed by night. It is a nothingness that is yet full of a presence that threatens and is frightening. The eyes gaze fearfully into the void left by the absence of daylight, seeking for that which cannot be found yet is sensed and terrifies. Levinas offers an allusion to the experience of insomnia where “a monotonous presence… bears down on us” and from which we cannot escape into the blissful ignorance of sleep. In insomnia we are exposed to the there is and can take no shelter from it. “The rustling of the there is... is horror.” It is the dense “presence of absence”. If this impersonal, anonymous horror is indeed what lies behind the being one possesses as an existent, it is no wonder one feels the need to escape from this burdensome menace! But for a being to need this escape from its being requires that an existent emerge from the anonymous rustlings of the there is. This emergence happens through the taking of a position. “Through taking position in the anonymous there is a subject is affirmed.” This emergence of an existent Levinas calls hypostasis.

To designate this apparition we have taken up the term hypostasis which, in the history of philosophy, designated the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive. Hypostasis, the apparition of a substantive,… signifies the suspension of the anonymous there is, the apparition of a private domain, of a noun. On the ground of the there is a being arises…. By

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63 Ibid., 55.

64 Ibid, italicized in the original.

65 Ibid., 59.

66 Ibid., 82, italicized in the original.
hypostasis anonymous being loses its *there is* character…. Someone exists who assumes Being, which henceforth is *his* being.\(^{67}\)

This emergence of the subject from anonymous being takes place in an instant,\(^{68}\) but it is a frozen moment. The subject that arises from the *there is* is solitary and stuck in the present moment of its own being. Again offering but an enticing comment at the end of his text, Levinas notes that “time and the other are necessary for the liberation” from one’s existence as a solitary subject.\(^{69}\) This is because, for Levinas, “the absolute altermity of another instant cannot be found in the subject” but can only come “from the other” for “time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other”.\(^{70}\) The self, being stuck in the present moment of its own being, is incapable of creating time. Time must come from what is not of the self, but what is other than the self and thus a mystery to the self. Time must come from the other. This is the very theme of *Time and the Other*,\(^{71}\) a compilation of lectures published after *Existence and Existent*, and to which we now turn.

After reiterating his analysis of the emergence of the solitary subject through hypostasis, Levinas comments on the tragedy of this existence.

The first freedom resultant from the fact that in anonymous existing an existent arises, included as its price the very finality of the *I* riveted to itself. This finality of the existent, which constitutes the tragedy of solitude, is materiality. Solitude is not tragic because it is the privation of the other, but because it is shut up within the captivity of its identity, because it is matter. To shatter the enchainment of

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 83, italicized in the original.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 103: "An instant breaks the anonymity of being in general."

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 104, emphasis mine.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 96.

matter is to shatter the finality of hypostasis. It is to be in time. Solitude is an absence of time. 72

These comments come at the conclusion of Part I of *Time and the Other*. Part II consists of a brief reflection on “salvation” in the sense of liberation from the solitude of existence, especially through the nourishment offered by the world. However, as we know from his earlier text, such pleasures are finite and the escape they provide is thus fleeting and eventually the subject falls back upon itself in its solitude. The only way the subject can truly escape from its solitude is through an encounter with something other than itself, something irreducible to itself that pulls it out of itself. Levinas first reflects upon the unknown of death as “a relationship with mystery” for with death “the subject is in a relationship with what does not come from itself.”73 In this way, the possibility of the future is opened to the subject and its solitude is broken.74 However, for our purposes here, what is even more important is Levinas’ analysis of the coming of the other person who, as other, also brings the future to the self and with whom one is in a relationship that Levinas characterizes as a mystery.75 Indeed, it is not so much that the subject breaks out of its solitude as that its solitude is broken by the coming of that which is other than the subject, thus irreducible to the subject and unable to be grasped by the subject. The subject is surprised by the future for it is alien to him or her. The subject is passive in the

72 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 57, italicized in the original.

73 Ibid., 70.

74 Ibid., 71 and 74.

75 Ibid., 77: “The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future…. I have characterized this event as mystery, precisely because it could not be anticipated – that is, grasped; it could not enter into a present or it could enter into it as what does not enter it.”
face of the coming of the future. And the future does have a face. It is the face of the Other. And the relationship with this other is the face-to-face. While with death the possibility of the future opens up, for death is other than the self, this however is not yet time. For Levinas, time “lies in the relationship between humans,” which is the face-to-face.

Relationship with the future, the presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face with the Other. The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship.

Now this intersubjective relationship of the face-to-face does not yet carry the ethical weight that will come to characterize the heart of Levinas’ thought. Rather than ethics, Time and the Other concludes with reflections on eros and fecundity. But ethical glimmers are on the horizon (dare we use the word) when Levinas mentions the passivity of the subject in relation to the other and the asymmetry of this relationship. Time is still needed before these concepts flower into the rigors of ethical obligation that are presented in his later works. For now we simply note with Levinas that “the Other is what I myself am not” – a simple sentence that opens up an anarchical world of incommensurables.

76 Ibid., 78.
77 Ibid., 79.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 81-84.
80 Ibid., 83.
Now we turn to the two instances that have not only escaped being but are in fact beyond being: the other who is other than me and puts all of my totality into question, and the self who is enacted by the encounter with the other as an ethical subject answerable “for all that is and all that is not”. Beyond being as such, the other and the self as ethical subjectivity are bound in a relationship older than memory and prior to manifestation. It is upon this relationship, the first philosophy of ethics, that our notions of humanity, society, and justice are founded. But this requires the coming of the third party present in the face of the other, another aspect of Levinas’ thought to which we must pay careful attention. But all this is in an attempt to answer Levinas’ question: how is it possible to speak of transcendence? How is it possible to think beyond being?

*The Face of the Other – the command and cry of ethical responsibility*

Before we speak directly about the face (an ethical impossibility to be sure!), we must first expand a little more upon Levinas’ concept of infinity. It is well known that Levinas’s understanding of infinity was greatly influenced by Descartes. Indeed, Descartes’ name is mentioned throughout Levinas’ numerous works. For Levinas, there seem to be two key aspects about Descartes’ idea of the infinite. First, there is a disproportion between the infinite and the idea of it. That is, in the language of phenomenology, “its ideatum surpasses its idea”. While we can have this idea of the

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81 See Translator's Introduction, *Otherwise than Being*, xxxviii.

infinite, the infinite itself is not grasped or encompassed in this idea. “In thinking infinity the I from the first thinks more than it thinks.” The intentional aim is unequal to this task. Or, as Levinas says reflecting later on his use of Descartes’ idea: “There is a disproportion between the act and that to which the act gives access.” Because of this inequality, this disproportion, this surpassing or overflowing of the idea of the infinite by the infinite itself, the infinite is, as such, infinite or transcendent. This overflowing is, for Levinas, the very infinition of infinity, marking it as transcendent. What is more, this transcendent disproportion between the self and the infinite marks the infinite as other than the ego. This brings us to the second aspect of Descartes’ idea of the infinite that Levinas highlights. It is an idea that has been “put into us”. The infinite is “radically, absolutely, other”. As infinite, it exceeds the very thought consciousness aims at it and thus can never be grasped and reduced by the ego. And so the question arises, how can one even come to think this thought that is wholly other than the self and overflows the very thought that attempts to think it? Levinas’ answer is that one does not so much think this thought in the sense that one wills (chooses) to aim one’s consciousness at this

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83 Ibid., emphasis original.
84 Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 91.
85 See Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 25. See also, “Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity”, 54: “The transcendence of infinity with respect to the ego that is separated from it and thinks it constitutes the first mark of its infinitude.”
86 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity", 54, emphasis original.
87 Ibid.
phenomenon and has the capacity to do so. Indeed, in the face of the infinite, one is rendered incapable, powerless, passive. And so, one does not so much think this thought as this thought is placed into one, given to one, by the infinite that approaches.\(^8\) It is this event of the idea of the infinite being placed into us that Levinas calls experience: “a relationship with the exterior, with the other, without this exteriority being able to be integrated into the same”.\(^9\) But how, one might ask, is this experience of the relationship with the infinite other enacted concretely? This is where the face is invoked and the human other makes its entrance.

The concept of the face did not make its debut in Levinas’ writings until 1951 in his essay “Is Ontology Fundamental?”\(^\)\(^9\) Although here there is no mention of the infinite per se, hints of the other exceeding my capacity to comprehend are found in this essay.

It is primarily a matter of our finding a vantage point from which man ceases to concern us in terms of the horizon of being, i.e., ceases to offer himself to our powers…. That being is man, and it is as a neighbor that man is accessible: as a face.\(^9\) It was not long until Levinas made the connection between this human face and the idea of the infinite. As stated above, if true relationship can only occur with what is other than me, what is exterior to me, and if the other person is this other who “exceeds the confines

\(^8\) Ibid. Levinas states that idea of the infinite "does not come from within" the subject.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^\)\(^9\) See Foreword to Existence and Existent, xiii, “the preeminent Levinasian theme, the human face that demands an ethical response, was not invoked by Levinas until 1951”.

of [my] understanding”, then it is clear how Levinas connects the idea of the infinite and the social relationship. Here is also where the face comes into play: “We call face the epiphany of what can thus present itself directly, and therefore exteriorly, to an I.” Making an even more explicit connection to Descartes, Levinas goes so far as to state that “the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face”. Levinas invokes this transcendence of the other by speaking of the nudity of the face. In its self-presentation as face, the other expresses him or herself. As we commented above, the other founds meaning and significance precisely because it expresses itself without any reference to me. In this way the face is “nude” for it is “by itself and not by reference to a system”. And when the other is manifested in the nudity of the face a desire is awakened in me.

The idea of infinity is a thought which at every moment thinks more than it thinks. A thought that thinks more than it thinks is a desire. Desire “measures” the infinity of the infinite.

Now we recall that in his earlier essay, “On Escape”, Levinas spoke of need as resulting not due to a lack but due to the plentitude of being. However, in his later writings when

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92 Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 5.

93 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity", 54. He states: "the idea of infinity is the social relationship", emphasis mine.

94 Ibid., 55, italicized in the original.

95 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 50, emphasis original.

96 Ibid., 51.

97 Ibid., 75, emphasis mine.

he came to introduce this concept of desire, need again took up the position of lacking something.99

The term we have chosen to mark the propulsion, the inflation, of this going beyond [that is the idea of infinity placed in me] is opposed to the affectivity of love and the indigence of need. Outside of the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches and the senses one allays, exists the other, absolutely other, desired beyond these satisfactions…100

Need, now interpreted as the traditional lack of something, results in the attempt to fulfill that need. Levinas states that, “in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other”.101 As such, “need is the primary movement of the same”.102 However and as opposed to need, “in Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me”.103 For Levinas, desire is unquenchable and can never be satisfied. Indeed, desire only grows to the proportion that one seeks out what is desired, the other. “The true desire is that which the desired does not satisfy, but hollows out. It is goodness.”104

Here we begin to take a more explicitly ethical turn for the epiphany of the face and the desire that it awakens are, ipso facto, an ethical event. Already in his earlier

99 See Introduction to Totality and Infinity, 19, emphasis original: "Levinas’ description between need which seeks to fill a negation or lack in the subject, and desire which is positively attracted by something other not yet possessed or needed..."

100 Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity", 56, emphasis mine.

101 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 117, emphasis original.

102 Ibid., 116.

103 Ibid., 117.

In his later writings, Levinas is quite adamant about this point. “The epiphany of the face is ethical.” Even more, the presence of the other via the face is “ethical resistance”. That is, the presence of the other via the face which signifies by itself is a resistance to my totalizing grasp that seeks to reduce and possess the other through my constitutive comprehension of the other. The face of the other refuses such violence and never lets down its guard. “Ethical resistance is the presence of infinity.” Thus for Levinas, desire for the infinite is desire for the other: “Desire, an aspiration that does not proceed from a lack… is the desire of a person.” This desire for the other person is goodness. Goodness is “being for the other”. Being for the other is the response of ethical responsibility which is infinite for I am never finished with my duty and obligation to and for the other. “The infinity of responsibility denotes not its actual immensity, but a responsibility increasing in the measure that it is assumed; duties become greater in the measure that they are accomplished.” We will return to this infinite response of

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105 See "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 9-11. Levinas concludes this essay with a section entitled "The Ethical Meaning of the Other". Here he links the other with the desire to murder and the social relation with the other, the face to face, with the inability to kill.

106 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 199.

107 Ibid.


109 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 299.

110 Ibid., 304-305.

111 Ibid., 244, emphasis original.
responsibility in the section on the ethical subject. However, there are a few more points to consider about this ethical epiphany of the face of the other that resists the violence of the encompassing ego.

We have seen how the other manifests itself in the face which expresses itself, resisting my comprehension and categorization. “The face speaks” – but what exactly does the face say? Levinas is very specific on this point and it further reveals the ethical resistance of the face, for what the face says is “thou shalt not kill”. This prohibition against murder was seen as early as 1951 in “Is Ontology Fundamental?”\(^\text{112}\) In Totality and Infinity it is reiterated with even greater force.

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.”\(^\text{113}\) So we see that ethics is first philosophy for the other founds expression and meaning, speaking the first word which is the prohibition of murder. But this first word reveals something else about the other. The other holds a curious position in relation to me. It is a position of both height and destitution.\(^\text{114}\) The other stands over me as an authority, commanding me not to murder. But the other also kneels before me, looking up to me with pleading eyes, begging me who holds his or her life in my hands not to kill. The other both commands me and appeals to me. In this way, I stand before the other both accused and in a powerful position to act. Thus the nudity of the face that signifies its ability to express itself without recourse to my meaning bestowal, is also the nakedness

\(^{112}\) See “Is Ontology Fundamental?”\(^\text{,}9\text{-}10.\

\(^{113}\) Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 199, emphasis original.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 200.
of exposure, destitution, and poverty.\textsuperscript{115} The presence of the face both puts my freedom into question, measuring me and finding me wanting in the adequacy of my response,\textsuperscript{116} and it promotes my freedom, calling me to responsibility and founding my capacity to respond.\textsuperscript{117} In this way Levinas can make the claim that “it is therefore not freedom that accounts for the transcendence of the Other, but the transcendence of the Other that accounts for freedom”.\textsuperscript{118} The other does not only found language and meaning, but also my very ability to act.

In this notion of infinite ethical resistance we see how Levinas can claim that the other “\textit{is}” not otherwise but is “otherwise than being”.\textsuperscript{119} As is now familiar, traditionally the notion of being is linked with presence and manifestation. However, for Levinas, the other does \textit{not} give him or herself to be seen. Although the other is “manifested” in the face, this is a “manifesting… without manifesting” that Levinas terms \textit{enigma}.\textsuperscript{120} A phenomenon reveals itself to the intentional consciousness, but an enigma expresses itself without revealing itself. This is the way of the face. This is what Levinas means when he says that the face speaks and expresses itself but does not give itself to be seen. Indeed, Levinas goes so far as to say that “the best way of encountering the Other is not even to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{115} See Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 86.
\textsuperscript{116} Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity”, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{117} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 203.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{119} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 3.
\end{flushright}
notice the color of his eyes!” To see the color of the other’s eyes is already to conceptualize the other and turn him or her into a thing, a mere phenomenon to be judged and thematized by me. But the other is not a mere thing, is no-thing, is an enigma whose way is an otherwise than being that calls me to respond. This is the face of the other that I encounter in ethical responsibility. As such, this encounter with the face of the other who holds a position of height and destitution is the ethical relationship that Levinas calls the face to face. We will have more to say about this ethical relation in our section on the subject who responds to the summons of the other.

While Levinas insists upon the in-visibility of the face, otherwise than being, he also insists that “we are in the world”. And so the question arises, who exactly in the world is this other who summons me to ethical responsibility and response? For this Levinas provides a handful of options. First, the other as other is the stranger, the one who “escapes my grasp” and over whom I have no power. Echoing the ancient Hebrew prophets, the face of the other is also the face of the poor, the widow, and the orphan. Apparently the other is any poor soul crying out to me for mercy and compassion, whose destitution accuses me, shames me, demands that I respond. The other is the one who makes me realize the truth of Pascal’s words that Levinas is fond of quoting: “This is my place in the sun.” Here is the beginning and the prototype of the usurpation of the whole

121 Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 85.

122 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 33.

123 Ibid., 39.

124 Ibid., 245.
earth.”

Perhaps so as not to be too restrictive to these few categories, Levinas tends, in his later works to refer to the other as, simply, my neighbor.

The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.

However, lest we have any naïve connotation of this neighbor, Levinas insists that this neighbor is also my persecutor, the one who accuses me of a crime I did not commit and forever hounds me for a responsibility I did not choose. But while we and the other are apparently in the world, there is yet another other, an other other, who is not in this world – “God is the other”. We will save our reflection on this Absolutely Other for the final section of this paper.

Another way in which Levinas tries to maintain the transcendent alterity of the other who is ethically resistant to me in the enigma of the face is by way of the trace. First developed in his 1962 essay, “The Trace of the Other”, it soon became an important concept in Levinas’ repertoire. Levinas insists upon the “beyond being”. Infinity, the other, goodness, ethics, the subject who responds ethically to the other, God – all these are beyond being. But what precisely is this beyond? Levinas states:

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126 Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", 83.

127 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 111-112.

128 Levinas Totality and Infinity, 211.

…the beyond is not a simple background from which a face solicits us, is not “another world” behind the world. The beyond is precisely beyond the “world,” that is, beyond every disclosure – like the One of the first hypothesis of the Parmenides, which transcends all cognition…¹³⁰

The face signifies from this “beyond”, but it does so not in the way phenomena in this world manifest themselves, giving themselves to be seen in the present moment. Indeed, the other does not so much present itself in the face as pass us by like a disturbance upon the water. There are ripples on the water that indicate that something once was here but we were too late or too slow or too unaware to see it and so it passed us by. Only in the trace of its passing, with the ripples on the water, do we become aware that once something was here. Such is the way of the face. “The beyond from which a face comes signifies as a trace.”¹³¹ Just as the ripples on the water indicate that something has passed, so too does the trace refer to a past – an “immemorial past”.¹³² We saw how in his earlier works Levinas spoke of the coming of the other as bringing the future and enacting time. In his later works, especially after his analysis of the trace, Levinas prefers to refer to the past. But we must not confuse this with a past accessible to me, available to memory and recollection. “No memory could follow the traces of this past.”¹³³ The realm of the other, the time in which the other “is”, otherwise than being, is inaccessible to me, inaccessible to my comprehending, intentional grasp. Another way in which Levinas refers to this inaccessible realm of the other is to make a distinction between diachrony and synchrony.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 354, emphasis original.
¹³¹ Ibid., 355.
¹³² Ibid.
¹³³ Ibid.
Diachrony is the realm and time of the other who is beyond being and signifies by way of the trace. “Diachrony is the refusal of conjunction, the non-totalizable, and in this sense, infinite.”\textsuperscript{134} The “immemorial past” of the other from which the trace signifies is diachronous. Synchrony indicates the time and realm of being, history, the present, consciousness. “The present is essence that begins and ends, beginning and end assembled in a thematizable conjunction…”\textsuperscript{135} The ethical relation of responsibility towards the other also belongs to the realm of diachrony.

But the relationship with \textit{a past that is on the hither side of every present and every re-presentable, for not belonging to the order of presence}, is included in the extraordinary and everyday event of my responsibility for the faults or the misfortune of others, in my responsibility that answers for the freedom of another…\textsuperscript{136}

But again we are slipping towards a later section.

At the beginning of this chapter we spoke of the anarchy of ethics, prior to and beyond all foundations and origins. This anarchy also refers to the realm of diachrony. Beyond being, outside of the time that can be recalled or anticipated in the present, the trace of the other is diachronous.

A trace qua trace does not simply lead to the past, but is the very \textit{passing} toward a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time – the past of the other, in which eternity takes form, an absolute past which unites all times.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 11.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 10, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{137} Levinas, "The Trace of the Other", 358, emphasis original.
And so we see the other is beyond being, a trace of an immemorial past that was never present and a future that will never “be”. Levinas is clear, “it is in the trace of the other that a face shines”.\textsuperscript{138} The encounter with the face is an anarchy that overthrows the assumed primacy of my consciousness and totalizing gaze.

A relationship that would not create simultaneity between its terms, but would hollow out a depth from which expression approaches would have to refer to an irreversible, immemorial, unrepresentable past.\textsuperscript{139}

Here again we see the “height” of the face, transcending and commanding me because coming, not merely before me, but from beyond me – coming from a beyond that is immemorial, that disrupts the totality of my present, an-archy.

One additional concept that can be discussed in relation to diachrony is what Levinas terms the saying. Just as diachrony is contrasted with synchrony, so the saying is contrasted with the said. This is one of the more dense and challenging concepts offered to us by Levinas. “All speaking is an enigma.”\textsuperscript{140} We will reflect on these two concepts, the saying and the said, as a segue into our consideration of Levinas’ analysis of ethical subjectivity for, as we will see, within the saying is found both the approach of the other and the response of the subject.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 359.

\textsuperscript{139} Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma", 65.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 69.
The Saying vs. the Said: at the origins of language is the ethical approach of the other

We have seen that the ethical relationship between the self and the other, who is infinitely other – an enigma – is language. And so, if the other who calls to me is infinite so too is the summons, and so too must be my response. This infinite response that is the ethical relationship, thus language, Levinas invokes as the saying.

First we can briefly outline the more familiar realm of the said. Levinas designates as the said that which belongs to the synchronous realm of the intentional consciousness and being. “Intentionality is thought and understanding, claim, the naming of the identical, the proclaiming of something as something.” The said is precisely the realm of thought, conveyed by words whether spoken aloud or held within the secrecy of my silent mind. The said is the conceptualization and thematization of the ego pronouncing its judgments upon reality as captured within its intentional grasp, giving meaning to that which “is”.

Consciousness confers meaning... in taking the given, whether immanent or transcendent, “as this” or “as that.” To become conscious of is to “take as...”.

Language... is meaningful because it is a kerygmatic proclamation which identifies that as that.

However, as we know, Levinas finds the traditional priority given to the intentional consciousness and its meaning bestowal upon the world to be rather problematic for all cannot be reduced to the thematizing gaze of intentional consciousness. What is more, to

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141 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 39.


143 Ibid., 112-113.
try and comprehend that which is beyond the capacity of the ego is violent. To attempt to say, or identify, what the other is is, for Levinas, not only impossible but an injustice bordering on murder. To encounter the other as other requires another form of signification than that of the conscious thought of the ego, the said. It requires the ethical saying of exposure and responsibility. “Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities.”144 Indeed, as the other presents him or herself not as a phenomenon but as an enigma, so the encounter with this other cannot be enacted by way of comprehension and knowledge. As was discussed above, one must not see the color of the Other’s eyes.

When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.145

Levinas is of course aware, as are we, of the irony of this situation. For here we are reducing Levinas’ work to mere themes and concepts just as Levinas himself, in his analyses of the other, the ethical encounter, the subject, etc., engaged in the task of thematizing and presentation – the realm of the said. As noted, he admits that “in language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal”.146 However, at the same time, Levinas wishes to show that this betrayal is not only unavoidable, for we live in the synchronous time of the present, we are in the world, but is also not merely negative.

144 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 46, emphasis mine.
145 Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 85-86.
146 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 6.
Our task is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead it to the said, to the putting together of structures which make possible justice and the “I think.” The said, the appearing, arises in the saying. Essence then has its hour and its time.\textsuperscript{147}

While the necessity to unsay the said\textsuperscript{148} is never-ending, something yet must be said. Incommensurables must be translated. And so we attempt to say what the saying is, recognizing the paradox of this very act.

Three points can be made about this ethical saying.\textsuperscript{149} First, saying “is the condition that precedes every said, all systematic discourse, thematization, and phenomenology”. Second, the saying “cannot be understood as a modulation or modification of a human or superhuman Said”. Third, the saying “cannot be reduced to the act of an autonomous subject or the free initiative of human self-consciousness”. As to the first point, Levinas states:

\begin{quote}
Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages, it is the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification…. The original or pre-original saying, what is put forth in the foreword, weaves an intrigue of responsibility.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

Prior to thought, prior to the mere formation and speaking of words, ethical language is the entering into a relationship with the other. If this is so, then the second point, that the saying “cannot be understood as a modulation or modification of a human or superhuman Said,” stands to reason. For Levinas, this ethical language of the saying involves “a

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 46, emphasis mine. This bridge to the realm of the said will be further articulated in the section on the coming of the third party below.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{149} These points are taken from Peperzak, \textit{Beyond}, 157.

\textsuperscript{150} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 5-6.
positive and antecedent event of communication which would be an approach to and a contact with the neighbor”.\textsuperscript{151} That is, in language there is a proximity between me and the other. “Speech and its logical work would then unfold not in knowledge of the interlocutor, but in his proximity.”\textsuperscript{152} For Levinas, proximity is the very meaning of the face of the other who approaches me, initiating language and meaning.\textsuperscript{153} Combining several concepts we have been addressing, Levinas states:

In proximity is heard a command come as though from an immemorial past, which was never present, began in no freedom. This way of the neighbor is a face.\textsuperscript{154}

To speak presupposes that I am speaking to someone. “Whatever be the message transmitted by speech, the speaking is contact.”\textsuperscript{155} Before I utter a word, I approach another and make contact with him or her. I expose myself to the other.

To say is to approach a neighbor, “dealing him signifyingness”…. Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure.\textsuperscript{156}

Now while Levinas admits that “the saying does indeed lead to the said”, what he wishes to bring attention to is this forgotten “event” prior to the said of language that is exposure to the other. He wishes to draw our attention to “the first word” that “says only the saying

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\textsuperscript{151} Levinas, "Language and Proximity", 125, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 115. This refutation of knowledge is a direct critique of Heidegger’s emphasis on Dasein’s quest for knowledge. See our section on Levinas’ critique of Heidegger in chapter one of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{153} Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", 82.

\textsuperscript{154} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 88, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{155} Levinas, “Language and Proximity”, 115

\textsuperscript{156} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 48.
itself before every being and every thought in which being is sighted and reflected”.\textsuperscript{157}

This approach to and contact with the other that is an exposure of the self carries with it the sense of risk and vulnerability. Indeed, Levinas goes so far as to claim that “one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it, as a cheek is offered to the smiter”.\textsuperscript{158} In this exposure to the other, the self is rendered passive and can take no shelter from the accusation of the other’s face, “thou shalt not kill”.

The saying signifies this passivity; in the saying this passivity signifies, becomes signifyingness, exposure in response to…, being at the question before any interrogation, any problem, without clothing, without a shell to protect oneself, stripped to the core…. It is a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as a vulnerability.\textsuperscript{159}

In this exposure and passivity before the other, this saying without words, Levinas finds a radical reversal of the ego’s self-interested persistence in being, its \textit{conatus essendi}. For Levinas, \textit{to be} is to be self-interested. “\textit{Esse is interesse}; essence is interest.”\textsuperscript{160} However, with the proximity of the other in which I am exposed to him or her, there is “an inversion of the \textit{conatus of esse}”.\textsuperscript{161} Exposure to the other, ethical saying, renders one dis-interested, torn from the self-interested naval-gazing of the ego, de-centered, de-nucleated, indifferent to self but non-indifferent to the other.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{157} Levinas, "Language and Proximity", 126.

\textsuperscript{158} Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 49.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 75.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 48-49.
Irreducible to being’s essence is the substitution in responsibility, signification of the one-for-the-other, or the defecting of the ego beyond every defeat, going countercurrent to a *conatus*, or goodness.\textsuperscript{163}

As outrageous as it may seem, for Levinas it is this very stripping bare of the ego to the point of a passive exposure that wounds which identifies and enacts one as unique and irreplaceable, as a subject. One is not an ego, but a *self*.

Saying is a denuding, of the unqualifiable *one*, the pure *someone*, unique and chosen; that is, it is an exposedness to the other where no slipping away is possible. In its sincerity as a sign given to another, it absolves me of all identity…. This absolution reverses essence. It is not a negation of essence, but a disinterestedness, an “otherwise than being” which turns into a “for the other”…. Here identity lies in the total patience of the one assigned…. The reverting of the ego into a self, the de-posing or de-situating of the ego, is the very modality of dis-interestedness.\textsuperscript{164}

As to our third point above, it should now be clear why the saying “cannot be reduced to the act of an autonomous subject or the free initiative of human self-consciousness” for in the saying human consciousness is stripped bare of its initiative. However while the ethical saying is an exposure that marks the self as passive and vulnerable, it is this very coming of the other that enacts my freedom. A paradox to be sure, but, as we discussed in the section on the face of the other above, it is the face of the other who accuses me and calls me into question *who also* founds my freedom to act and respond to the other. And so at last we find ourselves presented with the second member of the ethical dyad that Levinas calls *the self*. For while we have come to the point of the denuding of the ego and vulnerable exposure of the self, it is precisely here that one’s subjectivity is enacted, but

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 50, emphasis original.
as a self, not as an ego. And so we turn now to more fully address this ethical subject who
is passive and yet responds to the summons of the other.

Subjectivity Enacted in Ethical Responsibility – from the realm of the same to the
testimony of the hostage

To be oneself, otherwise than being, to be dis-interested, is to bear the
wretchedness and bankruptcy of the other, and even the responsibility that the
other can have for me. To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to
have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of
the other…. Subjectivity is being hostage.  

These are hard words to bear let alone to understand. Yet here is the crux of
Levinas’ conception of human subjectivity – it is the position of being a hostage to the
point of substitution for the other, to the point of bearing the responsibility of the other,
even the other’s responsibility for oneself. In this section, we will offer a close analysis of
chapter four of Levinas’ text, Otherwise than Being. This chapter, entitled “Substitution”,
is not only the centerpiece of the book,  but also provides an in-depth presentation of
Levinas’ ethical reconstitution of human subjectivity which, like the face of the other, is
an otherwise than being. However, before we delve into the obscurities of what is one
of Levinas’ most difficult texts, a few preliminary comments from Totality and Infinity
are offered.

Levinas is quite clear that Totality and Infinity offers a “defense of subjectivity”.
However, it is not the familiar vision of subjectivity, as founded upon the egoistic

165 Ibid., 117 and 127.
166 Levinas himself admits this. See his “note” prefacing Otherwise than Being.
167 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 111.
tendencies of the intentional consciousness, that he offers. Rather, it is a defense of subjectivity “as founded in the idea of infinity”. That is, it is subjectivity as enacted through the encounter with the other who, in his or her alterity transcends me and is thus infinite. As we know this encounter with the other, as other, that is an encounter with the commanding, pleading face of the other is, ipso facto, ethical. “This book [Totality and Infinity] will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality…” This ethical responsibility, this hospitality offered to the other is, as we have commented above, infinite. The more I respond to the other, the more a response is demanded – my response is never complete but always insufficient to the demand of the other. For Levinas, this is precisely what defines one as a subject. “Perhaps the possibility of a point of the universe where such an overflow of responsibility is produced ultimately defines the I.” To be a subject, to be an I, is to be chosen as responsible for the other. Indeed, it is through ethics alone that we can speak of such notions as the self and the other. Levinas states, “through morality [ethics, ethical responsibility] alone are I and the others produced in the universe”. Taking an even more radical stance, Levinas claims that it is not cognition or reason that founds subjectivity, but fear. In complete refutation of the anxiety Heidegger’s Dasein feels in the face of its own death, the ethical subject fears the death of the other more than its own. Confirmation as a person thus consists “in existing for the Other, that is, in being called in question and in dreading murder more than death

168 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 26.
169 Ibid., 27.
170 Ibid., 245.
171 Ibid.
[which] an I… can alone accomplish”. In this way, being a subject is not to be for oneself but to be for-the-other. “To be I and not only an incarnation of a reason is precisely to be capable of seeing the offense of the offended, or the face.” This is why Levinas calls the ethical relationship the face-to-face for it is only when I face the other, when I offer my face to the commanding and pleading face of the other, that I can offer him or her the welcome and hospitality that marks ethical subjectivity. To face the other is a highly personal act, it is what marks us as human.

The human is the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness, to mauvaise conscience, to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which justifies being over that which assures it.

Responding to the other is “a response to the being who in a face speaks to the subject and tolerates only a personal response, that is, an ethical act”. It is in this way of turning to face and respond to the other that “the other provides my existence with meaning”. Indeed, for Levinas, it is the encounter with the other that enacts my subjectivity. One can go so far as to say that without the other I could not be a human

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172 Ibid., 246, emphasis mine.

173 Ibid., 247.

174 Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", 85, italicized in the original. See also Otherwise than Being, 83. He states: “Humanity, to which proximity properly so called refers, must then not be first understood as consciousness, that is, as the identity of an ego endowed with knowledge or (what amounts to the same thing) with powers.” He concludes this section (p. 86) claiming that human subjectivity is rather confirmed in the commitment to proximity in which, as we know, is heard the immemorial command coming from the face of the other who is my neighbor (p. 88).

175 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 219, emphasis mine.

176 Peperzak, Beyond, 186.
The age old question over the meaning of life has, for Levinas, a simple yet profound answer – the meaning of life is to be for-the-other.

Levinas’ description of human subjectivity takes an even more radical turn in his later text, *Otherwise than Being*. In the analysis of the ethical response found here, the turn to the other takes its most far-reaching steps. Here we find the enucleation of the subject, substituted for the other to the point of expiation. As we have noted, ultimately for Levinas, “a subject is a hostage”.¹⁷⁷

Chapter four of *Otherwise than Being* is divided into six sections. In the first section, “Principle and Anarchy”, we find Levinas juxtaposing the play in being of the intentional consciousness that is for itself, sovereign and in a position of domination, with that of the obsession of the subject in proximity to the other (102). When one encounters the other one is met with an “assignation of me by another” which is responsibility and obligation to and for the other (100-101). However, this assignation of obligation that is the proximity of the other occurs “anarchically”, that is, “anachronously prior to any commitment” (100-101). In the encounter with the other I find “a responsibility that is justified by no prior commitment” (102, emphasis original). For Levinas, this ethical responsibility that is prior to thus “irreducible to consciousness” is a relationship of obsession (101). Levinas also calls it a persecution for the consciousness is “affected in spite of itself” (102). Being obsessed with the other is a persecution: “being called into

¹⁷⁷ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 112. For ease of reading, in the following analysis of chapter four of *Otherwise than Being* citations will be placed in parentheses within the body of the text.
question prior to questioning, responsibility over and beyond the logos of response” (102).

In section two, “Recurrence”, Levinas delineates how this obsessive obligation takes place “on the hither side of consciousness and its play, beyond or on the hither side of being which it thematizes, outside of being, and thus in itself as in exile” (103). As shown in section one, prior to consciousness and outside of being, there is a “subjective condition” that is a responsibility for the other prior to commitment (103). In this “antecedent [that is, prior to consciousness] recurrence of the oneself” one is “in itself already outside of itself” (104). That is, the oneself does not issue out of its own initiative but is “provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others” (105). In this irreplaceable devotion, one is reduced to oneself, “expelled into itself outside of being” (105). Levinas uses this hermetic language to try to convey that this ethical subjectivity of obsessive devotion to the other can nowise be understood in terms of being. To be oneself is precisely to be enacted by another, reduced to the bare bones of one’s responsibility without the protective cushioning of being, thus in oneself outside of being. The assignation of the other that is prior to being and the present, prior to the for itself of cognition, anachronous, “assigns the self to be a self” (106). This is the ipseity of recurrence, the oneself that is responsibility for others (106). It is “an inversion in the process of essence”, withdrawing from the game of being, “a non-condition” (107). It is an “extreme passivity” for it is “a duty overflowing my being” (109). As such, the oneself of ethical responsibility comes from an immemorial past. However, this recurrence of self into itself outside of being is also incarnation (109). As abstract as the ethical subject may appear, for Levinas there is no debate – without the body one cannot give to the other
(109) thus without the body there can be no ethical relationship. For Levinas, incarnation is “an extreme passivity” for only when one has a body can one be exposed to pain and suffering, exposed to the other in compassion and, “as a self, [exposed] to the gift that costs” (195). Ethical responsibility manifests itself concretely in “taking care of the other’s need” which is “a giving” (74).

To give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one’s own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one’s own fasting (56). … But giving has meaning only as a tearing from oneself despite oneself, and not only without me. And to be torn from oneself despite oneself has meaning only as a being torn from the complacency in oneself characteristic of enjoyment, snatching the bread from one’s mouth. Only a subject that eats can be for-the-other, or can signify. Signification, the-one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood (74, emphasis original).

One has the uncomfortable feeling that when Levinas speaks of the persecution of the ethical subject obsessed with his or her obligation to the other, he means this quite literally. There is pain and sacrifice in the ethical commitment to the other. Levinas concludes this section summing up his vision of the ethical recurrence of the oneself:

“Responsibility prior to any free commitment, the oneself outside of all the tropes of essence, would be responsibility for the freedom of the others” (109).

Section three, “The Self”, attempts to show how the “passive folding back” of the oneself in recurrence coincides with “the anarchic passivity of an obsession” (110). For Levinas, this recurrence of the self into responsibility for the other is “the ultimate secret of the incarnation of the subject” (111). As we know, this recurrence takes place on the hither side of being and consciousness. It is anarchical and thus passive. “It is the passivity of a trauma,… the passivity of being persecuted” (111). It comes from the other.
Levinas insists upon this passivity for it is only in passivity that the ethical subject can be outside of being.

To undergo from the other is an absolute patience only if by this from-the-other is already for-the-other. This transfer, other than interested, “otherwise than essence,” is subjectivity itself (111).

Levinas also speaks of subjectivity as “the other in the same” to try and convey this sense of passivity. The other in the same is a “putting into question of all affirmation for-oneself” (111). Thus the “subjectivity of a subject is responsibility of being-in-question in the form of the total exposure to offence in the cheek offered to the smiter” (111). This recurrence of self that is responsibility for others, “a persecuting obsession”, is not only outside of being, it also “goes against intentionality” (111). Here again Levinas tries to convey the passivity of ethical subjectivity. What is more, he offers a key conclusion: in this ethical passivity one does not lose one’s identity but finds it.

It is in the passivity of obsession, or incarnated passivity, that an identity individuates itself as unique, without recourse to any system of references, in the impossibility of evading the assignation of the other without blame (112).

One is rendered a unique individual not by way of self-promotion but by way of ethical obligation. Levinas speaks of “the impossibility of evading the assignation”, the “irremissibility of the accusation” (112). That is, I am unique and irreplaceable in my responsibility for others. While I can take the place of others (as will be shown), no one can take my place – I always have “one degree of responsibility more” (117).

Dostoyevsky expresses this sentiment perfectly for Levinas: “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others” (146). In this additional weight of responsibility lies the individuality of the I. “In the ethical saying of responsibility, which is an exposure to an obligation for which no one could replace me, I am unique” (139).
The ethical relationship is clearly not reciprocal but asymmetrical. Levinas expresses this asymmetrical obligation from which I cannot hide through the concepts of substitution and the hostage.

For under accusation by everyone, the responsibility for everyone goes to the point of substitution. A subject is a hostage (112).

We will have more to say about this directly. Levinas further indicates how ethical subjectivity is prior to being and on the hither side of consciousness through this “impossibility of evading the assignation” or “inability to decline” one’s duty toward the other. Ethical responsibility is “a debt preceding a loan,” “an expenditure overflowing ones’ resources,” “an accusation preceding the fault, borne against oneself despite one’s innocence” (112-113). This is the “infinite passion of responsibility” that marks the ethical subject (113). It is a passion that will lead one on the path to substitution and the position of the hostage. And this is precisely what Levinas focuses on in his next section.

Just as chapter four is the centerpiece of Otherwise than Being, section four of chapter four, “Substitution”, may be seen as the centerpiece of this chapter. Levinas opens this section again reflecting on the event of recurrence. And like the metaphorical wave, this reflection proceeds just a bit farther up the beach. As we know, “in the recurrence to oneself there is a going to the hither side of oneself” (114). It is “an identity gnawing away at itself”, it is a hostage (114). In our section on the other above, we commented on how the face presents the other by expressing the other. The face speaks, commanding and pleading “thou shalt not kill”. To these haunting words the ethical subject responds with words of his or her own: “here I am”. “The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone” (114, italicized in the original). The
“here I am” is the saying of the ethical relationship. In this saying “the pronoun ‘I’ is in the accusative” (142). This is made clearer if we consider the words in their original French: _me voici_. For Levinas, the ethical saying “is without noematic correlation” (145). The I (_je_) is not present in the “here I am” (_me voici_) for the ethical self has “no nominative form” (112). The ethical subject is not only provoked by the other, but once provoked, stands before the other accused and subjected. “The self is a _subjectum_; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything” (116). The ethical self is not only _not_ from itself and _not_ for itself, but is rather _from_ the other and _for_ the other. “I exist through the other and for the other” (114). The incarnation of recurrence of “being-in-one’s-skin” is a “having-the-other-in-one’s-skin” (115). This is the substitution of the self for the other of being a hostage that, while being prior to all choice and free commitment, paradoxically, liberates the self and renders one unique and irreplaceable (115), the “non-interchangeable par excellence” (117). The other does not substitute him or herself for me, only the I, “the unique one, substitutes itself for others” (117). And so we come at last to the quote with which we opened this section:

To be oneself, otherwise than being, to be dis-interested, is to bear the wretchedness and bankruptcy of the other, and even the responsibility that the other can have for me. To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the other (117).

Clearly, “these are not events that happen to an empirical ego” (115)! Here again we see the asymmetry of the relationship for the self is responsible even for the responsibility of the other. What is more, Levinas finds in substitution the very condition that allows for pity, compassion, pardon, proximity, and solidarity in the world (117). All concrete forms of morality or justice in the world “presuppose the subjectivity of the ego, substitution,
the possibility of putting oneself in the place of the other, which refers to the transference from the ‘by the other’ into a ‘for the other’, and in persecution from the outrage inflicted by the other to the expiation for his fault by me’ (117-118). Scandalous as it may seem, for Levinas the ethical subject is responsible for the crimes of the other, even those the other inflicts upon me.\textsuperscript{178} One is indeed a hostage. This is perhaps made most clear in Levinas’ bold statement “I am an other” (118). Sadly the English does not render how very radical this claim is. The French, \textit{“je est un autre”}, reveals the blending of the nominative, first person I with the third person form of the verb to be.\textsuperscript{179} In this way Levinas tries to indicate the dramatic transformation that occurs in ethical substitution resulting in the subject as a hostage to the other. The self is hostage to the point of claiming:

\begin{quote}
I am outside of any place, in myself, on the hither side of the autonomy of auto-affection and identity resting in itself. Impassively undergoing the weight of the other, thereby called to uniqueness… (118)
\end{quote}

The subject is hostage to the point that he or she can no longer say “I am” (\textit{je suis}) but “I is” (\textit{je est}). Here indeed is “the other \textit{in} the same” (111, emphasis mine) that we spoke of earlier – the other \textit{is}; thus I, as the ethical subject substituted for the other as his or her hostage, not \textit{am} but \textit{is} as well. And as we saw above, ethical responsibility is passive to

\textsuperscript{178} However Levinas also claims that such a radical responsibility, responsible even for one’s persecutor, is a responsibility that he can only give himself. "I am responsible for the persecutions that I undergo. But only me! My ‘close relations’ or ‘my people’ are already the others and, for them, I demand justice." See \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 99.

\textsuperscript{179} Indeed, the English translation, to more truly reflect Levinas’ intentions here, should be rendered as "I \textit{is} an other". In this passage, Levinas is quoting and in agreement with French poet, Arthur Rimbaud.
the point of the trauma and persecution of substitution for even the guilt of the other. It is this that Levinas claims is the Good and in this way that the self is, as such, goodness.

In this sense the self is goodness, or under the exigency for an abandon of all having, of all one’s own and all for oneself, to the point of substitution…. Goodness invests me in my obedience to the hidden Good…. It is an expiating for being. The self is the very fact of being exposed under the accusation that cannot be assumed, where the ego supports the others… (118, emphasis original).

Section five, “Communication”, revisits Levinas conception of language as communication which in turn is ethical responsibility for the other. To communicate is to open oneself to the other, to turn to the other as responsible for the other (119). This we have seen before, but now Levinas adds that this responsibility manifested in language goes to the point of substitution for the other (119). The “transcendence involved in language” is the infinity of my responsibility for the other to the point of being a hostage (120). In this way Levinas claims that “communication is an adventure of a subjectivity” that is not a return to the self or return to the known, but an adventure outside of and beyond the self with no certain future (120) – it is the adventure of Abraham into the unknown and never to return, not the roundtrip of Ulysses. Levinas concludes this section with a warning not to revert this ethical subjectivity of the here I am and the relationship between the self and the other into a theme as phenomenology is wont to do (121). “The self involved in the gnawing away at oneself in responsibility, which is also incarnation, is not an objectification of the self by the ego” (121, emphasis original).

Chapter four concludes with an interesting reflection on freedom in section six, entitled “Finite Freedom”. Returning to the issue of the passivity of the subject, Levinas reminds us (like God reminding Job) that we humans did not create the world but have come late into the world. This “lateness” indicates the limits imposed on the freedom of
the subject (122). But these limits are not purely negative, are not a “pure privation”. Rather, the human tardiness into the realm of creation indicates that there is something prior to (human) being. As we have seen, Levinas insists that what is prior to (and therefore has priority) is the ethical relation. Thus human “freedom” is actually a relation of responsibility that signifies “the Goodness of the Good” (122). In this way “the Good is before being” which also indicates “the necessity that the Good choose me first before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome the choice” (122). I am chosen, assigned, prior to my choice, prior to my very being. “The Good assigns the subject, according to a susception that cannot be assumed, to approach the other, the neighbor” (122-123). But if this is the case, if I am bound to the other before I ever got to choose and indeed, cannot turn away from this task, how can we even speak of human freedom at all? In this way, Levinas speaks of “finite freedom” which is a freedom “qualified” or oriented by the prior assignation of ethical responsibility (124).

This finite freedom is not primary, is not initial; but it lies in an infinite responsibility where the other is not other because he strikes up against and limits my freedom, but where he can accuse me to the point of persecution, because the other, absolutely other, is another one…. And the proximity of the neighbor in its trauma does not only strike up against me, but exalts and elevates me, and, in the literal sense of the term, inspires me. Inspiration, heteronomy, is the very pneuma of the psyche. Freedom is borne by the responsibility it could not shoulder, an elevation and inspiration without complacency (124).

Not only does Levinas see responsibility as orienting freedom, responsibility actually liberates the self. An “anarchic liberation”, substitution “frees the subject… from the enchainment to itself” (124). The anarchic for-the-other of substitution liberates the self from the burden and weight of being. The escape from being that Levinas sought in 1935 has at last been found in the radical responsibility for the other to the point of
substitution. One’s persistence in being, essence as self-interest, is disrupted by the non-indifference towards the other and becomes dis-interestedness. In this way “responsibilities correspond exactly to liberties” (125). What is more, it is this very dis-interest in myself that most clearly marks me as \textit{me}.

The disinterestedness of the subject is a descent or elevation of the ego to me…. The subject posited as deposed is me…. But the concept of the ego can correspond to me only inasmuch as it can signify responsibility, which summons me as irreplaceable…. The ego involved in responsibility is me and no one else (126).

This irreplaceability of the ethical subject is nowhere more clear than in the notion of substitution. “My substitution – it is as \textit{my own} that substitution for the neighbor is produced…. It is in me… and not in another” (126, emphasis original). Levinas insists on this non-reciprocity of the ethical relationship for “to say that the other has to sacrifice himself to the others would be to preach human sacrifice” (126)! Indeed, “it is I, I and no one else, who am a hostage for the others” (126-127). One can perhaps see here a subtle snubbing of Heidegger’s emphasis on the “mineness” of \textit{Dasein’s} death. What marks me as \textit{me} has nothing to do \textit{with me} but rather is precisely my lack of concern for myself and instead my obsessive and infinite concern for the other even to the point of dying for the other – my death \textit{in place of} the other’s death.

And so we come to the end of Levinas’ key chapter on the ethical subject. It is a subject deposed from its \textit{conatus essendi}, passive and persecuted, dis-interested yet non-indifferent, subjected and held hostage, unable to decline the assignation placed upon it before it even drew breath. “It is a pure self, in the accusative, responsible before there is freedom” (127). Such is the human subject, such is human personhood. However, even after this stripping bare of the ego, a question dares to come to mind. It is a question, or
concern, Levinas himself raises at the end of his reflection on the enucleated subjectivity of the ethical self (128). What of the other other, the other who is other to my neighbor? What of the third party? This is yet another theme in Levinas’ thought – the limiting of my infinite responsibility due to the coming of the third party for the self and the other are not alone in the world. There are other others. And with this recognition is ushered in the whole realm of consciousness, justice, presence, thematization, etc. “The fact that the other, my neighbor, is also a third party with respect to another, who is also a neighbor, is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice, and philosophy” (128). It is to this realm of the third party that we now must turn.

*The Coming of the Third Party – the realm of intersubjectivity and society*

The ethical subject has an infinite responsibility to the other. But, as Levinas himself states, “we are in the world”¹⁸⁰ and it is a world full of millions upon millions of people crying out for aid and compassion. And so he admits that “we cannot act on a daily basis in approaching our fellow man as if he were the only person in the world”.¹⁸¹ If it is indeed true that the ethical subject is not a mere abstraction, but a concrete human person “of flesh and blood, a man that is hungry and eats, [has] entrails in a skin, and [is] thus capable of giving the bread out of his mouth, or giving his skin,”¹⁸² then a real ethical dilemma arises. The ethical dyad of the self and the other is in a constant state of disruption by the entrance of what Levinas terms the third party. “The I is in relationship

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¹⁸⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

¹⁸¹ Levinas, "The I and the Totality", 21.

¹⁸² Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 77.
with a human totality."¹⁸³ The ethical subject is called upon to respond to this totality of human others, to give the bread from his mouth to all these others, however a piece of bread can only go so far.

But here the simplicity of this primary obedience [of the self for the other] is upset by the third person emerging next to the other; the third person is himself also a neighbor, and the responsibility of the ego also devolves onto him. Here, starting from this third person, is the proximity of a human plurality. Who, in this plurality, comes first? Here is the hour and birthplace of the question: a demand for justice.¹⁸⁴

I must make a decision – the trauma of choice! – to whom will I give my piece of bread? However, the entrance of the third party breaking up the ethical dyad is not seen as something merely negative, like the disturbance between lovers who desire only to be alone together. Levinas assures us that language “as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient ‘I-Thou’ forgetful of the universe; in its frankness it refuses the clandestinity of love”.¹⁸⁵ Rather, the third party is present in the very coming of the other who enacts the ethical dyad. “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice.”¹⁸⁶ Thus we must not think of the entrance of the third party chronologically as an event that happens after the ethical encounter of the self and the other. Indeed, the third party is “present at the [very] encounter” of the self and the other.¹⁸⁷ While it is true that, as we saw in the conclusion

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¹⁸³ Levinas, "The I and the Totality", 22-23, italicized in the original.

¹⁸⁴ Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation", 106, emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁵ Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 213.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
of our previous section, the coming of the third party initiates the realm of thought, consciousness, justice, and philosophy – that is the synchronous realm of the said – the third party also belongs to the diachronous realm of the other who claims my infinite response of responsibility. Yet another of Levinas’ wonderful (or perhaps infuriating) paradoxes! Let us take a further look at this entrance of the third party.

As should now be clear, in his writings Levinas does not focus on the realm of “ethics” as social justice. His desire is to comment on the ethical realm that precedes the conceptualization and thematization required for the moral codes found in human society. However, while still eschewing any type of prescriptive writing, Levinas does address the issue of human community where such social justice is required. As we will see, while justice is a necessary component of life in human community, it is not justice that constitutes the ethical relation but rather the ethical relationship between the self and the other that founds justice, making it possible.\(^{188}\) In *Totality and Infinity* there is a brief (barely three pages) but dense description of the entrance of the third party. Adriaan Peperzak, longtime commentator on Levinas’ work, finds three key aspects in the coming of the third party as described in *Totality and Infinity.*\(^{189}\) First, the third party is present in the face of the other. We have already commented on this situation above. For Levinas, the epiphany of the face attests to the presence of the third in the very eyes that look at me. But it is not just one third who gazes upon me through the eyes of the other. This third is in fact the whole of humanity: “the epiphany of the face qua face opens

\(^{188}\) Levinas, *The I and the Totality*, 35.

\(^{189}\) See Peperzak, *To the Other*, 167-175.
humanity." Interesting consequences arise from this event of revelation as is seen in the second point: the other is the servant to the third person who is the other for my other. The third party, humanity as such, is present in the coming of the other, the epiphany of the face. But the third is present as an other to the other. That is, as an other him or herself the third demands the same ethical response as the other whom I face. What is curious is that, for Levinas, the ethical demand of the third party is, here, not addressed to me but addressed to the other. The other is already at the service of the third party who is other to him. However, it is not my task to alert the other to his or her responsibility for the third party or call him or her to task. As we commented above, to demand that the other sacrifice him or herself for others in turn is to promote human sacrifice. My concern is only ever my own responsibility.

This brings us to Peperzak’s third point, the other “commands me to command”. We have seen how the other stands in a position of both height and destitution before me, commanding me and appealing to me. What we find now is that this command of the other also involves a command on behalf of the third party who is other to the other. That is, when I encounter the ethical demand of the other in the epiphany of the face, the other does not command me to serve on his or her behalf alone. The other, if you will, turns me to the third party, for whom the other is

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190 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

191 Ibid.

192 See *Ethics and Infinity*, 99: "My 'close relations' or 'my people' are already the others and, for them, I demand justice." That is, in my encounter with the other I am only ever concerned with my own ethical response to them and not with how they are enacting their own responsibility to the third party. However, as we will see in the following point, the responsibility of the other does in fact affect me, but only as it becomes my own responsibility.
responsible, and commands me to be responsible for them as well. Thus the command of
the other “commands me to command”.193

The presence of the face, the infinity of the other, is a destituteness, a presence of
the third party (that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us), and a
command that commands commanding.194

Here we revisit the issue of freedom as founded upon the infinite obligation of ethical
responsibility. Levinas comments that both the other and the ethical subject are masters in
this situation. The other is master as the one commanding me to respond to both the other
and the third party. However, this command enacts me as a master who can command
justice for the other and the third party. Their fate is in my hands. I am in charge but
under a charge that is prior to and beyond my status as a commander. We now see how,
although Levinas finds the other obligated to the third party, how the other enacts his or
her responsibility toward the third party is not our concern. Rather, this responsibility of
the other toward the third party is in fact my own responsibility to the third party. That is,
one can never push off one’s responsibility onto the other who is responsible for the third
party for I am responsible for the responsibility of the other – I am responsible for the
third party, all of humanity. And so we also see how, for Levinas, it is the ethical
relationship as enacted upon the epiphany of the face that founds human community and
thus social justice. “Like a shunt every social relation leads back to the presentation of the
other to the same… solely by the expression of the face.”195 We would thus like to add a
fourth point to Peperzak’s three: human community is founded upon the epiphany of the

193 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 213.

194 Ibid., emphasis mine.

195 Ibid., 213.
face in which the third party is also present. While Levinas acknowledges that “the human” can be defined through biology and in this way “the human race” is a community based on biological status, he also insists that there is another way in which we are “human” and upon which a “human community” is founded. This is by way of the ethical encounter of the self and the other that not only initiates a relationship between the self and the other, but with all of humanity who are others to the other and present in the very epiphany of the face of the other. In this way Levinas claims that humanity, the idea of the human race, is not in fact based on biology but on fraternity. “The very status of the human implies fraternity and the idea of the human race.”¹⁹⁶ For Levinas the ethical encounter establishes all as “brothers” (sisters too we are to assume), equal under the weight of an ethical obligation. “Equality is produced where the other commands the same and reveals himself to the same in responsibility…”¹⁹⁷ For Levinas there are two aspects of this human community founded upon fraternity: society is composed of both individualities, unique and irreducible in their difference, and “involves the commonness of a father”.¹⁹⁸ That is, the ethical relationship marks the subject as unique and irreplaceable in his or her ethical obligation while the other is the unique one par excellence due to his or her very alterity. However, the entrance of the third party reveals a common point of departure. Human community as based on fraternity, that is the ethical encounter, “refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height,  

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 214.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁹⁸ Ibid.
in responsibility for oneself and for the Other”. 199 As we commented above, human society is based upon the ethical encounter of the self and the other who enacts one as the ethical subject, a human person as such. Human society is a community of unique individuals founded upon the coming of the other to each of us and who individuates by summoning each to a position of irreplaceable, ethical obligation.

Levinas basically reiterates these points in his later text, *Otherwise than Being*, but with a few additional details. We will briefly consider the development of his thought on the third party, especially as found in a section of chapter five entitled “From Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire”. 200 We saw how Levinas concluded chapter four, “Substitution”, briefly pondering the issue of the third party who is neighbor to my neighbor (the other), thus my neighbor, and whose coming is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice, and philosophy”. 201 After the intensity of the enucleation of the subject that constituted the bulk of chapter four, one could almost miss the quiet comment on the limitation of my ethical responsibility due to this entrance of the third. In the wake of *Totality and Infinity* one’s first thought would be that such a limitation is only due to the fact that my responsibility must be divided among many others and not only lavished infinitely upon the one. In light of this Levinas’ following statement comes as quite a shock: “The ego can, in the name of this unlimited responsibility, be called upon to concern itself also with itself.” 202 One feels the ground shift beneath one by this

199 Ibid.

200 See *Otherwise than Being*, 153-162.

201 Ibid., 128.

202 Ibid., emphasis mine.
seismic claim and is rendered speechless at the audacity of this statement. One must pause and reread the sentence: “Come again? Did I really read that? Could it be a typo?...” But then shock gives over to confusion and frustration. How, one might ask the philosopher with growing vexation, after stripping me bare and exposing my vulnerable skin to the flaying of the accusative gaze of the other dare you offer the hope of self-concern? Is it a trick? Is it but a temptation that, if I succumb to it, will only be taken from me with a further and more intense berating for daring to look away from the other and toward myself? Totality and Infinity did not offer this possibility. Indeed, the “equality” spoken of there was only in relation to the responsibility that I owe to the other and the other owes to the third. What Levinas develops in Otherwise than Being is that I, the ethical subject who is infinitely responsible for the other, can myself be the third party, can be the neighbor to the neighbor of my neighbor. Let us consider this more closely.

As we know, Levinas views that “consciousness is born as the presence of a third party”. Reason, presence, intentionality, being all become possible with the coming of the third party. Furthermore, at the foundation of consciousness is justice. But what is justice? For Levinas justice is “a comparison between incomparables and a synopsis, a togetherness and contemporaneousness”. One can imagine the event of the ethical encounter between the self and the other. They are facing one another, gazing into each other.

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203 Ibid., 160.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid., 16.
206 We remind the reader not take this example literally or chronologically.
other’s eyes; the one pair commanding and pleading not to kill while the other set responds “here I am”. But then a curious thing happens. Someone else enters the picture. They are, so to speak, “behind me” for I only notice them in the eyes of the other whom I am facing. In the eyes of the other is reflected the face of another other, the third party. The self, heretofore mesmerized by the face of the other, caught up in the penetrating gaze of the neighbor, awakens to the presence of the third party. It is like a blink of the eye or the taking of a breath. I had been gazing, staring into the face of the other, not daring to blink or look away, not even daring to breathe so obsessed am I. But then, in those eyes in which I am spellbound I suddenly realize there is another face there, looking at me out of the eyes of the other. It disturbs my obsessive, breathless stare. I take a breath. I blink. The ethical subject gains consciousness. “The act of consciousness is motivated by the presence of a third party alongside of the neighbor approached.”207 Not only is consciousness awakened but in this breath, in this blinking of the eye, I take a step back. A space or distance is created between the self and the other and the third party.208 In this space the self comes to realize that an obligation is owed to both the neighbor and the third party. “In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsess me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness.”209 Measure and knowing, that is, the presence of the third party means that I must divide my attention between them. I must compare these incomparables, I must choose to whom I will turn first, to whom I will give my piece of bread. In this way,

207 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 16.

208 Ibid., 157.

209 Ibid., 158, emphasis mine.
“the relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at”\textsuperscript{210} However, this correction of the infinity of the ethical response is also a betrayal. Just as the ethical saying is betrayed by the conversion into the said, so too the awakening of consciousness and initiation of justice is a betrayal of the “anarchic relationship” with the other.\textsuperscript{211} “The saying is fixed in a said, is written, becomes a book, law, and science.”\textsuperscript{212} And just as the saying necessarily leads to the said, so too this betrayal of the ethical obligation owed to the other by the coming of the third party is unavoidable. “There must be a justice among incomparable ones.”\textsuperscript{213} The transcendence of the ethical response becomes codified, becomes law. A court of appeal is established to settle the disputes between those who are, diachronously, incomparable. I must now act as judge and jury, deciding between them. This is still the familiar territory from \textit{Totality and Infinity}. But Levinas now goes a step further.

But justice can be established only if I, always evaded from the concept of the ego, always destitute and divested of being, always in non-reciprocal relationship with the other, always for the other, \textit{can become an other like the others}… My lot is important.\textsuperscript{214} That is, “there is also justice for me”.\textsuperscript{215} The space that is opened between the self, the other, and the third is in a constant state of flux. The self is obliged to the other. The other

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 159.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 160, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 159.
is obliged to the third. Because the self is “responsible for the responsibility of other”, the self is also responsible for the third. However, “I am another for the others”\textsuperscript{216} thus justice is also owed me. “The incomparable subject” is also “a member of society”.\textsuperscript{217} And so “justice, society and the State, comparison and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy” are initiated.\textsuperscript{218}

However, Levinas is quick to take back these rights given, so briefly, to the subject. “But it is still out of my responsibility that my salvation has meaning.”\textsuperscript{219} It is as if he is uncomfortable with the equality that has been so tentatively erected between the self and the other and the third party. It is as if we must whisper this notion of the self as other so as not to attract too much attention to it, looking furtively over our shoulders, troubled that such a blasphemy might have been overheard. The self as other, the self as a face who commands and pleads for ethical response from the other and the third party is almost scandalous. It is as if the self as other should be no concern of mine, should be forgotten as soon as it is mentioned – forgotten in its very mentioning – so that I can concentrate on the much more important task of responding to the other and the third party. “[B]eing must be understood on the basis of being's other…. Reason… presupposes disinterestedness, passivity or patience.”\textsuperscript{220} The subject may indeed be a member of society, but its concern should always be for the other. The other may concern

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 158.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 161.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 16, emphasis original.
him or herself with me, I might be an other to him or her, but that is not my business.

Mine is the business of peace and I fear murder more than death.

    Peace is incumbent on me in proximity, the neighbor cannot relieve me or it. Peace then is under my responsibility. I am a hostage, for I am alone to wage it, running a fine risk, dangerously…. I am reduced to myself in responsibility.… Reason is the one-for-the-other.

We have now described the key concepts involved in Levinas’ ethical philosophy. The terms of the ethical dyad, the other and the self, have been thoroughly analyzed. We have also considered the breakup of the ethical relationship by the entrance of the third party which is the foundation of justice and society. Thus we have returned to the very point from which Levinas desired to flee – the realm of being and ontology. However, it is the realm of being as founded upon the diachronous time of the other, as founded upon ethics. So we have not in fact returned to our exact point of departure but, perhaps, beside it, otherwise than it.

    There is yet one last theme we would like to consider. It is a concept that features throughout Levinas’ work and has caused a great deal of controversy over the status of Levinas as a philosopher. We would like to consider Levinas’ thoughts on God. We could certainly close this chapter now, leaving a satisfactory presentation of Levinas’ work. In other words, one need not believe in God or even be remotely religious to understand Levinas’ work and appreciate its radical contribution to philosophy. However, we would

221 Ibid., 166-167. See also Ethics and Infinity, 99-101, emphasis original: “In the concrete, many other considerations intervene and require justice even for me…. But justice only has meaning if it retains the spirit of dis-inter-estedness which animates the idea of responsibility for the other man…. Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse.”

222 See Otherwise than Being, 191, note 2: "Justice is at the origin of the claims of ontology to be absolute, or the definition of man as an understanding of Being."
be remiss to exclude this one last theme for while Levinas insists that his work is philosophical and not theological, God continues to appear throughout his work. Indeed, Levinas was at first more well known as a Talmudic commentator before he received the full recognition for his philosophical work. While Levinas always kept his philosophical work separate from his more Jewish writings,\footnote{223} it is almost as if Levinas could not help but mention God and make reference to certain biblical themes even in his philosophical work. Certainly he does not avoid dealing with God and he is quite fond of turning to the ancient prophets of the Jewish tradition to corroborate his ethical stance. But perhaps there is nothing wrong with this? Perhaps it is wrong to see Levinas’ invocation of God and his use of scripture as a philosophically problematic slide toward theology. Whether or not there is a God, a vast portion of the human population has some sort of dealings with “the divine”. Philosophy, as a study of the “human existential”, should perhaps have some dealings with the divine as well, at least from the human perspective.\footnote{224} Levinas himself sees a place for God within philosophy: “Philosophical discourse therefore should be able to include God… if this God does have a meaning.”\footnote{225} As for Levinas’ use of scripture, perhaps Roger Burggraeve is correct in his claim that “It is not the case that what the Bible says is true because it is in the Bible, but rather that it is in the Bible


\footnote{224} Michael Purcell makes this claim in Levinas and Theology. Although he is speaking specifically about the relationship between phenomenology and theology, he approaches phenomenology as the foundational method for philosophy. See chapter one, specifically pages 28-37.

because it is true". It is not our place here to debate the validity of the biblical text nor do we wish to enter the debate on the status of Levinas’ work as philosophy vs. theology. Certainly Levinas’ writings can be and have been used within a theological setting. In later chapters, this dissertation itself will treat Levinas as a dialogue partner over certain theological issues. For now, we simply wish to present Levinas’ own views on God for while we need not implore the name of God to realize our ethical duty to the other, God does indeed play a significant role in Levinas’ thought.

*God: the Absolutely Other, transcendent to the point of absence...*

Before we make any comments on Levinas’ thoughts on God as such, perhaps it is best to first mention Levinas’ disdain for theology. Indeed, it is ironic that some philosophers accuse Levinas’ work of being too theological when Levinas is so clearly critical of the work done by traditional theology. Quite simply, Levinas considers theology to be an ontology. It participates in the same ontological tradition as all of Western philosophy. As such, theology conceives of God as a being, indeed, God

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227 Indeed, in Levinas’ opinion, traditional theology is responsible for the very "bankruptcy of transcendence", reducing it to a mere theme that can be grasped and codified. See *Otherwise than Being*, 5.

228 Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 121-135. This text is a compilation of two courses taught by Levinas at the Sorbonne in 1975-76. Levinas opens his course on God with a few lectures that consider the state of philosophy as “onto-theo-logy”, as put forth by Heidegger. While this is a course that reflects upon God from a philosophical standpoint and not theological per se, it is still clear that, for Levinas, if philosophy is onto-theo-logy, theology is onto-theo-logy. Later in the course Levinas makes this
according to traditional theology (in Levinas’ estimation) is “the entity par excellence”. Levinas however insists that God is not a being at all. Rather, God signifies the “other of being”, the “beyond being”. For Levinas, just as it is necessary to understand that the other is otherwise than being, so too is it important “to hear a God not contaminated by Being”. Levinas insists that the only way to do this is “by way of the analysis of the interhuman relationships that do not enter into the framework of intentionality”. That is, it is only on the basis of ethics that God can be approached and thought of outside of being. An additional problem that Levinas sees with traditional human thought of God as it is manifested in religious behavior is its tendency to treat the human-divine relationship as an exclusionary event between two parties alone: myself and God. This is nowhere more evident, in Levinas’ estimation, than in the I-Thou structure made famous by Martin Buber. The human-divine relationship is conceived as a relationship between an I (the human person) and the divine Thou who is worshipped and adored. The connection quite clear (p. 204, emphasis mine): “With theology, which is linked to ontology, God is fixed in a concept.” See also Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 167-168: "But as soon as he [God] is conceived, this God is situated within 'being's move'."

229 Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 168, emphasis original.

230 Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 124 and 126.

231 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, xlviii.

232 Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 172.

233 Ibid., 137. Levinas asks (emphasis original): "on the basis of an ethics that would no longer be the corollary of a simple vision of the world, could we not formulate a model of intelligibility such that we could think God outside of onto-theology?" Levinas of course answers this question with a resounding "yes" and through his course he attempts to outline this very "model of intelligibility" via ethics that provides a thought of God outside of Being.

234 See Levinas, The I and the Totality, 18-22.
problem with this, as Levinas tries to show, is that the *I-Thou* relationship is an “intimate society” of two that excludes the third party.\(^{235}\) For Levinas the human-divine relationship based upon the *I-Thou* structure is a relationship of love but love – “unless it becomes judgment and justice – is the love of the couple. The closed society is the couple”.\(^{236}\) As we will see, Levinas refutes the conception of God as based on ontology, God as a being, and he argues against the view of the human-divine relationship as the intimate society of two. Indeed, the conception of the human-divine relationship as the *I-Thou* has only resulted in a “crisis of religion”:

Thus, the crisis of religion results from the impossibility of isolating oneself with God and forgetting all those who remain outside the amorous dialogue. The true dialogue is elsewhere… [T]he notion of God and worship of him would have to be developed in terms of the unavoidable necessities of a society that entails third parties.\(^{237}\)

As we will see, for Levinas the only way one can be in relationship with God is not by turning to God at all, but by turning to the human other and the other others who are present in the face of the other. In this way not only is ethics first philosophy but, for Levinas, ethics is also *first theology*.

Holiness thus shows itself as an irreducible possibility of the human and God: being called by [the other]. *An original ethical event which would also be first theology.* Thus ethics is no longer a simple moralism of rules which decree what is virtuous. It is the original awakening of an I responsible for the other; the accession of my person to the uniqueness of the I called and elected to responsibility for the other. The human I is not a unity closed upon itself,… but rather an opening, that of responsibility, which is the true beginning of the human and of spirituality. In the call which the face of the other man addresses to me, I

\(^{235}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{236}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 21.
grasp in an immediate fashion the graces of love: spirituality. The lived experience of authentic humanity.\textsuperscript{238}

Perhaps the best place to begin our reflection on Levinas’ thoughts on God is to return to Descartes’ \textit{idea of the infinite}.\textsuperscript{239} As we know, for Levinas the \textit{human} other transcends me and is thus infinite. Therefore the idea I have of the other must be an idea of the infinite which is an idea that overwhelsms the thought that thinks it. For Levinas, God is also infinite, is \textit{the} Infinite and thus the idea we have of God is an idea of the Infinite. And just as the thought of the other overflows its content, so the idea of God “overflows every capacity” and thus “signifies the non-contained par excellence”.\textsuperscript{240}

What is key for Levinas in Descartes’ idea of the infinite is how this idea is the very disruption of the ego or “breakup of the \textit{I think}”.\textsuperscript{241}

The idea of God is God in me, but God already breaking up the consciousness which aims at ideas, and unlike any content.\textsuperscript{242}

Thus God is not a mere being but beyond and otherwise than being. Levinas offers two more insights on this idea of the Infinite. He notes that there are two ways in which the \textit{in} of the Infinite signifies: as \textit{non} and as \textit{within}. The Infinite, God, is not the finite. The Infinite cannot be included in the finite, is “being-not-includable”, that is, the infinite

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\textsuperscript{239} See Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 173-175.
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\textsuperscript{241} Ibid, italicized in the original.
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\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 174.
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exceeds all thought about it. However this is no mere negation of the finite, for while not includable within the finite, the Infinite is yet in relationship with the finite and this is indicated by the fact that the finite being can have this idea of the Infinite. The idea of the Infinite is within us.

And yet there is an idea of God, or God is in us, as though the being-not-includable were also an ex-ceptional relationship with me, as though the difference between the Infinite and what ought to include and comprehend it were a non-indifference of the Infinite to this impossible inclusion, a non-indifference of the Infinite to thought.

We cannot conceive of God on our own merits. God exceeds our capacity to think of God. Yet God, apparently, desires that we know him (or her), God is non-indifferent to being thought of. Thus God gives us this idea of the Infinite (of the divine self) so that we may think it even though its content is ever overflowing this very thought that we have of God. This is what Levinas means when he says, echoing Descartes, that the idea of the Infinite is put into us. And so the Infinite is both not the finite yet within the finite as a thought put into our minds. Levinas also sees here the passivity of the human in relation to the divine. “The breakup of the actuality of thought in the ‘idea of God’ is a passivity more passive still than any passivity, like the passivity of a trauma through which the idea of God would have been put into us.” For Levinas, it is as if God places this idea of the Infinite into the human person prior to consciousness. Thus the idea of the Infinite is an-archical. What is more, the consequence of this traumatic placing is the awakening of the

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243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid.
246 Ibid., emphasis mine.
consciousness. However, it is not an awakening to God per se. Here Levinas offers a radical view – the idea of God placed within the human person awakens their consciousness not to the idea of God, but to the other, the *human* other.

What can this… mean if not the trauma of awakening – as though the idea of the Infinite, the Infinite in us, awakened a consciousness which is not awakened enough? *As though the idea of the Infinite in us were a demand,* and a signification in the sense that an order is signified in a demand.²⁴⁷

For Levinas, the idea of the Infinite placed in us does not become some knowledge of God as is conveyed by traditional theology, but rather is the ethical demand of infinite obligation to the other. But how does Levinas make this move from the Infinite God to the infinite other?

As we have seen in our comments on the other above, Levinas speaks of the desire for the other, for what is other than the self which is the Good. God, as the Absolute Infinite, is thus the desirable par excellence, the Good beyond being that we desire. And, just as with the other, the desire for God can never be satisfied but grows “in the measure that it approaches the desirable”.²⁴⁸ What is more, Levinas sees in this insatiable desire for what is not and can never be reduced to the self a true turning from the self, a dis-interestedness. “This endless desire for what is beyond being is dis-interestedness, transcendence – desire for the Good.”²⁴⁹ However, Levinas wonders, in our desire for the Infinite can God truly remain transcendent? That is, how can the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 175, emphasis mine.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 177.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, emphasis original. This dis-interestedness reveals yet another aspect of the passivity of the human in relation to the divine. Not only in the idea of God placed into us, but this idea awakens an insatiable desire for what is other than the self and renders the self dis-interested, that is indifferent and passive toward oneself.
Infinite maintain its transcendence, its distance from the finite, when the finite is turned toward it in desire? Levinas’ simple yet radical answer is that the Infinite turns us toward the other: “the desirable orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence – the other”.\(^{250}\) We now see how Levinas can claim that the placing of the idea of the Infinite into me is an awakening of the consciousness that is heard as a demand. God turns our desire from him (or her) to the other who demands our ethical response and it is in this way that we name God good.

The goodness of the Good… inclines the movement it calls forth, \textit{to turn it from the Good and orient it toward the other}, and only thus toward the Good.\(^{251}\) Levinas terms this way in which the Infinite refers us from its own desirability to that of the other, “to the non-desirable proximity of the others”, as \textit{illeity}.\(^{252}\) Thus the idea of God, which is not knowledge of God but desire for God, is ethical for this idea turns us not to God but toward the other. And as we know when we face the other we encounter the face that commands and pleads with us, enacting our ethical obligation. In this way ethics is, according to Levinas, \textit{an optics}.\(^{253}\) Ethics is the very vision of God whose sight is upon the other, the neighbor, who pleads and demands for justice.

\(^{250}\) Ibid., 178. See also \textit{God, Death, and Time}, 223, emphasis original: “In order that disinterestedness be possible in desire, in order that the desire beyond being not be an absorption, the desirable (or God) must remain separated within desire; near, yet different – which is, moreover, the very meaning of the word ‘holy.’ This is possible only if the desirable commands me to what is undesirable, only if he commands me to the undesirable \textit{par excellence}: to the \textit{other person} \([à autrui]\). The referral to the other is an awakening to nearness, which is responsibility for the neighbor to the point of substitution, which is the enucleation of the transcendental subject.”

\(^{251}\) Levinas, “God and Philosophy”, 178, emphasis original.

\(^{252}\) Ibid.

\(^{253}\) Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 23.
The moral relation therefore reunites both self-consciousness and consciousness of God. Ethics is not the corollary of the vision of God, it is that very vision. Ethics is an optic, such that everything I know of God and everything I can hear of His word and reasonably say to Him must find an ethical expression.... The knowledge of God comes to us like a commandment…. To know God is to know what must be done.\textsuperscript{254}

When the idea of God is placed into me so too is the vision of God which is a sight of the other. The idea I have of God thus does not remain with God. God is ever at a distance from me, I cannot gaze upon him (or her) directly but only indirectly through the face of the other to whom God directs me. In this way “[God’s] transcendence turns into my responsibility… for the other.”\textsuperscript{255} It is also in this way that Levinas speaks of God’s transcendence as an absence. God is “transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the there is”.\textsuperscript{256} God is wholly and absolutely other. God’s transcendence is so far beyond us that it is as if God is absent and the only inkling we have of God is immediately turned to the human other. So we see that the human relationship with God necessarily passes through the other. For Levinas there is no direct relationship with God, no I-Thou relationship. The only way one can be in relationship with God is by ethically responding to the other. And once this turn has been made to the other (which is not chronological!), all the aspects of the ethical relationship that have been discussed in this chapter come into play. In this way the idea of the Infinite is also related to ethical substitution and the position of being a hostage.


\textsuperscript{255} Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 179.

\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, italicized in the original.
This trauma which cannot be assumed, inflicted by the Infinite on presence, or this affecting of presence by the Infinite – this affectivity – takes shape as a subjection to the neighbor. It is through thinking more than it thinks, desire, the reference to the neighbor, the responsibility for another.257

While on the one hand we see that the only way humans have access to God, can be in relationship with God, is through ethically responding to the other, we also find that the ethical subject witnesses to the presence of God. Levinas makes a critical distinction between the statement “I believe in God” and the ethical response, “here I am”. For Levinas the statement “I believe in God” is the epitome of ontology. It is a statement in which “God” is conceptualized, thematized, presented, and thus reduced to an idol – not God at all, but some mere thing that humans can grasp and wrap their minds around. Rather for Levinas the first attestation of God is a phrase in which God is not even named or invoked: me voici, here I am.258 Levinas insists that to bear witness to God is precisely not to state “I believe in God”. Rather it is “in my ‘here I am’, from the first present in the accusative, [that] I bear witness to the Infinite…. ‘Here I am, in the name of God’, without first referring myself directly to his presence”.259 It is this “here I am” that refers directly to the vision of God which is the sight of the other who summons me. What is more, this “here I am” is also the ethical saying. In this context the saying is a testimony to my ethical responsibility which is a “pure testimony” to God whose name is not even spoken in the saying.260 “The Infinite passes in saying.”261 That is, God’s “presence” is

257 Ibid., 180.

258 Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 200. See also Otherwise than Being, 149.

259 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 149.

260 Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 183.
attested only as passing through my ethical response to the other. Thus Levinas claims that saying “bears witness to the other of the Infinite which rends me, which in the saying awakens me”.  

261 Levinas *Otherwise than Being*, 147.

262 Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 183.

263 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 146.

264 Ibid., 148.


266 Levinas, "God and Philosophy", 185, emphasis original.

But this is not any type of presence of God.

“Here I am” as a witness of the Infinite, but a witness that does not thematize what it bears witness of, and whose truth is not the truth of representation, is not evidence.  

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For Levinas this ethical witnessing of God in the “here I am” where God is not named nor made present is also the glory of God.

Glorification is saying, that is, a sign given to the other, peace announced to the other, responsibility for the other, to the extent of substitution.  

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In this way God is glorified not by empty religious rituals or solemn oaths (“I believe in God”) but by my ethical responsibility for the other.  

265 The most frequent example of this ethical witnessing of God that Levinas offers is the word of the prophet which is a diachronous saying prior to the said.

Prophesying is pure testimony, pure because prior to all disclosure; it is subjection to an order before understanding the order…. It is in prophesying that the Infinite passes – and awakens. As a transcendence, refusing objectification and dialogue, it signifies in an ethical way. It signifies in the sense in which one says *to mean an order*; it *orders*.  

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The prophet, the witness to God par excellence, is inspired to speak the word of God, thus testifying to God. The prophet is inspired, that is turned from God by God toward the other. The prophet speaks: this is the ethical saying. What is spoken is the word of God: this divine word which is a demand orienting us toward the other who summons and commands us, pleading with us, can only be said by humans in one way, “here I am”. Thus the prophet testifies to God by way of the ethical saying through which the Infinite passes. In this way ethics is the inspiration of God and the ethical relationship is human spirituality. It is an inspiration in which “the Other agitates the Same to the point of the fission of its core”\(^{267}\), a spirituality in which the human person is awakened to an infinite responsibility for the other. And so the “otherwise than being” that is both the face of the other and the ethical subject is the glory of God.\(^{268}\)

**Conclusion – Ethics Enacted?**

This chapter is but a meager presentation of Levinas’ work, touching upon what we find to be the key concepts and themes of his ethical philosophy. One last question remains. It is a simple question and perhaps somewhat simplistic in the face of the riches of Levinas’ thought. On the other hand it might be the most important question one can ask of Levinas’ ethical project. *What are we to do with it?* That is, now that our thinking has been reoriented (or perhaps we should say disoriented) by the transcendence of the other away from self-interest and toward the dis-interestedness of substitution, how can we apply this reorientation into the concrete experiences of our daily life? For, as one


author has commented, “it [this ethical reorientation of our thought] matters not at all unless it impacts on our approach to concrete situations so that we come to see them as ethical”. As we have seen, Levinas himself states that the ethical relationship of the self and the other is what founds and orients justice and the institutions of the State. The saying does indeed lead to the said. But how can this happen without the ethical saying simply disappearing, or even being destroyed by the conceptual, thematizing insistence of the said? How do we maintain the priority of an ethical situation that comes from the diachronous realm prior to consciousness and thought without it transforming into consciousness and thought? How do we keep justice and morality founded upon ethics without reducing the ethical relation to merely codified behavior? This is a dilemma to which there is no easy solution. However, if Levinas’ thought is not to be merely an exercise in mental gymnastics, some answer, even if inadequate and requiring the unsaying of the said at every turn, must be sought. For our own part, we would like to offer the situation of empathy, as conceived by phenomenologist Edith Stein, as one potential bridge from the realm of Levinas’ anarchical ethical relationship of the self and the other to the synchronous realm of concrete daily life. That is, Stein’s concept of empathy may serve as a real time analogue for Levinas’ ethical relationship. While it is true that Levinas is often critical of the concept of empathy, we will argue that Stein’s

269 Robert Bernasconi, "What is the question to which 'substitution' is the answer?", in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchely and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 250.

270 See Otherwise than Being, 125: "My substitution for another is the trope of a sense that does not belong to the empirical order of psychological events, an Einfühlung or a compassion which signify by virtue of this sense."
particular understanding of empathy can find support in Levinas’ writings. Empathy clearly belongs to the realm of the said which must be unsaid. However Levinas himself admitted that the saying does indeed lead to the said. Furthermore, we will also argue that this ethical, empathetic situation is concretely enacted in situations of solidarity. Levinas claims that the ethical situation of persecution by the other “is at the bottom of solidarity with another”. How exactly? We will argue that it is through empathy as rooted in Levinas’ anarchic ethical relationship. Solidarity as rooted in ethically enacted empathy manifests the “personal response” that is the “ethical act” of substitution. It is the empathetic subject who is in solidarity with his or her neighbor that manifests Levinas’ ethical hostage. This is what it means to be a human person. What is more, we will argue that it is only through the ethically empathetic acts of solidarity that true human community is created. In our next chapter we will consider Stein’s concept of empathy and how it relates directly to her conception of the human person as such and, following upon that, the creation of human society.

271 Ibid., 146: “Substitution is not the psychological event of compassion or intropathy in general, but makes possible the paradoxical psychological possibilities of putting oneself in the place of another.”

272 Ibid., 102.

273 See Totality and Infinity, 219.
CHAPTER THREE

Edith Stein:
Selfhood through Intersubjectivity – Empathy as the Act of Personhood

Introduction

Edith Stein was born in 1891 to a middle class Jewish family in, what was then, Breslau, Germany. She died 51 years later in 1942 in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.¹ Where her name is recognized at all, it is either for the horrific circumstances surrounding her death or for the controversy surrounding her conversion to Roman Catholicism (1922), entrance into the Carmelite order (1933), and eventual canonization by Pope John Paul II (1998).² However, there is another aspect of Edith Stein which has, until recent years, been sadly overlooked – her philosophical career, particularly her status within the phenomenological movement.³ This neglect perhaps owes something to


³ This issue of Stein's neglect in the philosophical world has been noted by numerous authors newly committed to addressing this lacuna. See for example: Baseheart, Person in the World, ix; Alasdair MacIntyre, Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922 (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), vii-viii; and Antonio Calcagno, The Philosophy of Edith Stein (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), xi. See also p. 1-2 of Calcagno’s text where he sums up the popular images of Edith Stein as “a ‘sweet’ Jewish-Catholic martyr, a vilified Jewish heretic whom Christians have no right to claim as Jewish, or a Catholic feminist”. He concludes that “in such identifications, ‘Stein the philosopher’ seems to have been overlooked”.

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her untimely death. However Stein is one of only a handful that could boast to be a part of the very founding of Husserl’s phenomenological movement. She was contemporaries with such figures as Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, Roman Ingarden, Hans Lipps, Jean Hering, Fritz Kaufmann, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and Martin Heidegger. No mere student of “the Master”, Stein had the distinction of serving as Husserl’s private assistant from 1916-1918. During this time she not only prepared students to take classes with Husserl but research now concludes that much of Husserl’s posthumously published Ideas II owes a great deal not only to Stein’s editorial skills, but even to her own influence and creativity. She also wrote prolifically during her lifetime and offered several public lectures. Such a record would seem to accord her a ready place in the hall of philosophers – at least the section on phenomenology. So why the relative obscurity? History has shown that Edith Stein’s life suffered from numerous “closed doors”. Twice Stein failed to achieve a position as a university professor, which some claim was

4 MacIntyre, 15.

5 Of interest is Stein’s letter to Fritz Kaufmann in which she relates the details of becoming Husserl’s assistance. See Edith Stein, Self Portrait in Letters, 1916-1942, trans. Josephine Koeppel (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1993), 1. Stein, like many of Husserl’s students, often referred to him as “the Master” as is apparent throughout her numerous correspondence.

6 Baseheart, Person in the World, 12.

7 For an in depth analysis of this claim see Marianne Sawicki, Body, Text, and Science: The Literacy of Investigative Practices and the Phenomenology of Edith Stein (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997). See also Calcagno, 15-16. He states: “The present form of Ideas II is pretty much the same form that Stein prepared.” See Stein’s letters to Fritz Kaufmann and Roman Ingarden in Self Portrait in Letters, p. 5 and 22 respectively, where she reveals how, at least in her mind, her role as Husserl’s assistant was also one of collaborator.
merely due to the fact that she was a woman.\textsuperscript{8} What is more, certain of her editorial contributions to Husserl's own texts received no credit at that time.\textsuperscript{9} Then, due to her Jewish origins and the German anti-Jewish laws of the 1930's, Stein was prohibited both from offering public lectures and publishing her work.\textsuperscript{10} A succession of doors closed swiftly at that time: Stein was removed from her teaching position at the Pedagogical Institute in Münster, she then decided to enter the Carmel at Cologne in 1933.\textsuperscript{11} Nine years later, as stated above, the doors closed upon her forever in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. For a time, it would seem that Edith Stein's name would pass into anonymity, at least on the pages of philosophical history. In addition and particularly in the English speaking world, Stein suffers from perhaps an even greater neglect due to the fact that

\textsuperscript{8} In her attempt to gain a position at the University of Göttingen, Husserl wrote her a letter of "recommendation". His half-hearted support of his former student and assistant is infamous. He states: "If the career of university teaching were supposed to be open for ladies, then I would be the very first to recommend her warmly for admission." See MacIntyre, 106, emphasis mine. See also Calcagno, 13 where he comments on how during Stein's life "the Ministry of Education made it practically impossible for women to habilitate in philosophy because of blatant sexism".

\textsuperscript{9} In addition to the lack of credit for her work on Ideas II (see note 7 above), another example is Husserl's On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time which was prepared and edited by Stein. However, at its publication Husserl's later assistant, Martin Heidegger, took the credit for this work. See Calcagno, 2. See also Life in a Jewish Family, p. 506, note 208.

\textsuperscript{10} Calcagno, 20.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 20-22. It is beyond the scope of this work to comment on the controversy behind both her conversion to Catholicism and decision to become a Carmelite nun. However, with our theme of "closed doors", it is noted that both a symbolic and quite real door closed between Stein and her family upon the occasion of her entrance into Carmel.
only a handful of her writings have been translated into English to date. However, it would seem that her fate is not to be entirely forgotten. Interest in Stein as a philosopher appears to be gaining strength, witnessed to by recently published books and articles on her thought. Those who have taken notice of Edith Stein have found a challenging philosophical voice of great depth and perception. Specifically, she adds a unique voice to the phenomenological discussion. In this chapter we will focus on Stein as a philosopher and phenomenologist. What is elaborated upon in this chapter will then serve as the foundation for a dialogue between the thought of Edith Stein and Emmanuel Levinas to be found in our following chapter. It is our belief that not only can there be a fruitful dialogue between these two thinkers, but that such a dialogue can offer much to enhance both of their philosophical projects.

The Structure of the Human Person in the Thought of Edith Stein

It has been said that the key theme running throughout Stein’s writings is her reflection upon the structure or nature of the human person. That is, Stein continually asks the question: what does it mean to be a human person? As we will see, Stein reveals her unique philosophical voice in this very analysis of human personhood. Although she remained deeply indebted to her phenomenological training, she departs from Husserl

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12 MacIntyre, vii. It is to be noted that ICS Publications is in the process of publishing a multi-volume series entitled The Collected Works of Edith Stein as her texts become available in English.

13 Baseheart, Person in the World, x: "The guideline that runs through all her work is the inquiry into the question of the nature of the human person."
both methodologically and in the conclusions of her analyses.\textsuperscript{14} What is of particular interest for this work is how Stein’s lifelong reflection upon the human person is one deeply rooted in intersubjectivity for, as we will see, it is through encountering other persons that one can become one’s deepest self. With Levinas’ ethical subjectivity in the back of our minds, already a door begins to creak open between the two philosophers. Before such a dialogue can begin though, we must look closely at Edith Stein’s own philosophical project. While Stein’s work reveals a great breadth of topics, for the sake of time and space, we must limit our reflection to those areas that we consider most fruitful for the upcoming dialogue between Stein and Levinas. Thus, we will focus on Stein’s concept of empathy, her understanding of human individuality, and her analysis of human community. Prefacing this explication we will offer a few brief comments on how Stein departs from Husserl, employing her own unique version of the phenomenological method.

\textit{Confronting “the Master” – Stein’s Realism vs. Husserl’s Idealism}

Although Stein frequently cites Husserl’s influence behind her work and expresses her gratitude to “the Master”,\textsuperscript{15} she also reveals a marked independence of thought and unique employment of the phenomenological method. While a systematic

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{14} Calcagno, 18.

analysis of the points of contact and departure between Stein and Husserl are beyond the scope of this work, it will suffice to elaborate upon a few key divergences between these two phenomenologists.

What is perhaps at the root of Stein’s departure from Husserl is her realist flavor, inspired by the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, as opposed to the later Husserl in which a transcendental and idealistic turn is found. We need to recall here that, according to many scholars, Husserl’s phenomenological method reveals a marked “shift” in style and emphasis between the publication of the *Logical Investigations* in 1901 and his later writings such as “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science” (1910) and *Ideas I* (1913).[^16] Many scholars agree that Husserl’s earlier period reveals a more realist bent while his later texts seem to belie a transcendental and idealistic turn. Husserl’s shift in thought is tied to his development of and emphasis on the phenomenological reduction or *epoché*. As we have seen, Husserl believed that the only way one can in fact get to the “things themselves” is by bracketing out the naïve realism of the natural attitude and its presuppositions.[^17] This bracketing (the *epoché*) “reduces” the natural attitude and allows the phenomenological attitude of presuppositionlessness to arise from which one can encounter and reflect upon the things as they are in themselves. What, in part, is suspended here is one’s belief in the

[^16]: Calcagno, 14. See also Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 65-66, where he discusses the different stages in the development of Husserl’s thought.

[^17]: See the section on Levinas’ critique of Husserl in chapter one of this dissertation.
existence of the world and the things therein.\textsuperscript{18} That is, in the natural attitude one takes for granted that the world exists and that the things in the world which appear to us do so independently of our subjective stance. Many of Husserl’s followers found the reduction not only problematic but also quite impossible and therefore refused to perform it.\textsuperscript{19} As we will see, Stein is to be counted among this rank of realist dissenters.

We need not here enter into the debate over whether or not Husserl truly took an idealistic turn. For our purposes it is enough to note that Stein certainly found Husserl’s later explication of the phenomenological method to take a transcendental turn which tended toward idealism. It was a turn that Stein felt Husserl should never have made.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, what first attracted Stein to phenomenology and inspired her to go to Göttingen in 1913 to study under Husserl was the realistic flavor of the \textit{Logical Investigations}.\textsuperscript{21} Husserl’s cry to “return to the things themselves” struck a chord with the young Stein who agreed with Husserl’s critique of relativism and psychologism.\textsuperscript{22} From her earliest work on empathy in her dissertation (1916) to her mature texts such as \textit{Potency and Act}


\textsuperscript{19} Moran, 77 and 160.

\textsuperscript{20} Calcagno, 14. In fact Stein was so strongly against Husserl’s transcendental turn that she even confronted “the Master” with her concerns over his work. See for example her letter to Roman Ingarden in \textit{Self-Portrait in Letters}, 10-11: “Recently I laid before the Master, most solemnly, my reservations against idealism.” While Husserl appeared to be open to changing his mind on this issue, Stein noted how “she never yet managed to do that”.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 8. See also Baseheart, \textit{Person in the World}, 5.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
(published posthumously), Stein was dedicated to a realistic analysis of these things themselves. However, in Stein’s opinion, with the phenomenological reduction and the *epoché* Husserl himself did not remain faithful to this analysis of the things themselves.

She holds that, if one truly wants to discover what phenomena are as such, one must remain committed to the reality of the world and one’s embeddedness therein for that is precisely how things are given to us – as things existing in the world to which we belong. Stein’s realist approach is thus contrasted with “the idealistic interpretation that Husserl gives his own teaching on the transcendental constitution of the objective world” for this interpretation “seems radically to do away with… ‘naïve realism’”. For Stein it is precisely the phenomenological reduction that inclines Husserl to “this idealistic interpretation”. Indeed, Stein’s insistent commitment to a more realist use of the phenomenological method has led some scholars to interpret her employment of the

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23 Edith Stein, *Potency and Act*, trans. Walter Redmond (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2009), 360-379. This section of her text, entitled “Excursus on Transcendental Idealism”, offers what is considered Stein’s mature opinion on and personal version of phenomenology (see the German Editor’s Introduction to this text, xlii). In it she defends the realism of the natural attitude against, what is in her view, Husserl’s transcendental idealism.


25 See Mary Catherine Baseheart, “Edith Stein’s Philosophy of Person,” in *Edith Stein Symposium and Teresian Culture*, Carmelite Studies, ed. John Sullivan, vol. IV (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1987), 37. Here she comments on how “for Stein these ‘things’ of experience [which phenomenology attempts to reflect upon] presuppose things of the fact world, the existence of which Husserl ‘brackets’. She [Stein] never gives assent to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, the epoché; that is, the suspension of judgment in regard to the transcendent existence of the objective correlates of the *cogitata*”.


27 Ibid.
reduction in her dissertation as merely a nod to appease her director.\textsuperscript{28} Whether or not that is the case and while there is yet debate over the idealistic status of Husserl’s writings, scholars seem to be in agreement upon the realist nature of Stein’s use of the phenomenological method.\textsuperscript{29}

Stein’s realist stance toward the phenomenological method led her to certain conclusions in her philosophical analyses that also distinguish her position from that of Husserl. Again, we do not offer a full account of these conclusions but focus on those that seem pertinent to the thesis of this dissertation. First, Stein’s refusal to perform the epoché and thus remain rooted in the world as existing leads her away from Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity.\textsuperscript{30} For Stein the subject is not absolute for it “is not through itself, but it receives being and essence”.\textsuperscript{31} That is, the subject, upon reflection, does not find itself purely above the world and constituting it, but rather discerns itself as already existing in a world into which it was placed.\textsuperscript{32} In this way Stein argues that

\textsuperscript{28} Calcagno, 15. Husserl directed Stein’s doctoral dissertation on Empathy.

\textsuperscript{29} Baseheart, 88; Calcagno, 18; MacIntyre, 75. See also Moran, 172 where he comments on how Ideas II, as edited by Stein, offers a "corrective to the rather disembodied idealist standpoint of Ideas I” thus making it fit better with Husserl's earlier realist phase. See also both the English translator's note and the German editor's introduction to Potency and Act where both concur on Stein's realist interpretation of phenomenology ix, xxx-xxxi and xxxvii. And see Richard Feist and William Sweet, eds., Husserl and Stein (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 1. Several of the authors in this compiled text remark on the realist stance of Stein’s work.

\textsuperscript{30} See the German Editor's Introduction to Potency and Act, xxx.

\textsuperscript{31} Stein, Potency and Act, 348-349, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 374
the I points to something that is absolute in a sense other than that wherein itself is absolute…. Thus the I transcends itself in a direction toward something wherein the I itself has the reason for its being (hence toward a transcendence opposite to that of transcendental idealism).33

In other words, Stein insists on a subject who is dependent for his or her existence on something other than itself. What is more, it is specifically through a phenomenological analysis, albeit sans the reduction, of the subject as such (the thing in itself) that this existential dependence is revealed. For Stein the fact is that the subject finds itself existing in a world populated by things and people other than itself. What this means for phenomenological analysis is that the subject is not alone in its reflection on the things in this world – there can be no universalized “transcendental subject”. In this way Stein also rejects the “isolation of the subject” that results from the époche.34

Man, through the entelechy characteristic of his soul, is put into a cosmos where he interacts with his fellows who are like him yet unlike him…. What we see in our daily experience and throughout history is always human individuals and communities that are what they are potentially, habitually, and actually (in the sense of changing actuality) thanks to a development whereby they condition and influence each other.35

Now, one may argue that Husserl himself was aware of the fact of the existence of other persons who seem (one can never be absolutely certain) to possess an intentional and

33 Ibid., 374-375, emphasis mine. We will refrain for now from speaking about the obvious theological direction towards which this conclusion could point which also happens to be the direction in which Stein herself takes it. Stein’s more theological views will be analyzed towards the end of this chapter.


35 Stein, Potency and Act, 404-405, emphasis mine.
constituting consciousness like oneself. However for Husserl it would seem that these others are not necessary for phenomenological analysis, for reflection upon the things themselves. For Husserl, through the *epoché* the transcendental ego emerges which is a structure that *all* intentionally conscious people share.\(^{36}\) That is, Husserl’s phenomenological reduction appears to also bracket out personal individuality.

Husserl formulates a law that any i is capable of access to the same appearances as any other i; in other words, what is meant by “i” is the capacity to be appeared-to without contributing anything to the contouring of any appearance…. Husserl’s law merely declares: the world must and does appear to me just as it would appear to anyone else who might stand where I stand; *for my own unique individuality is irrelevant to my observations…. I’s are interchangeable.*\(^{37}\)

Husserl’s transcendental subject has been accused of being a “windowless monad”, closed in upon itself and disregarding any outside influence.\(^{38}\) Stein, on the other hand, will offer a “more relational sense of the person”.\(^{39}\) As we will see in greater detail below, Stein insists upon the “uniqueness and unrepeatability” of the individual person.\(^{40}\) Now while this might make the individual absolute in one sense (as irreplaceable), in another sense, with the fact of innumerable unique individuals populating the world in which we live, the other’s perspective must be taken into consideration for an accurate picture of this world as such, for an analysis of the things themselves as they appear not

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\(^{37}\) Ibid., 125, emphasis mine.


\(^{39}\) Ibid.

only to me but to numerous others as well. For Stein, the I’s most certainly are not interchangeable. Thus we must be in relation with these other individuals to gain a more accurate picture of the world. For Stein, not only must the subject have “windows”, but he or she must also open these windows to the world and particularly to the other persons living therein. We must take more time to unpack the density of this conclusion for it involves Stein’s concept of human individuality, the role of empathy in the encounter between human persons, and the constitution of human communities – all of which we will address below. For now we note that for Stein, as opposed to Husserl, the human subject is no isolated monad but is rather an intersubjective person who is open to the external world – transcendent as opposed to transcendental. For Stein, Husserl’s reduction cannot be true to this intersubjective, transcendent reality in which we exist.

One last note concerning Stein’s departure from a purely Husserlian phenomenology: after her conversion to Roman Catholicism, Stein took an interest in Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, her interest in the scholastic Saint became so intense that she made the claim that her “proper mission” or “life’s task” was to offer a synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology and Aquinas’ scholasticism. Three texts are attributed to this cause: an imaginary dialogue between Husserl and Aquinas written for Husserl’s seventieth birthday celebration, Potency and Act, and Finite and Eternal Being. We

41 Sawicki, "Empathy Before and After Husserl", 126-127.

42 See the Translator’s Note to Potency and Act, vii.

43 Edith Stein, "Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison," in Knowledge and Faith, trans. Walter Redmond (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000). While Stein’s original text was a playful dialogue between Husserl and Aquinas, Heidegger had her amend the text into a more scholarly essay for its publication in the Jahrbuch (1929). The essay is entitled “What is Philosophy? A Conversation Between Edmund Husserl and
need not elaborate upon the differences such a synthesis would bring to Husserl’s conception of phenomenology. We merely note this development in Stein’s thought as a further indication of her independence and divergence from her teacher’s position. We would like to turn now to a more in depth look at Stein’s analysis of the human person as rooted in the concept of empathy.

**Empathy – the Intersubjective Enactment of Human Personhood**

For Stein, empathy is the “key” to unlocking the secrets of human personhood. As we will see what this ultimately entails is that, according to Stein’s analysis, the human person is necessarily intersubjective – I cannot enact my own human personhood without encountering other human persons. Of all her philosophical writings, Stein’s doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy* (1916) is perhaps her best-known text.

In her autobiographical text, *Life in a Jewish Family*, Stein comments on how she came to choose this topic for her doctoral dissertation:

> Now the question needed to be settled: what did I want to work on? I had no difficulty on this. In his course on nature and spirit, Husserl had said that an objective outer world could only be experienced intersubjectively, i.e., through a plurality of perceiving individuals who relate in a mutual exchange of information. Accordingly, an experience of other individuals is a prerequisite. To the experience, an application of the work of Theodor Lipps, Husserl gave the name *Einfühlung* [Empathy]. What it consists of, however, he nowhere detailed.

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Thomas Aquinas”. Helpfully, *Knowledge and Faith* contains both versions in a side by side comparison, revealing the changes and development from the original text to the published manuscript.


Here was a lacuna to be filled; therefore, I wished to examine what empathy might be.  

In light of how Stein continued to treat the topic of the intersubjectively constituted human person in her later texts, this youthful selection of her dissertation thesis seems rather significant. Indeed, Stein herself remembers a strong attachment to her theme:

“Herr Professor,” I told [Husserl], “I have no intention of finding some convenient project with which to get a doctorate. I want to prove myself whether I am capable of an independent achievement in philosophy.”

Edith Stein’s doctoral dissertation, in which she first set out to prove her philosophical worth, is still considered to this day to offer an “original contribution” to the phenomenological description of the nature of empathy.

The published version of her dissertation contains three separate parts or chapters. However, originally there was an additional opening chapter that traced the historical development of the literature on empathy. This chapter has since been lost. In the remaining chapters Stein first considers the act of empathy itself. Then she turns to the constitution of the self as a person (or “psycho-physical individual”) which brings her directly to the constitution of the “foreign individual”. In the last section of her work,

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47 Ibid., 317.

48 See the Preface to the first and second edition's of Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy*, xiv.

49 Stein, *Empathy*, 1. For ease of reading, in the following analysis of Stein’s concept of empathy citations from *On the Problem of Empathy* will be placed in parentheses within the body of the text.
Stein considers empathy in light of the concept of “spiritual persons”. We turn now to Stein’s concept of empathy.

A) The Empathic Act

Stein opens her text with a simple definition of empathy. It is “the perceiving of foreign subjects and their experience” (1). Although Stein does here perform the phenomenological bracketing that Husserl insists upon (3-4), her conclusions already belie her deviation from her teacher and situate her as a realist phenomenologist. She concludes that the experiences of the “I” cannot be placed in doubt and what the “I” experiences is a world in which there are “experiencing subjects external to us, of whose experiences we know” (5). Thus “the phenomenon of foreign psychic life is indubitably there” (5). What Stein wants to examine is how the self comes to experience the reality of these foreign individuals through an experience of their experiences and what that experience is like for the self. As we know, the how is the act of empathy. She gives the example of a friend who tells her of the loss of his brother (6). She becomes aware of his pain. This awareness is an empathic experience. According to Stein’s analysis this act involves “three levels or modalities of accomplishment” (10). These are:

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50 It is to be noted that "spirit" and "spiritual" has for Stein no theological or moral context. At this point in Stein’s work, "spirit" is to be understood as "the creative human spirit". See the Note on Translation in Stein, Empathy, xxv. We will find, in her development of the concept of the "spiritual person", that this is where we encounter the realm of feelings and values.

51 We recall, in light of Stein's obvious disdain for the epoché, that perhaps this was done more in appeasement of her director than out of a true commitment to this methodological task. See note 25 above.
1) the emergence of the experience
2) the fulfilling explication
3) the comprehensive objectification of the explained experience (10)

Before we elaborate upon these three levels of the empathic process one must first understand the difference between primordial and non-primordial experiences. Simply put, primordial experiences are “our own experiences as they are given in reflection” (7). I cut my thumb and feel pain. I eat a peach, tasting and enjoying its sweet juiciness. I listen to a piece of music and it somehow gives me energy while I’m exercising. These are all primordially perceived experiences. I, the self, is at the center of the experience, receiving it and experiencing it. However if you cut your thumb, or eat a peach, or listen to music, this is your primordially given experience, not mine. I can witness you doing these things and understand what is happening in them, but the experience itself, its content, is not given to me primordially, rather it is given to me non-primordially. This brings us to empathy. Stein states that empathy is “an act which is primordial as present experience though non-primordial in content” (10, emphasis mine). Let us return to the peach. You eat the peach, a primordial experience for you. I perceive you eating the peach, this is both a primordial and non-primordial experience for me. My perception of you eating the peach is my primordial experience, but your eating of the peach is non-primordial to me. If I wish to understand what your experience of eating a peach is like I must place myself in your shoes, so to speak, and become “the subject of the content in the original subject’s place” (10). However, I never fool myself into actually thinking that I am eating the peach myself. I am fully aware that you are the one eating the peach and that I am not. However, I can experience eating the peach non-primordially through you. This is empathy and I am the subject of this act but its content is only secondarily, or
non-primordially, mine. Thus the empathizing (the proverbial placing oneself in the other’s shoes) is my primordial experience. The eating of the peach is the content of the experience which I perceive non-primordially.

Let us place this example into the three stages that Stein believes takes place during an act of empathy. First there is the emergence of the experience – your eating of the peach (or in Stein’s example, her friend hearing of his brother’s death). Next there is the fulfilling explication – the placing of myself in your shoes so to consider the primordial content of your experience though always with the awareness that it is your primordial experience and not mine (I am not eating the peach; it was not my brother who died). Finally there is the comprehensive objectification of the explained experience – I “return” to my own position and can now reflect upon your experience specifically as yours and not mine. In this way Stein claims that:

On the first and third levels, the representation exhibits the non-primordial parallel to perception, and on the second level it exhibits the non-primordial parallel to the having of the experience. The subject of the empathized experience, however, is not the subject empathizing, but another…. These two subjects are separate and not joined together… by a consciousness of sameness or a continuity of experience (10-11).

In this last aspect of empathy, the fact that the two subjects do not become one but remain separate, Stein is trying to protect the integrity of the two individuals. For Stein, each member of the empathic dyad remains an autonomous I, a person in their own right. Neither is reduced to the other (a loss in personhood or self-ness). It is, in part, due to this refusal to allow a reduction of the one to the other that will enable empathy to be a constitutive element in personhood, rather than a destructive one. This is perhaps made clearer with Stein’s insistence on what empathy is not.
Empathy, according to Stein, is not sympathy, a “feeling of oneness”, imitation, association, or analogy. Sympathy, or “fellow feeling”, has a different quality to empathy (14). When I sympathize with your joy over some good news the joy I feel is my own primordial experience. I am joyful with you but it is my joy that I am experiencing. Now perhaps my joy arises in light of my empathic perception of your joy, but in sympathy, the content of the experience is given as my own. Stein is also adamant that empathy is not a “feeling of oneness” (16-18). This should be already clear due to her distinction between experiences as primordial and non-primordial. In a feeling of oneness “there is no distinction between our own and the foreign ‘I’,… they are one” (16). In fact Stein claims that a feeling of oneness, a “we” arising out of an “I” and a “you” (17), is only possible on the basis of empathy (18). Imitation is the mere “contagion” or “transference of feelings” which actually prevents empathy from happening because the experience becomes our own rather than remaining the primordial experience of the other (23). One can think of the phenomenon of how a child begins to cry merely by seeing another child crying. The first child has no notion of why the other child is crying nor does he or she care why the other child is crying. He or she simply feels the urge to imitate the other child and in this imitation the crying is his or her own primordial experience with no concern for the experience of the other. Association is the process by which I see another’s action and relate it back to my own similar action – you stamp your

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52 Stein's view of what empathy is not will be an important aspect in our proposed dialogue with Levinas in the following chapter.

53 This will become clearer when we address Stein's concept of community below. There we will see that while a communal experience is not an empathic one per se, it is yet rooted in empathy.
foot in anger, I recall when I once stamped my food in anger. Here, instead of entering into the experience of the other as their own, I refer to my own experience and relate yours to it. This is not empathy either (24). Analogy is similar to association but rooted in the fact of our embodiment. I know myself as a conscious and experiencing subject who also has a physical body through which I express myself and have such conscious experiences. I cannot know if you are a consciously experiencing “I” but I do see that you have a physical body and it appears to be similar to mine in how it receives experiences, etc. Thus, through an analogy to my own embodied experience, I assume a linkage between your physically experiencing body and a conscious foreign I embodied therein (26). In this way Stein claims that analogy ignores the perception of foreign consciousness for through analogy in the external world we see nothing but “physical soulless and lifeless bodies” (26). If empathy is in fact the perception of foreign consciousness as such, clearly it cannot happen through analogy (as understood here). Empathy, rather, is “the experience of foreign consciousness [that] can only be the non-primordial experience which announces a primordial one…. [It is] an experience of our own announcing another one” (14 &19). What is more, there is a certain passivity in the empathizing subject for he or she feels him or herself as being “led” by the primordial experience of the other (11). The empathizing subject cannot take control of the content of the experience for it is not his or her own but belongs to the other. Ultimately for Stein, empathy is “a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis*” (11). It is the unique act by which I encounter and experience foreign subjectivity.

One last aspect of empathy needs to be mentioned. We noted above how empathy, for Stein, plays a role in the actual constitution or enactment of human personhood. Stein
makes her first move towards the self-constitutive element of empathy when she introduces the concept of reiterated empathy or “reflexive sympathy”.

There is not only reflection, but also reflection on reflection…. In fact, all representations can be reiterated…. And so I can also empathize the empathized, i.e., among the acts of another that I comprehend empathically there can be empathic acts in which the other comprehends another’s acts. This “other” can be a third person or me myself. In the second case we have “reflexive sympathy” where my original experience returns to me as an empathized one (18, emphasis mine).54

In other words, instead of empathically perceiving the eating of the peach, I empathically perceive the empathic acts of the other. If the other is empathically perceiving me, I thus empathically perceive how the other is perceiving me. This can tell me something of myself from another’s point of view and perhaps shape me as a person. We (with Stein) will return to the self-constituting implications of reiterated empathy. For now we need to turn to the constitution of the “I”, or as Stein designates it, “the psycho-physical individual”.

B1) The Constitution of the Psycho-Physical Individual

Stein begins her reflection on the constitution of the individual person by first revealing how such individuality arises. She speaks of the “pure I” as the “subject of experience” (38). This is the subject of the “I” think, “I” feel, “I” will. It is an “I” because it is “‘itself’ and no other” (38). This idea of “selfness”:

54 In light of Stein’s previous emphasis that empathy is not sympathy, it is somewhat unfortunate that she calls this reiterated empathy "reflexive sympathy" for this can be confusing to the unwary reader (similar to Levinas’ confusing use of the word “metaphysics” in Totality and Infinity, see chapter two).
is first brought into relief in contrast with another when another is given.... This otherness is apparent in the type of givenness; it is other than “I” because it is given to me in another way than “I”. Therefore it is “you” (38).

The “I” (its own self-givenness) manifests itself when it comes into contact with the other. This encounter enables one to realize the self and what belongs to it in contrast with the other and what belongs to the other. Thus the realization of one’s selfness requires the encounter with another. However, Stein adds, “since [the other] experiences itself as I experience myself, the ‘you’ is another ‘I’” (38). We will return to this empathic experience below.

Another way to understand the “I” is “as the unity of a stream of consciousness” (38). This stream refers to the phenomena of the unity or flow of past, present, and future experiences. The “I” comes to perceive that it is the subject not of isolated experiences, but rather of a whole unity of experiences that relate to one another, build off each other, influence one another, etc. all within the context of being the primordial experience of the “I”. Now, just as the “I” came to appreciate its individuality in contrast with the other, so too the “I” perceives how its stream of consciousness differs from yours: “‘other’ streams of consciousness face this ‘same’ stream; the stream of the ‘I’ faces those of the ‘you’ and the ‘he’” (39).

Stein next considers the phenomenon of the soul as a characteristic of the individual.55 The soul, she claims, is the “bearer” of our experiences (40). It is intimately linked with psychic unity and the stream of experience or consciousness.

55 As with our comment on the "spirit" (see note 50 above), the "soul" here also has no religious or moral content as of yet.
This substantial unity is “my” soul when the experiences in which it is apparent are “my” experiences or acts in which my pure “I” lives. The peculiar structure of psychic unity depends on the peculiar content of the stream of experience; and, conversely, (as we must say after the soul has been constituted for us) the content of the stream of experience depends on the structure of the soul (40).

However, such a “mentally” (psychic) isolated analysis of the soul is imperfect for the soul is intimately linked to the body. Stein reveals this as she takes the step from the psychic individual (an incomplete one as such) to the psycho-physical individual. This brings us to the “living body”.

The living body reveals the unity of the soul and the physical body. Stein claims that “the soul is always necessarily a soul in a body” (41). My body is always “here” with me (in contrast to other objects which are “there”), it belongs to me and I to it, I am bound to my body in perpetuity (42). Now, with the physical body come tactile and visual senses. However with the soul we have sensations. Sensations “are among the real constituents of consciousness” (42). A sensation, for example, can be of pressure or pain or cold. They do not “issue from the pure ‘I’” as judging, willing, or perceiving do, they are “at a distance” from the pure “I” yet they form a unity within the living body (42). Stein further indicates this unity of the soul and the body by marking the body as the “zero point of orientation” for the self (43). This notion refers to how the “I” perceives

56 Stein does not here discuss such issues as loss of bodily parts or functions or the phenomenon of transplantation of body parts from foreign bodies (I do not believe such medical breakthroughs had occurred yet at the writing of her dissertation). We will accept that she is here talking “ideally” in the sense of this is how it is “meant” to be: persons are meant to have bodies that function in a specific way (eyes are meant to see, ears to hear, etc.) and they live their lives through the medium of their bodies. Of course the fact that one is blind and bound to this sightless body as such certainly gives a particular flavor to one’s psychic experiences and stream of consciousness, which actually fits in with the point Stein is trying to make here that one’s physical body is also a part of what makes one an individual person, enabling and shaping one’s very experiences.
itself in relation to the world around it. The “I” is at the center of its own world of perception. All other objects appear at a distance to it. Even if I hold a cup in my hand, though the cup touches my hand, it is still at a distance from me for we are two separate entities.

The distance of the parts of my living body from me is completely incomparable with the distance of foreign physical bodies from me. The living body as a whole is at the zero point of orientation with all physical bodies outside of it. “Body space” and “outer space” are completely different from each other (43).

Thus we see that “the living body is constituted in a two-fold manner as a sensed (bodily perceived) living body and as an outwardly perceived physical body of the outer world. And in this doubled givenness it is experienced as the same” (43). Both soul and body, the psychic and the physical, are united in the one individual. Furthermore, “what makes the connection between sensation and bodily perception particularly intimate is the fact that sensations are given at the living body to the living body as senser” (44, emphasis mine).

Stein further elucidates this connection of the psychic and the physical body by considering movement, feeling, expression, and willing. If I walk down the street, I do not simply perceive that some physical body removed from myself is walking down the street, rather I with my body (as a part of my body) move down the street (46). As to feelings, Stein looks at both “psychic” and “bodily general” feelings and claims that they have a “reciprocal ‘influence’ on the other” (49). My body may be tired from lack of sleep and can cause my mind to be sluggish as I try to write this chapter. However, after a sudden reception of good news, the sluggishness lifts not only from my mind, but I even do not feel as tired in my body. With expressions, we find the physical manifestation of
one’s feelings. “Since phenomena of expression [physical, bodily manifestations] appear as the outpouring of feelings, they are simultaneously the expression of the psychic characteristics they announce” (54). I cannot help but smile at the reception of the good news, physically expressing the happiness I feel within. Stein claims that the “willing ‘I’ is the master of the living body” (56). This is revealed in action. For the will “externalizes itself in action” (55). The “I”, the psychic pure I that is the soul, wills to do something which is manifested in bodily, physical action. I will myself to stand up and stretch and find that my body obeys this order of the will. “The will employs a psycho-physical mechanism to fulfill itself, to realize what is willed [by the I]” (55). Thus the will manifests the unity of the soul and the body. Stein summarizes her findings on the constitution of the individual I:

We have at least outlined an account of what is meant by an individual “I” or by individuals. It is a unified object inseparably joining together the conscious unity of an “I” and a physical body in such a way that each of them takes on a new character. The physical body occurs as a living body; consciousness occurs as the soul of the unified individual. This unity is documented by the fact that specific events are given as belonging to the living body and to the soul at the same time: sensations, general feelings. The causal tie between physical and psychic events and the resulting mediated causal relationship between the soul and the real outer world further document this unity. The psycho-physical individual as a whole belongs to the order of nature. The living body in contrast with the physical body is characterized by having fields of sensations, being located at the zero point of orientation of the spatial world, moving voluntarily and being constructed of moving organs, being the field of expression of the experiences of its “I” and the instrument of the “I’s” will. We have gotten all these characteristics from considering our own individual (56-57).

It is to the foreign individual that we now must turn.
B2) The Foreign Individual

Stein begins her reflection on the foreign individual by suggesting how one perceives the foreign I as a foreign living body. She reviews how one’s own “fields of sensation” are primordially given in “bodily perception” (57). This givenness is actually “co-given” in both bodily and outer perception. I both see and feel my hand move across the table while simultaneously perceiving that it is my hand that is moving. The same is perceived of the foreign fields of sensation thus the foreign I must also possess a living body. Stein calls this givenness of the foreign living body as “con-primordiality” or empathic presentation (57). That is, this all takes place via empathic representation. I empathically perceive the foreign fields of sensation as given in both bodily and outer perception, thus perceiving the foreign I as possessing a living body as does my own. What is more I can also empathically “bring the foreign fields of sensation to givenness by making them intuitive for me” (58). Let us return to the example of moving a hand. If the other moves his or her hand, I can, through empathic “co-comprehension”, move my own hand as if it were the foreign hand. Thus, through empathy, I feel the sensations of the foreign hand. Let us be more explicit. You stroke a cat’s fur. Through empathy I can sense the softness of the cat’s fur and the warmth of its body beneath as if I was stroking the cat for I have “placed” my hand in the position of the foreign one (58). However, as before, Stein is clear to avoid any reduction of the other to the self (or the self to the other):

During this [empathic] projection, the foreign hand is continually perceived as belonging to the foreign physical body so that the empathized sensations are continually brought into relief as foreign in contrast with our own sensations (58).
In the end, I know that it is not I who stroke the cat, but you. What I sense is given non-primordially whereas your experience is the primordial one.

Stein next comments upon how such sensual empathy is possible. Ultimately, empathy is only possible with physical bodies of “like type” with my own (59). There must be some “common ground” (if you will) upon which to base the empathic experience. What is interesting is that Stein does not limit empathy as only possible between human subjects for “there are types of various levels of generality to which correspond various possible levels of empathy” (59). Can one empathize with a dog or a cat? What of plants? Stein makes it clear that empathy is indeed possible with non-human types for one can find a level of generality with the other living creatures of this world to which we all belong. She does however offer a reasonable clarification: “the further I deviate from the type ‘human being’ the smaller does the number of possibilities of fulfillment become” (59). Certainly it makes sense that one would have a higher potential level of empathic experience with one’s fellow human persons than one would with one’s dog or cat. However, we refrain from any explicit comment on the possible level of empathy that can be reached with non-human types. It is enough to state that it is indeed possible.

We have seen how the living body of the self is the “zero point of orientation” for its own perceptual world. We now see that the foreign living body is the center of orientation of its own world. Revealing its self-constitutive application, Stein notes how through empathy the foreign point of orientation can become enriching of my own.

When I now interpret [the foreign living body] as a sensing living body and empathically project myself into it, I obtain a new image of the spatial world and a new zero point of orientation…. I retain my “primordial” zero point and my
“primordial” orientation while I am empathically, non-primordially obtaining the other one (61, emphasis original).

By coming to empathically perceive this other image of the spatial world I realize that the world is a “bigger place” than I alone can perceive from my own zero point of orientation. Thus we find that empathically perceiving the foreign orientation to the outer world can enrich our own image of the world (62-63). Enrichment, however, is not all the empathic experience of the foreign orientation enables. Through this experience one comes to view “the appearance of the world [as] dependent on individual consciousness, but the appearing world – which is the same, however and to whomever it appears – is made independent of consciousness” (64, emphasis mine). The world will appear to me in a certain way and to you in another, however, it is the same world. By coming to perceive your view of the world (via empathy), my understanding of the world not only increases, but the possibility arises that I might come to know the existing world as such. Thus the possibility arises for knowledge of the existing outer world through the empathic experience of foreign consciousness.

Empathy, however, results in more than simply the constitution of the external world. Empathy is also found to be a means to self-constitution (63). This recalls our

57 We recall here our reflection above on Stein’s rejection of the phenomenological reduction and emergence of the transcendental subject as not true to the givenness of the world as such. Due to the unique individuality of each person, we must consider all intuitive encounters with the world if we wish to know the world as such. As noted above, the I’s are not interchangeable.

58 Of course to truly know the existing world as such and in its entirety would require one to perceive the world from every possible vantage point, which, considering the sheer number of people in the world today (not to mention those from the past and those yet to come who will also perceive the same world from their own unique points of orientation), is a practical impossibility. However, through empathy the possibility or means to such knowledge is made available.
earlier discussion on reiterated empathy. By realizing that my zero point is only one among many, I also come “to see my living body as a physical body like others (63, emphasis mine).” In an intriguing reversal of the standard interpretation of the concept of analogy, Stein does not find the self reducing the other to one like itself but rather finds the self determining itself according to others. “In ‘reiterated empathy’ I again interpret this physical body as a living body, and so it is that I first am given to myself as a psycho-physical individual in the full sense” (63). Through empathically perceiving the other’s empathic experience of myself, I can come to a fuller, richer vision of myself, not limited by my own self-image. Stein will again return to this self-constitution through empathy before the close of this section.

Stein discusses three other phenomena in light of the foreign individual: voluntary movement, the phenomena of life, and expression. We have come to see that the foreign living body is the bearer of fields of sensation and the center of orientation of its spatial world. Now we see that the foreign living body is also the bearer of voluntary movements (66). Just as with our own living body, through empathy we come to perceive that the foreign living body moves not only mechanically (as we all do), but also spontaneously and voluntarily.

I represent [the foreign movement] to myself empathically when I transfer myself into his orientation…. As I participate in the movement empathically in the way already sufficiently familiar, I follow out the “co-perceived” spontaneous movement’s tendency to fulfillment. Finally, I objectify it so that the movement faces me as the other individual’s movement (67).

The phenomena of life are those experiences such as “growth, development and aging, health and sickness, vigor and sluggishness” (68). Again through empathy, we can bring
these life phenomena as experienced by the other to our own non-primordial experience.

As for expression:

[The] understanding of a bodily expression is based on comprehending the foreign living body already interpreted as a living body of an “I”. I project myself into the foreign living body, carry out the experience already co-given to me as empty with its countenance, and experience the experience ending in the expression (82).

Thus empathy has revealed the foreign individual to be a self, a living body, a person. Before ending this section, Stein offers a few further thoughts on self-constitution through empathy.

Stein gives both a warning and a clarification on the act of empathy. Her warning pertains to the possibility of deceptions of empathy (86). She states quite clearly that “we come to false conclusions if we empathically take our individual characteristic as a basis instead of our type” (87). What she is referring to is the temptation to assume that what is an individual trait of our own is actually the universal norm and then to apply it to the other or to judge the other by it. For example if I assume that my pale colored skin is normative for the human person, when I encounter a foreign individual who has differently colored skin, I will judge them to be deficient for not measuring up to my assumed universal characteristic. Obviously (though once it sadly was not so, and likely is still not entirely so) this is a “false conclusion”, as Stein calls it, based on turning my individual trait into a norm. Stein believes that empathy itself can aid us in avoiding this misconception by truly entering into the experience of the foreign person (87).

Stein’s clarification is in relation to one’s self-constitution through empathy. She upholds that it is possible that the foreign I can actually have a clearer picture of me than I have of myself. She states: “It is possible for another to ‘judge me more accurately’ than
I judge myself and give me clarity about myself” (89). On the other hand, the other may be deceived in their image of me (89). However, I am not only aware of myself through reiterated empathy. I also see myself through “inner perception”. Stein claims that “empathy [reiterated empathy] and inner perception work hand in hand to give me myself to myself” (89). Of course it is the task of long reflection and discernment to put these two images together, sorting out the false images from the true.

C) The Spiritual Person

In the final section of her dissertation, Stein considers the phenomena of the “spiritual person”. She states that “something” goes beyond the mere psycho-physical constitution of the individual:

Consciousness appeared not only as a causally conditioned occurrence, but also as object-constituting at the same time. Thus it stepped out of the order of nature and faced it. Consciousness as a correlate of the object world is not nature, but spirit (91).59

The phenomena of the object-constituting consciousness is thus seen to reveal the realm of the spirit in the psycho-physical individual.

Stein offers a definition of the “spiritual subject”. It is “an ‘I’ in whose acts an object world is constituted and which itself creates objects by reason of its will” (96). This element of the will points to the notion that spiritual acts are not caused (causality regulates the physical realm) but rather are “motivated” (96). We must be careful with this word for Stein’s use of it does not have exactly the same connotation as it does in English. According to Stein motivation is:

59 Please refer to note 50 for Stein's understanding of "spirit".
the connection that acts get into with one another: not a mere blending like that of simultaneously or sequentially ebbing phases of experiences, or the associative tying together of experiences, but an emerging of the one out of the other, a self fulfilling or being fulfilled of the one on the basis of the other for the sake of the other.\(^{60}\)

Stein envisions the structure of the human person as a multi-layered being, physical-sensory-mental-personal, whose layers are mutually permeable within the individual.\(^{61}\) At the physical and sentient level the laws of causality function, whereas at the intellectual and personal level one is guided by motivation. A simple difference between causality and motivation is that according to causality an event is necessary whereas in motivation the “transition from act to act” is optional.\(^{62}\) That is, eating food necessarily causes my digestive system to start working (physical level) and coming in contact with a flame causes me to feel a burning sensation and pull my hand away (sentient level).\(^{63}\) However, in the mental and personal realms one thought or action may arise out of another, but it is not a necessary following of one after the other. I feel fatigued and think about taking some rest. This puts me in the mind of taking a vacation. I start to look into flights and sea-side destinations. In the end I give myself a weekend at a local spa, pampering myself. Now not a single point in this chain of events is necessary. One part does not cause the next but rather motivates it, allowing one to emerge out of the other or on the

\(^{60}\) Stein Beiträge, 41, emphasis original.

\(^{61}\) See the Editor's Introduction to the Beiträge, xv-xix.

\(^{62}\) Stein, Beiträge, 46, note 69.

\(^{63}\) What is interesting is that in the sensory realm my will can actually override the causal reaction. I can actually choose to keep my hand against the flame despite the causal sensation of pain and involuntary reaction to move my hand away. Here we see an example of the permeation of the layers.
basis of the other but it need not necessarily be so – I need not go to the spa however much I may want to go. Feelings and values also belong to this realm of motivation. Now we need to keep in mind that here “feelings” are not the sensory reactions to tactile encounters. We feel things but also have feelings about things. In this way feelings are also attitudes that we have toward things. For Stein there is a passive element in attitudes. Attitudes “befall” me for they are “due to the objective whatever-it-is that it holds for”.

That is, attitudes are both aroused by and grounded in the thing that I encounter thus they “seize possession of me”. However, I do have a choice in the matter here. I can choose whether or not to adopt the attitude. That is, I “take a stance” toward the attitude that has befallen me, either accepting or rejecting it. The stance I adopt toward things reveals how, or to what degree, I value them. This stance taking is a free act and as such belongs to the realm of the will.

My “fiat!” is required here. According to Stein “free acts presuppose a motive”. Thus the stance I willfully take toward an attitude, revealing the value it holds for me, is not caused but motivated, not necessary but chosen.

Let us now return to Stein’s spiritual subject who is an “I” acting out of the motivation of its will. We see now that it is at this spiritual level of the human person that the stances one takes toward feelings (attitudes) and the values one holds are manifested

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64 Stein, Beiträge, 48.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., 49. In this way when I speak about “my attitude” toward something, Stein would say it is actually the stance I have taken toward the attitude that has arisen in me.

67 Ibid., 55.

68 Ibid.
thus revealing some of the unique aspects of the individual person. Stein claims that in the emotions the “I” is always present to itself. “For as [the ‘I’] feels it not only experiences objects, but it itself” (98). I feel pain or love or joy or sorrow. It is my experience, and I perceive myself in it. As one is able to experience a whole range of feelings, a “hierarchy of felt values” is revealed: “the depth classification of value feelings, and the level classification of the person [are] exposed in these feelings. Accordingly, every time we advance in the value realm, we also make acquisitions in the realm of our own personality” (101). This is held to be true, for what one values reveals (in part) who one is. And because this hierarchy of values is set according to our will, which is always “‘I’ centered” (106) Stein also claims that willing reveals something of the human individual as well.

Because every willing is based on a feeling and, further, this feeling of ‘being able to be realized’ is linked with every willing, every willing invades the personal structure in a double manner and exposes its depths (107).

What is more, through empathy, we can come to understand the values and personality of the foreign individual (101). “[In] every comprehension of an act of feeling [of the foreign individual] we have already penetrated into the realm of the spirit” (92). Stein goes one step further by claiming that if, through the empathic experience, we come into contact with values unknown to us, “the comprehension of foreign persons [can be] constitutive of our own person” (102). Our values may be enriched and new ones given (or rejected) by encountering those held by others.

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69 See also p. 103 for “another ‘dimension’ of the significance of feelings for the constitution of personality. They not only have the peculiarity of being rooted in a certain depth of the ‘I’ but also of filling it out to more or less of an extent”.
Thus we see that in the realm of the spirit, we encounter the value-world of the individual that both shapes their personality and molds their actions accordingly. And so the psycho-physical person is found to be a *psycho-physical-spiritual* person. This is, for Stein, the total structure of the human person. We have come to understand this personal constitution through the act of empathy, not only of the foreign individual, but also of our own self-constitution.

We… see the significance of knowledge of foreign personality for “knowledge of self” in what has been said…. By empathy with differently composed personal structures we become clear on what we are not, what we are more or less than others. Thus, together with self knowledge, we also have an important aid to self evaluation. (116).

To conclude this section on empathy we would like summarize Stein’s unique analysis into five distinctive features as determined by Marianne Sawicki in her work *Body, Text, and Science.*\(^70\) First, we see that empathy is an act that is led and not projected. There is a certain passivity in the act of empathy for “my awareness is magnetized and configured to a pattern not of my own design”.\(^71\) I project nothing of myself into the empathized experience. I must stand aside or even “*bracket*” myself out if I wish to perceive the other’s experience as his or her own. Thus my experience of empathy is actually controlled by the other who is having the primordial experience. Second, “what is empathized is neither act nor form, but content”.\(^72\) That is, what distinguishes empathy is not due to the *type* of act that it is but rather due to its content. In the end, empathy is an act of reflection just like any act of reflection that the ego can

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\(^71\) Ibid., 96.

\(^72\) Ibid., 96.
And so its uniqueness resides in its content. We agree with this only up to a point. Stein herself calls empathy “a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis*. It would seem then that while one can claim a loose connection between the kind of act empathy is with other acts of reflection or perception; on the other hand there is something quite unique about the kind of act empathy is. This is perhaps due to the passivity of the act as found in point one. It could also be due to how the content of the act is received (which is found in point three). In our estimation, there is a unique quality to the act of empathy as such. Third, the empathized content “has a quality distinguishing one’s own from another’s”. In the second point we saw that what distinguishes empathy from other acts performed by the consciousness (such as remembrance) is the content of the act. Point three focuses on the unique way in which this content is given to the empathizing subject which contains the tension of primordiality and non-primordiality. The content of an act of empathy is the content of the other person’s primordial experience given to me non-primordially. This non-primordially given content is the primordial content of my act of empathy. Fourth, in the act of empathy the “I’s neither overlay nor displace each other while sharing content”. As we have noted, Stein insists upon the separation of the self and the other in the act of empathy. The two never become one. This is largely due to the empathizer’s awareness of the non-primordiality of the content. As noted above, empathy is not a “feeling of oneness”, association, or analogy. Fifth, “empathy requires a new

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73 Ibid., 97.


76 Ibid., 102.
That is, the philosophical approaches to the question of foreign consciousness to date were, in Stein’s opinion, inadequate. This included Husserl’s version of the phenomenological method. Thus Stein set out on her own unique path to address this issue of the givenness of the foreign individual and its effect upon our understanding of the human person as such, to include our own selves. “To illuminate the givenness of other human beings” is seen as Stein’s “distinctive gift to phenomenology”.  

We find ourselves now on the threshold of another phase of Edith Stein’s understanding of the constitution of the human person. For one does not only empathize with one foreign individual but rather with a plurality of foreign subjects who also give me to myself through reiterated empathy. In other words, we are on the verge of community. However, before we turn to that person-constituting experience, it would be beneficial to briefly glance at a text written toward the end of Stein’s life for in it we find a further analysis of human individuality that both agrees with but also enhances Stein’s earlier conception found in her dissertation.

**Individuality – Edith Stein’s concept of the human person**

In Stein’s rather hefty tome, *Potency and Act*, we find a lengthy analysis of what it means to be a person and specifically a human person. We offer here only the key

\[^77\] Ib., 103.

\[^78\] Ib., 108.

\[^79\] Stein holds that God is the person *par excellence*, thus the distinction is made between what it means to be a person and specifically a human person. We will consider Stein’s analysis of God as Person towards the end of this chapter. We also recall here that this is one of the texts in which Stein is attempting to synthesize phenomenology with Thomistic scholasticism, giving this text a rather distinctive flavor.
conclusions of this text as pertains to our analysis of the psycho-physical-spiritual person elaborated above. For Stein a person is a spiritual subject who is, necessarily, an individual.  

An individual is that which is unique and unrepeatable. But how does such unique unrepeatability come about? How are human individuals as such possible? What is the structure behind such individuality? For Stein there is both an internal and external element to the structure of the individual person. Internally, there is in each of us what Stein calls the “personal core”. The person’s core is “what he is in himself and what perdures as the how varies” and as such this only pertains to spiritual subjects. Now Stein will eventually concede that there is in fact a way in which the core can change or develop over the course of the person’s life, however she ultimately envisions the core as that which shapes a person’s character, determining it from within. Thus we see that one must not confuse the personal core with the notion of a personality or personal character. For Stein one’s personality or character does not arise a priori within the individual but is shaped over time. What determines this shaping is, in part, the personal core.


81 Ibid., 28.

82 Ibid., 183, emphasis original.

83 Ibid., 220. She states: "So far we have seen only that the core lies behind the person's process of development - his actual living and the ongoing formation of his potencies into habits - but it does not itself undergo this development. Still, there were several hints that the core itself does experience a change which we called 'unfolding'".

84 Ibid., 183.
Thus the person himself, in what he is in himself, in his core, seems to be what has a dimension in depth and is the deciding factor in determining the depth of acts, habits, and potencies.\textsuperscript{85}

Now while we seem to be following Stein to an understanding of what the core is, the ability to define it ultimately slips from our hands. “What the person is… remains ever mysterious for him and for others, it is never completely disclosed nor disclosable.”\textsuperscript{86}

This is because Stein envisions the core as that which hovers, ineffable, \textit{behind} one’s consciousness and as its root, so to speak.\textsuperscript{87} Stein claims:

\begin{quote}
What I am as a spiritual individual is not accessible to rational knowledge at all…. As something absolutely unique, it cannot be brought under general concepts; at most it can be denoted by a proper name.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

However while, for Stein, a certain mystery always surrounds the person yet something can be known or is knowable by this very designation of a name. “I am what I am – or I am with what I am – for myself (and also for others) in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{89} That is, while I can never completely know the other person (or it would seem even myself), the event of name-bestowal reveals our recognition \textit{that} there is a unique individual before us who is manifested in the particular way in which he or she lives his or her life. This is why Stein

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 190.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 200.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 185. "We thus arrive at a being of the person that stands behind his conscious life but becomes actual in it and is its basis."

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. In our section on God below, Stein will show how this link between personhood, having a proper name, and the ability to say “I am” is only possible due to the personhood of God as revealed in the divine name “I am who I am” as given in the Hebrew Scriptures.
makes the claim that “every one of us, every individual, is unique in kind, I mean, each of us is our own species”.  

Now, lest we find ourselves slipping toward the closed and isolated monad that Husserl’s phenomenology is accused of harboring, Stein finds that there is an innate openness and receptivity in what it means to be a person. “[The] I transcends itself outwards into a ‘world’ of things.” And what does this I find in the world of things that is, for Stein, so crucial to its development as a person? “We find other ‘monads’ in this world.” That is, the I in its transcendence toward the world of things encounters other persons. And so we find that, for Stein, the person is both a unique individual, shaped from within, but is also shaped from without by their contact with the external world of things and, most importantly, other persons. “Dealing with things outside ourselves is an essential part of human living”. As we noted above in Stein’s divergence from Husserl, in the human person she finds not a transcendent subjectivity but a transcendence towards that which it is not. Of course we cannot forget the personal core which also

90 Ibid., 395. Here Stein has deviated from the classic claim made by Thomas Aquinas that angels are each their own species. In making this claim for human persons, Stein reveals the depth to which she appreciates the uniqueness of human individuality.

91 Mary Catherine Baseheart, "Edith Stein's Philosophy of Community," The Personalist Forum 8, no. 1 (Spring 1992 Supplement): 164. She comments how for Stein “the nature of person is a going-beyond self and an openness not only to the object world but also to the world of other subjects”. This going beyond self and openness to others is, for Stein, an element of the spiritual ream of the person.

92 Stein, Potency and Act, 375.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 174.

95 Ibid., 374-375.
plays a role here for one’s response to the external influences of the world is highly personal and individually unique. This is, for Stein, due to this personal core which colors how we are affected by the things we encounter and how we then respond to the things of the world.

Considered in concreto, the personal I is not a “self without selfhood” nor a “beginning without content” but a be-ing already materially fulfilled in itself, a “be-ing having a core”. Nor is it, in the way it is, placed into existence “all by itself”; it is rather put into a world from which it can gain content and life owing to the openness that belongs to its very own being.\textsuperscript{96}

Now Stein claims there is a certain breadth and depth in this personal openness to the world beyond. The human person is open to a wide array of things within this world that affect him or her, thus shaping him or her as a person. However, how deeply one is affected by what they encounter determines the extent to which such an encounter is constitutive of the person. “Contents have the feature of seizing the person at some depth or other.”\textsuperscript{97} This brings us to the realm of values. As we know, one “takes a stance” toward the attitudes things cause to arise in a subject. This stance-taking reveals how much a person is affected by things he or she encounters. It reveals what one values and to what degree.

As a rule, the spiritual subject does not merely encounter an object in the understanding; it does more than receive it in knowledge. The subject is inwardly affected by the object and challenged to take a stance on it.\textsuperscript{98}

This stance-taking is of course an act of the will, rooted in personal freedom. Here we see that what affects the person and to what degree is revelatory of their unique personal core

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 408, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 176-177.
that is shaping their character as a person. Thus Stein claims that “the what lies in a
how”,\(^99\) that is, what I am is revealed in how I value and thus act toward the things I
encounter in the world.

In this contact I see that the objects affecting me have corresponding qualities –
values –, and as I turn my attention to them I take certain stances toward them….
These are all kinds of the person’s “give-and-take” with what befalls him and…
seizes him inwardly at greater or lesser depth.\(^{100}\)

Of course what Stein finds to most deeply affect the human person and thus shape them
to the greatest degree in their unique personhood is one’s encounter with other human
persons.

We are most strongly seized inwardly, and so the give-and-take is most intense,
when the be-ing that we encounter is another person. Here approval and
disapproval take the form of love and hate.\(^{101}\)

It is interesting to note that, as with the personal core itself, Stein finds that at a certain
depth of reception, “in” the human soul, there is an inaccessibility to the consciousness
and the senses.\(^{102}\) It seems that our deepest levels of affectivity are beyond the conscious
self. “When we meet a living soul [especially another human person], we feel inwardly
affected in quite a different way than when we meet lifeless things” such that in this
counter our conscious understanding “takes second place to being inwardly
affected”.\(^{103}\) So important is our openness to other things and persons that Stein considers

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 178, emphasis original.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 179, emphasis original.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 179.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 391.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 387.
this receptivity as the “natural thing” for persons to do.\textsuperscript{104} Thus if a human person closes him or herself off from the external world it is an anomaly. What is more, it is potentially damaging to his or her life as a human person:

But by living in this way, they not only stay aloof from others, but they seal off the depths of their very soul, cut themselves off from their own depths, isolate their depths from the actuality of their life.\textsuperscript{105}

For Stein, openness and reception are truly personal acts that are characteristic of the human individual as a person. However, she also insists on the freedom of the individual to choose to be open to the world beyond and to allow itself to be affected by that world. Stein makes a distinction between human persons and animals, in part, through this characteristic of freedom.\textsuperscript{106} Human persons are self-conscious, free, and consciously free (aware of this freedom to control oneself).\textsuperscript{107}

However what marks man as \textit{man} (not as a species of animal) is his free, conscious, personal spiritualness (which means “endowed with reason” as well, insofar as “being conscious” is taken as “being open” = able to \textit{become aware of}, and freedom connotes the possibility of following up on what one is “aware of”).\textsuperscript{108}

However, as we now know, while one can indeed choose to close oneself off to the world and others, in this way one will never achieve the fullness of life or personhood. One

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 389.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 390.

\textsuperscript{106} See p.347: “It is just this clarity and freedom which is the distinctive feature of spiritual being in the personal sense and which animal dullness cannot attain.”

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 346.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 392, emphasis original.
must let oneself be shaped from without.\textsuperscript{109} And in this “letting it happen”, we find both a voluntary act and a passivity, or a voluntary act that renders one passive. For Stein, the person shapes him or herself, shapes the world into which he or she is placed (for one has the power to act upon things in the world and influence the people with which one comes into contact) and is shaped by the things of the world.\textsuperscript{110} Thus she concludes:

In regard to how what the person is in himself is related to his actual living, we may conclude that his living is borne not only from within but also from without, and from the things he encounters as well as from the persons he associates with.\textsuperscript{111}

The human person, that unique individual who is unrepeatable in all the world, while always retaining a mysterious core within, is ultimately a relational being.

Nowhere in this text does Stein mention the act of empathy. However, we also find nothing in the text that precludes empathy from still being the act by which human persons encounter, and thus are affected and influenced by, other persons. Stein also mentions the possibility of human community only in passing:

What we see in our daily experience and throughout history is always human individuals and communities that are what they are potentially, habitually, and actually... thanks to a development whereby they condition and influence each other.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 408-409.

\textsuperscript{110} See for example p.191: "What is the person?... He is something put into the world as a center to engage the world... in such wise that he is either beset by the world or penetrates into it by overcoming it." See also p. 175: “This [shaping power] includes the ability of spirits to shape themselves and other spiritual subjects by virtue of their own doing.”

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 199.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 405.
The brevity with which she treats this topic is due, perhaps, to the existence of an earlier text in which she treated this topic at great length. We turn now to Stein’s concept of human community, keeping in mind that, and as will be made clear, without human individuals there could be no such thing as human community. It is only human persons, as unique individuals, that can enter into the type of relationship that marks the human community as such.

*Individual and Community – A Plurality of Persons*

Stein’s most explicit treatment of the structure and nature of human community is found in her *Contributions to a Philosophical Foundation of Psychology and the Humanities*. Published in 1922, this text is composed of two treatises. The first treatise traces the sentient causality of the human person. The second treatise analyses the relationship of the individual to the community. We will focus here on the second treatise.

In the opening pages of her text Stein distinguishes between two basic types of intersubjective alliance: association and community (130). Later in her text she further separates these two relational units from the mass (241). Now it is important to note that Stein is aware that most “social unions” are of a “mixed” form (131 & 283). Rarely do we find a pure mass, association, or community. However, Stein treats them separately so to better reveal their different components. The mass is simply an anonymous grouping

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113 For ease of reading, in the following explication of Stein’s analysis of human community taken from *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (the *Beiträge*) citations will be placed in parentheses within the body of the text.
of people with no common purpose or goal (283). One could think of a mass like the random people milling about Times Square at any given point in time or people waiting in the security-line at the airport. “For the mass, which is simply an ensemble of individuals who comport themselves in a uniform manner, the decisive factor in their reactions is not ideas but suggestion, imitation [contagion], and feeling”. In a negative way, one can give the example of how panic can spread through a crowd and create the situation of “mass hysteria” causing people to simply react according to the group mentality (252).

The differences between an association and community are rather interesting.

Stein reveals the differences thus:

Under “community” is understood the natural, organic union of individuals; under “association” is understood a union that is rational and mechanical…. Where one person approaches another as subject to object, examines [the other], “deals with” [the other] methodically on the basis of the knowledge obtained, and coaxes the intended reactions out of [the other], they are living together in an association. Conversely where a subject accepts the other as a subject and does not confront [the other] but rather lives with [the other] and is determined by the stirrings of [the other’s] life, they are forming a community with one another. In the association, everyone is absolutely alone, a “windowless monad”. In the community, solidarity prevails (130, emphasis original).

Stein likens the association to a type of “well-oiled machine” (130). The individual members come together to achieve a particular goal and the life of the association is wholly directed towards that goal. “The life of the association – that’s the functionality directed toward the purpose that’s to be attained, or split into a series of single functions of various kinds that are distributed to single members or to certain groups of members”

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114 Stein's complete treatment of the mass is found on pages 241-255.

115 Baseheart, "Edith Stein's Philosophy of Community", 167.
(255). In this goal-driven, function-oriented association, its members appear to one another as mere “objects”, as “mere means to an end”; they are “instruments for achieving the purpose that the whole association serves (257-258). Due to this goal-oriented nature of the association Stein claims that they must be brought into existence by an “optional act” of a person who “institutes” the particular association (255). I decide to form a book club committed to the reading of one particular author or topic. There is a decisive moment of inception. What is more, once the association has attained the purpose for which it was founded it can come to an end, although such dissolution also requires an optional act (255). The book club has read all the works of our chosen author and so we decide to call it quits, have a farewell luncheon, and disband our little reading circle. Also due to the functional orientation of the association, the members of this association can easily be replaced without much notice. “In principle, anybody is replaceable by someone else” (256). For example, in a car manufacturing plant, one worker is let go and another takes his place without any real change in the overall nature of the company. However, one may protest here – “John was the best accounts manager we had; he’s taking 15 years of experience with the product with him, you can’t simply replace that with a new person unfamiliar with the inner workings of our firm; he was my friend and life at work will never be the same without him….” As we noted above Stein is well aware that most forms of human social relations are a mixture of the mass, association, and community. Indeed, she explicitly states that “a pure association that’s not to some degree a community cannot exist” (257). Her reasoning behind this has to do with the subject vs. object status of the members of a community vs. an association. It is Stein’s conviction that:
just plain living, living with others, is already presupposed in order to “probe” oneself and the others, in order to establish through observation the personal competence for this or that associational function. You’ve got to have taken the other as a subject first, at least once, in order to be able to make his or her subjectivity into an object (257, emphasis mine).

In this way Stein claims that a human community is always prior to the creation of an association (258). While the workers at the button factory may be seen as mere cogs in the machine from a certain perspective, if they had no prior notion or experience of communal living and cooperation, which happens, according to Stein, at the level where people face each other as subjects not objects, such a goal-oriented enterprise as the factory would be unable to function. What is more, I need to meet people at the level of their subjectivity to know in which capacity they may best serve the association (131).

The co-operation that comprises the sense of communal living would end up at a standstill if it were a purely associational living. If an association were nothing like a community, it would be a mechanism – an impeccably constructed one, perhaps – that couldn’t function (259).

For Stein, “the only essential fact for the association is that it presupposes some mode or other of community” (261). And so we must now take a closer look at Stein’s understanding of human community.

A community is a union of persons who stand “face to face” where “each individual is equally a subject in solidarity with others in a common life, that is, a life whose ends are shared”. While Stein sees the functioning of the association as analogous to a machine, the community is rather more “organic” in nature.

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116 It is of note that this priority of the community over the association is not merely chronological but an ontological necessity.

117 MacIntyre, 118.
In contrast to the association, it’s characteristic of the community that it isn’t generated and destroyed (founded and dissolved) by optional acts. Rather, it grows up and dies out like a living creature. Also, it doesn’t serve any external purpose, like the association, but rather – like an organism – has no other purpose than that immanent to it, the purpose of proper development, of the unfolding of its original predisposition (261).

Stein divides her analysis of the community into two separate concerns: first she considers the possibility and nature of a communal experience; then she elaborates upon the specific nature of communal life as such, its “ontic composition” (196).

If a community is comprised of a unity of individual egos (133), the question arises as to the possibility of and, if possible, then the nature of communal experience. That is, to use Stein’s example, is there a difference between the experience of grief over the personal loss of a friend compared to the experience of grief felt by members of an army unit over the loss of its leader (134)?

Three aspects of experience must be considered: the subject of the experience, the composition of the experience itself, and the experiential current of the experience. Stein claims there is a difference between the subject of an experience had as an individual vs. the subject of a communal experience. The subject of the communal experience “encompasses a plurality of individual egos” (134). Now while Stein dismisses the ridiculous notion of a communal ego analogous to the pure ego of the individual person (135), she does find a unique aspect to having an experience where the subject is part of a “we” (134). Again using the example of the military unit grieving over the loss of its leader she states:

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118 This example was particularly poignant in Stein's day as her text was written in the wake of World War I where Stein herself served as a Red Cross nurse at a hospital for patients with infectious diseases. See Macintyre, 69-70.
Certainly I the individual ego am filled up with grief. But I feel myself to be not alone with it. Rather, I feel it as our grief. The experience is essentially colored by the fact that others are taking part in it only as a member of a community. We are affected by the loss, and we grieve over it (134, emphasis original).

I have the distinct sense of being a member of this community in this experience of grief. “I grieve as a member of the unity, and the unit grieves with me” (134).

Now while Stein has shown that there is a particular type of subjectivity involved in a communal experience, she also finds that the composition of the experience itself is also unique. She breaks this down into the content of the experience, the actual experiencing of the experience (the “being experienced”), and the consciousness of the experience. As to the content, she finds that there is both an individual aspect and a communal aspect but that there is a “selfsameness” to them (135). That is, “the correlate of the experience is the same for everyone who participates in it” (136). The content of my grief, the loss of the leader, is the same as the content for your grief and for everyone else in the unit. So what makes the experience a specifically communal experience vs. isolated individual experiences that just happen to have the same content? This brings us to the actual experiencing of the experience which is itself only understandable in light of the consciousness of the experience. While Stein insists that all communal aspects are rooted in the individual (141), depending on how the individual interprets this experience, or is conscious of it, it may or may not be a communal experience. We find here a continual tension between having the experience privately as a solitary individual, the communal aspect of the experience, and the status of being an individual as a member of a community. While “every communal experience is simultaneously a solitary experience”, not every individual experience is also communal due to the private or
strictly individual level (141). In other words, one always has an experience at an individual level – it is my grief that is both unique and unrepeatable as accords with my status as an individual. However, Stein notes that there is also “something lying beyond the private experiencing” (135) due to the fact that multiple individuals can have the same content for their experience. If these individuals are united as a community, aware of their communal membership, then the private experiences of the individual members join together to form a “core sense” that is available to all the members (136 & 138). Thus we must distinguish between this core sense and the “particular sheath” or coloring “it takes on in the experiencing of this or that ego” (136). That is:

the content of the communal experience also has its “experiential coloring,” which surrounds the core sense and which is determined in its peculiarity by the distinctiveness of the private experiential contents that share in the coalescence of the communal experience (138).

The core sense is the universal content available to all members of the community (the death of our leader). The particular sheath of the core sense is the individual experiencing of this core sense particularly as a member of the community (I grieve over the loss of our leader). And of course this is only possible because, at the heart of it all, I have a private experience that is unique to me and no other. How the experience is experienced depends on how the individual experiencing it interprets, or is conscious of, their own experience.

There is another aspect to this consciousness of an experience. Stein states that while there can be a communal experience of a content there is no communal consciousness of this experience per se as if all the individual consciousnesses could somehow join together to form a super-conscious ego (139). Rather the consciousness of
the experience always and only resides in the individual consciousnesses of the members of the community. But because they are conscious of themselves particularly as members then we can speak of a consciousness of a communal experience.

The individual lives, feels, and acts as a member of the community, and insofar as he does that, the community lives, feels, and acts in him and through him. But when he becomes conscious of his experiencing or reflects upon it, then the community does not become conscious to what it experiences, but rather he becomes conscious of that which the community experiences in him (140).

Lastly, Stein considers the possibility of an experiential current of the community. Within an individual consciousness the experiences coalesce into a unity for that individual (140). Can the same be said for communal experiences? Stein says yes, but as with the consciousness of the experience, this can only happen via the individual. That is, “the communal experiences coalesce out of the individual experiential unities and on account of them” (143). Now while not every experience I have as an individual may contribute to the unity of experiences of a particular community, those experiences that I do have as a member of the community can contribute to an overall experiential current of the community. And so Stein concludes that while there is in fact such a thing as a communal experience it always and necessarily must be rooted in the individual experience (144).

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119 This is due to (at least) two factors: 1) as discussed above, I can have experiences as a private individual that have nothing to do with my membership in this community; 2) I can belong to more than one community and an experience I have as member of one community can have nothing to do with my experiences in another community. However, and to complicate matters, as we will see below while my private experience or experience in a different community may not belong to the experiential current of this particular community, all my experiences (whether private or communal) shape the life of the communities of which I am a member. As we will see, there is a reciprocal push and pull between the individual and the community. The individual shapes the community, but the community also shapes the individual.
Before we turn to look at the ontic structure of the community itself, we offer a brief concluding comment on the difference between the experience of empathy and the communal experience. It should be clear that the communal experience is not an experience of empathy. In our example of the loss of the leader, the grief I feel over this loss is my primordial experience colored by the fact that I am also a member of the community. Whereas, if I was engaging in an act of empathy, I would be having a non-primordial experience of the other person’s grief. We recall the difference between the communal “core sense” of the experience available to all the members that is clothed in the “particular sheath” of the individual experience as a member of the community. But there is always also the purely private and individual level of an experience. The leader of the army unit was my best friend, was your cousin, was her classmate in college, etc. At this private level the experience “affects me like no other human being” and the content of this experience “accrues to my experience and only to mine” (136). It is at this level or with this type of private experience that both empathy and sympathy are possible (136). The communal experience clearly does not have the nature of the empathic act. However, this does not mean that empathy does not play an important role in communal life. Indeed, without empathy there could be no such thing as a community. Remembering that the distinctive mark of the community is how its members face each other as subjects not objects, that is as human persons, we also remember that this encounter at the level of human personhood is only made possible through the act of empathy. Such empathic givenness “is a presupposition for the life of the community” (133 & 148). We can now turn to the nature of communal life itself.

Stein offers a compact summary of the community. She claims that:
Any community unites a plurality of subjects within itself, and is itself a carrier of one life that realizes itself by means of those subjects. Furthermore, we know that the community is provided with a lifepower out of which its experiencing is fed; and that the individuals make contributions to this power source and are fed out of it, but need not live with all the power standing at their disposal as members of the community. A sense-bound world unfolds for the community within its experiencing. Again, [it is] the individuals whose mental doing is constitutive for the world of the community; but then again, not everything that belongs to their individual world gets into the community’s world as well (197).

Let us unpack the key elements of this passage.

As we know a community “encompasses a plurality if individual egos” (134). It is composed of individual persons who have freely united themselves. Through this self-constituting unity the community comes into being. It continues to exist, or lives out its being, through the lives of the individuals who have united themselves into this community. Furthermore, we see that “there exists for the members of the community a common power reserve that they help to build up and on which they feed” (189, emphasis mine). This is the “lifepower” of the community. It ultimately comes from the individuals themselves who contribute their life and energy to the thriving of the community (203). On the other hand, with such a plurality of individual contributions, a “reserve of power” (so to speak) can thus be made available from which individual members can draw when their own power is weak (189). This lifepower will have an ebb and flow depending on how much the individual members are contributing to the life of the community, especially as most individuals are members of multiple communities who are all claiming their attention, energy, and participation (203). An individual’s membership in multiple communities can have either a positive or negative effect on these communities. If community A is demanding more of my time and attention than community B, I will not contribute as much to the life of community B and may even become a drag on its
lifepower. However, if my experiences in community A are invigorating then I might transfer this boost of power I received from community A into community B. In this way an individual can act as a “mediator” between the two communities and communities can experience influence from other communities outside of themselves (207). Thus we see that individual participation in the community life can wax and wane. At times one may be an active member of the community, contributing much to its lifepower. At other times, one may be rather inactive and dissociated from the communal experience. “Thus, the level of lifepower of a community depends upon these two factors: the lifepower that its components can draw upon, and the amount of the power at their disposal that they devote to the community” (205-206). In this way there is a push and pull between the life of the individual and the life of the community in how each can influence one another.

The values and attitudes of a community’s individual members are also important constitutive factors to the life of the community. We have already seen how values and attitudes, “a stance on value” (213), are constitutive of the individual person. If this is so at the individual level, it should also be true at the communal level made up of a plurality of individuals. What individual members value will have a direct impact on the form and development of the community. This is particularly true when it is the individual members’ value of and attitudes toward the community itself and the individual members that comprise it.

First of all it must be said that the solidarity of individuals, which becomes visible in the influence of the attitudes of one upon the life of the others, is formative of community in the highest degree. To put it more precisely: Where the individuals are “open” to one another, where the attitudes of one don’t bounce off of the other but rather penetrate him and deploy their efficacy, there a communal life subsists, there the two are members of one whole; and without such a reciprocal relationship community isn’t possible (214, emphasis original).
It is crucially important to the formation of communal life that its members be open to one another (268). Through this openness to one another the members of the community allow themselves to “be affected” by the personal distinctiveness of another (265). This of course is rooted in the act of empathy and results in the solidarity of the individuals. Stein states that “the possibility of community formation reaches just as far as the zone of reciprocal understanding by individuals” (206). The individuals must not only be open to each other as individuals but also as members of the community. That is, the members must value one another as individuals but must also value the community itself and as such. The formation not only of communal life but also of “the community character depends upon how deeply community is anchored in the individual and how the individual takes a stance toward community” (272). Stein even goes so far as to posit a “soul” of the community:

Here’s what I think. Wherever individuals really are grown together with their “innermost” [stuff], with their soul, you’ve absolutely got to talk about a soul of community that forms them as well (273).

In addition to this highly important issue of the community members’ depth of openness and relatedness to one another, Stein also mentions the “world of values”. These include aesthetic, ethical, religious, and personal values (219). “All these values are motives, direction-giving factors for the behavior of the community; but it is a self-evident presupposition that these values influence the community only if they are lived and if a receptivity for them exists”.\(^{120}\) Ultimately, as the realm of values is the rightful element of the individual person, so it is the responsibility of individual members to bring

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\(^{120}\) Baseheart, "Edith Stein's Philosophy of Community", 166-167.
an appreciation for values to the community. However it is interesting to note that some members, due to their unique individuality, are more well-equipped to fulfill this task than others. Stein comments upon this value-enriching responsibility:

> It suffices us to see that single individuals can serve a community as organs making the community capable of contact with the world of values, like the open eye with which he community peers into the world. But while they can function as organs of the community, it’s required that not only they themselves but also the community – and accordingly, other members of the community – be susceptible, and aside from that, that they be living as members of the community (221, emphasis original).

There are numerous other elements of the community as elaborated by Stein in her treatise, but we do not wish to treat them here. We have touched upon the essential elements of Stein’s conception of the community. We reiterate here that the community is a unity of a plurality of persons who live a life of mutuality in which the individual members relate to one another as subject to subject (made possible by empathy). In their reciprocal influence on one another, the members of the community are in solidarity with one another. The freedom of the individuals within the community is a key factor as are individual attitudes and values. In what can be seen as a stance against Husserl, Stein states: “Instead of monadic closure, community demands open and naïve commitments: not separated living but common living, fed from common sources and stirred by common motives” (215). Stein also notes that communities can take several different forms. She describes the “highest” form of community as:

> the union of purely free persons who are united with their innermost ‘personal’ life, or the life of a soul, and each of whom feels responsible for himself or herself and for the community (278).

It is of interest that Stein claims that such perfection of community “cannot be achieved by any earthly community” (285). This inability to achieve its complete form is based on
the inclination of every “genuine community” to continually “reach out beyond
themselves toward a complete unification” that cannot be reached in this earthly life
(285). “Consequently, an inner incompleteness clings to every earthly community, and an
inclination beyond itself” (285-286).

The life of the community is not the sole beneficiary of this intersubjective unity.
Individual persons coming together in reciprocal unity of life create the community and
these individual members are the lifeblood of the community, creating and maintaining
its lifeforce. However, these same individual members are also strengthened by the
community and develop as persons as a consequence of their membership in the
community. As we saw in our section on the structure of the individual person above,
what shapes one as an individual person owes a great deal to one’s encounter with other
persons. What we see now is that while this can and does take place on an individual
level, it can also happen at a communal level. Ultimately, the relationship between the
community and its individual members is a reciprocal one.

We’ve found linkages of various kinds between individual and community. The
character of the community turns out to be dependent upon the individual
distinctiveness of its members, and furthermore upon their typical composition. On
the other hand, we find the individual determined in his character by the
community, as a representative of a type in a new sense that isn’t intelligible apart
from communal life These relationships of reciprocal founding refer back to an
original genesis (264, emphasis mine).

In the end there is a note of mystery with the community just as there is with the
individual person, indeed, because there is an element of mystery in the human person.

Stein concludes her remarks on the community leaving the reader in a state curiosity.

Thus, all social life and all social modes finally refer back to the core of the
person, which is beyond the reach of all the influences of reciprocal
communication (294, emphasis mine).
**The Eternal God – The Person par excellence**

Towards the end of her life, Stein’s texts began to take on a more theological character as she took to treating the topic of God and the human-divine relationship. While some of her texts are purely theological in nature, others reveal more of a synthesis of philosophy and her faith-based views. We find Stein taking philosophy and pushing it “to the limits of natural knowledge; then the light of faith illuminates and enhances her thought”. In this way some researchers offer that she has reversed Augustine and Anselm’s famous procedure of “faith seeking understanding”. We will here consider Stein’s reflections on God as found in her more philosophical texts than in her more purely religious writings in keeping with the tenor of this dissertation. Specifically we will look at the analyses found in *Potency and Act* and *Finite and Eternal Being*.

We mentioned toward the beginning of this chapter that *Potency and Act* and *Finite and Eternal Being* belong to a trio of texts in which Stein attempted to synthesize the phenomenological method with the writings of Thomas Aquinas. As such, the reflections on God contained in these texts keeps to the traditional scholastic view of God

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121 See for example, Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. Josephine Koeppel (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002). It is to be noted that in this posthumously published text, a phenomenological flavor is still evident. Stein never fully removed the influence of her philosophical training even in her most religious writings.

122 See for example, *Potency and Act* and *Finite and Eternal Being*.


124 Ibid.
as pure being, pure act, the ground and cause of all being, etc. especially as found in
Aquinas’ famous *Five Ways*. What seems to be unique in Stein is how she uses the
phenomenological method not so much to prove God’s existence, but rather to show that
these ways of understanding God arise out of our human experience and, as such, are
valid for us.\(^{125}\) Another way in which her analyses are unique is in her treatment of God
as person, as *the Person par excellence*. Indeed, for Stein, we can only designate humans
as persons in an analogous way to the personhood of God.

God alone possesses personhood as selfsufficiency in the unrestricted sense of
*aseitas* [being from oneself]. But there is a genuine analogy between the infinite
person and created spiritual subjects that justifies our speaking of them, too, as
persons.\(^{126}\)

In *Finite and Eternal Being* Stein draws out this analogy between the divine and human
person further in a comparison between God’s name as given in the Hebrew Scriptures,
“I am who I am”,\(^ {127}\) and the human ability to say “I am”.\(^ {128}\) For Stein “only a person can
say I”.\(^ {129}\) Thus God’s proclamation of the divine name, “I am who I am”, reveals God to
be a person, or rather reveals the human ability to be a person due to the fact that God,
from whom humans receive their being, meaning, and purpose, is a person, *the Eternal
Person*. We recall that in the text preceding *Finite and Eternal Being, Potency and Act*,
Stein links the manifestation of human personhood to the reception of a proper name: “As

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 117.


\(^{127}\) Exodus 3:14


\(^{129}\) Baseheart, Person in the World, 121.
something absolutely unique, it [human individuality as person] cannot be brought under general concepts; at most it can be denoted by a proper name. “Foreshadowing what will come in *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein finds the proper name designating a human person tied to the ability to call oneself “I”. “I am what I am – or I am with what I am – for myself (and also for others) in a certain way.” Thus, for Stein:

*In the words *I am* (*Ich bin*; *sum*)… is the very first meaning of the analogy of being. It is only because all finite being has its archetype in the *Divine I* that the phrase *I am* has a universal meaning.*

Stein argues that this relationship between the Eternal Person and the finite, a relationship in which being, form, and meaning are imparted to the finite from the Eternal, is founded upon the “image and likeness relationship” between God and God’s creatures as established in the Hebrew Scriptures.

This image and likeness relationship must be assumed for all finite existents, the timeless as well as the temporal. Inasmuch as the “archetype” is the first and the “images” are derivatives which received the meaning of their existence from their image and likeness relationship, all finite existents must be regarded as having been placed into their particular being by that simple, archetypal first, and in this sense we call them *created*.

For Stein, further revealing her Christian perspective, this image-likeness relationship is made knowable to us through the divine Logos, the Eternal Word through whom creation comes into existence and receives both its form and its meaning.

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131 Ibid.

132 Baseheart, *Person in the World*, 121, italicized in the original.

133 Genesis 1:26-27

134 Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 119, first emphasis mine, additional emphases original.
The Logos occupies a peculiar intermediate position. It shows, as it were, a double countenance, the one mirroring the one and simple divine nature, the other mirroring the manifold of finite existents. The Logos is the divine nature (as object of divine knowledge), and it is the manifold of meaningful existence of created things as encompassed by the divine intellect and as reflecting the divine nature in images and likenesses.

We now can see a way which may lead us to an understanding of the twofold visible revelation of the Logos: In the incarnate Word (the God-Man) and in the created universe. And one further step allows us to grasp the idea of the inseparable oneness of the Logos become flesh and the Logos “become world” in the unity of head and body – one Christ.\footnote{Ibid, emphasis original.}

We will return to this image-likeness relationship between God and creation, specifically in respect to how creation images the Eternal Being. However, first we must consider another aspect of the divine being which Stein found crucial for the understanding of the human person, God’s triune nature.\footnote{Here Stein is clearly in the realm of Christian theology and not philosophy.}

Stein bases her understanding of the triune nature of God in another claim about God’s being, love. “God is love”.\footnote{1 John 4:8} However, love necessarily implies relationship. Obviously one can love oneself. In Potency and Act Stein makes a passing comment on how God’s being is “blessed self-love”.\footnote{Stein, \textit{Potency and Act}, 172.} However, in Finite and Eternal Being the highest form of love is love for the other. In the divine Person we find the fullness and the archetypal source of this love relationship.

[Love] is giving of the self to a thou, and in its perfection it is a being-one that is founded on mutual self-giving. And because God is love, divine being must be the being-one of a plurality of persons, and the divine name “I am” is thus equivalent

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\footnote{135}{Ibid, emphasis original.}
\footnote{136}{Here Stein is clearly in the realm of Christian theology and not philosophy.}
\footnote{137}{1 John 4:8}
\footnote{138}{Stein, \textit{Potency and Act}, 172.}
to an “I give myself wholly to a Thou,” and “I am one with a Thou,” and therefore also with a “We are”.¹³⁹

In traditional Christian doctrine, the “we” of God is the Father, the Son (the incarnate Word), and the Spirit. Although humanity can never achieve the pure oneness of the divine plurality of being (where the members yet remains distinct individuals), yet we are called to image God and, by virtue of being created by God, we are also capable of imaging God through love.

Becoming one in love entails a spiritual receiving-into-oneself of the beloved being and makes the one who loves an image of the beloved. And the fruit of such a union bears the stamp of a community of essence or nature.¹⁴⁰

For Stein, “every communion and community of finite persons has its primordial paradigm in the Divine Trinity,” although it is ultimately an incomplete and imperfect image.¹⁴¹ We discussed above how no earthly community can ever achieve completion or perfection. We see now why, for Stein, this is in fact true. For the perfection of community is found in the Triune God alone. Humans are called to and can image this plurality of Persons, however it is ultimately but an image.

It is interesting to note that, just as we found with empathy, Stein does not exclude the non-human world in her analysis of imaging the divine. Although she does find the more perfect image of God in humankind (revealed in the ability of humans to call themselves “I”, thus manifesting one’s personhood), yet all of creation bears a


¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 465-466, emphasis original.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 466.
certain “image character” of the divine being.\textsuperscript{142} This image-bearing quality of all creation is due to its very createdness. God, the archetypal being, who poured forth from the divine self in the creative act, imparted a portion of the divine image onto all of creation. “[E]verything has its primordial paradigm in the simple divine essence, and the image may be more proximate or more remote”.\textsuperscript{143} Stein would argue that humanity has the most proximate image of God, but it is in all of creation that God’s image can be found.

According to Stein, part of humanity’s ability to bear a true “\textit{God-likeness}”\textsuperscript{144} is due to the human soul. We recall from \textit{Potency and Act} how the human person is affected in their greatest depth at the level of the soul and what affects one to the greatest degree is other persons.\textsuperscript{145} Now we see that it is at the level of the soul that the human person is also able to receive the divine Person in love and participate in the life of the Eternal Being.

To say that the soul receives God means rather that it opens itself and gives itself freely to him to bring about a union that is possible only between spiritual persons. It is a union of \textit{love}: God is love, and the participation in divine being which is granted in this union must be a participation in divine love.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 464. She states (emphasis mine): “It is our conviction that a certain image character can be found and demonstrated \textit{in the entire created universe}.”

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, italicized in the original.

\textsuperscript{145} Stein, \textit{Potency and Act}, 179 and 391.

\textsuperscript{146} Stein, \textit{Finite and Eternal Being}, 505, emphasis original.
Stein upholds that this union with God is the soul’s ultimate vocation for the soul is the very “abode of God”. Thus we find that not only does the human person (along with all of creation) find its source in the divine Person, the goal of all human life is also to be found with the divine Person. “The vocation to union with God is a vocation to eternal life”. And ultimately, it was God’s “prerogative” to create the human soul with this capacity to both receive and image the divine being for God so desired to communicate in this way with God’s own creation.

God is the plenitude of love. Created spirits, however, are incapable of receiving into themselves and of sharing to the fullest extent the total plenitude of divine love. Their share in divine love is rather determined by the measure of their being, and this implies not only a “so much”, but also a “thus”. In other words, love always bears the stamp of personal individuality. And this explains in turn why God may have chosen to create for himself a special abode in each human soul, so that the plenitude of divine love might find in the manifold of differently constituted souls a wider range for its self-communication.

And so we see the human individual is a relational person due to his or her imaging of the divine Person who is open to relationship with all of creation.

Conclusion – Summarizing the Intersubjective Person

We conclude this chapter with six theses that can be found to originate in Stein’s dissertation on empathy and to which she remained committed throughout the remainder of her life’s works. First, the ‘I’ or self “is partially constituted in and through

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147 Ibid., 504.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid., 506.

150 We take these points from MacIntyre, 135-137.
relationships with others in which each of those others is also recognized as an ‘I’’. The enactment of myself as a human person is partially dependent upon my encountering others not an objects for me to comprehend but as unique individuals in their own right who are, ultimately, inaccessible to my objectifying comprehension. Second, “my self-knowledge derives in part from others and from what they know of me from their external standpoints”. I am, in part, given to myself by others who perceive me or encounter me through their own acts of empathy. This is Stein’s “reiterated empathy” that is constitutive of the human person. Points three and four are closely related. Third, “what we become, what qualities we come to possess, aesthetically, morally, intellectually, is in key part a matter of our responsiveness to our social and natural environment”. Fourth, “the different types of social relationship into which we enter make a significant difference to the kind of human being we become”. These two points both indicate the necessity of openness and receptivity in the nature of the person. Rather than Husserl’s monadic transcendental subjectivity, Stein emphasizes the transcendence of the human person who is open to and receptive of the external world of things and other persons. As was said before, a “windowless monad” is not a person. Fifth, “the character both of our qualities and of our social relationships is necessarily marked to greater or lesser degree by our individuality”. While Stein’s person is clearly a relational being, he or she is also a unique and unrepeatable individual. This individuality is determined both from within from the personal core and from without in our encounter with and responses to the external world beyond us. And sixth, “our judgments of value and the attitudes and actions which issue from or presuppose those judgments are intelligible only in terms of the account of individuals and their social relationships” as
sketched out by Stein. Ultimately for Stein the human person is structured by the two poles of individuality, especially as found in the personal core, and relationality, with the world but most especially with other people. The person is revealed, in part, by the values they hold (the stance one chooses to take toward attitudes) which manifest their unique responses to the world around them, especially other persons. In our next chapter we will argue that Stein’s dual insistence on human individuality and one’s relationships with other persons offers a means of dialogue between her philosophical analysis of the human person and the ethically enacted human personhood of Emmanuel Levinas.
CHAPTER FOUR
Levinas and Stein in Dialogue:
Stein’s Empathy as a Real-Time Analogue for Levinas’ Ethical Relationship

Introduction

The question we will address in this chapter is that of the accessibility of Levinas’ diachronic transcendental thought to actual human life as it is lived in the synchronous time of the present. That is, can Levinas’ ethical conception of the human other and the human self be applied to the flesh and blood people we encounter in our daily lives, even to our very selves? Can the ethical encounter between the pleading and commanding face of the other and the subjected and substituted self actually take place in the “real time” of history? And if such a relation can in fact be enacted, what exactly would it look like? How would we recognize it while being mindful of Levinas’ insistence that such a relation does not give itself to be “known” or “seen”? This question of the accessibility of Levinas’ thought is one that has concerned numerous philosophers and theologians.1 We recall the claim quoted at the end of chapter two that “it [the “reorientation of thinking” enacted by Levinas’ ethical philosophy] matters not at all unless it impacts on our

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1 See for example, Marie L. Baird, On the Side of the Angels: Ethics and Post-Holocaust Spirituality (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 84. The author is concerned, in part, with the “complex and perhaps vexed question of the availability of Levinas’s ethics to empirical experience within the ‘real time’ of history”. See also Jeffrey Bloechl, "Ethics as First Philosophy and Religion," in The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 137. Here the author asks “how am I to live by that insight [of anarchical ethical responsibility to and for the other]?” (emphasis mine).
approach to concrete situations so that we come to see them as ethical”.

It would seem that, if Levinas’ thought is not applicable to our “real” lives, then its worth becomes questionable at best. To put it in a more positive way, one could argue that the great interest Levinas’ thought has invoked within philosophical and theological communities is due, in part, to the fact that it does indeed resonate with our daily lives of blood and sweat and toil. One can envision the brave soul who dares to plunge into Levinas’ dense writings looking up and wondering: “Yes this is all very nice to say, but is it real? Is it true?” Something about Levinas’ prose gives us pause precisely, I believe, because it does strike us as deeply “real” or “true”. It strikes us as (to offer a pastiche upon a famous Levinasian idiom) a deeper reality more true still than any other reality. It is a resonance that freezes us in our tracks and knocks the wind right out of us and, if we allow it, refuses to let us continue living our lives as we have always done but instead calls us to a truer, more “authentic” enactment of ourselves. And so the question is not

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2 Robert Bernasconi, "What is the question to which 'substitution' is the answer?,” in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 250, emphasis mine.

3 See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy,” in The Levinas Reader, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 174-5, emphasis mine: “But in the idea of the Infinite there is described a passivity more passive still than any passivity…”

4 See Bloechl, "Ethics as First Philosophy and Religion," 140. Here he speaks of Levinas’ “ethics of the Other” as, “in part, an ethics of authenticity” for “the trauma [of encountering the face of the other] calls me (violently) back to a proper identity determined before and outside of being, so that the effort to take up the responsibility depicted there can also be understood as an effort to remain true to my self” (emphasis mine). This reflects Levinas’ view that the ethical response most truly enacts the unique and irreplaceable subjectivity of the self which is more “authentic” than Heidegger’s self-concerned Dasein whose authenticity consists in pulling away from others. See chapter one for a fuller treatment of this issue.
so much if Levinas’ thought is accessible to real time and real lives, but rather: How does the application take place? What could it look like?

As has been hinted at in previous chapters, it will be argued here that the event of empathy as understood by Edith Stein offers a real time analogue to Levinas’ ethical encounter. What is more, the self and the other person as constituted in this empathetic act can also be seen as analogous to Levinas’ ethical subject and the diachronous other. Additionally, it will be argued that Stein’s concept of the human person as rooted in the empathetic encounter manifests, albeit indirectly, the human-divine encounter and relationship as conceived by Levinas. Understanding the human-divine encounter from the perspective of the ethical relationship with the other person, made possible by the act of empathy, helps to avoid the idolatrous conceptions of God for which Levinas so often criticized the “onto-theological” traditions of the West.

Upon first glance, a fruitful dialogue between Edith Stein and Emmanuel Levinas might appear unlikely. In certain ways the content of their thought seems to be fundamentally opposed to one another. With her final, posthumously published text entitled *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being,* Stein’s writings clearly remain in the realm of ontology, a realm from which we know Levinas announced the need to flee as early as 1935. What is more, Stein’s reflections on God certainly embody the very kind of “onto-theology” which Levinas finds distasteful and to be avoided:


But to hear a God *not contaminated by Being* is a human possibility no less important and no less precarious than to bring Being out of the oblivion in which it is said to have fallen in metaphysics and in onto-theology.\(^7\)

Despite this apparent opposition, Levinas and Stein can be fruitful dialogue partners. Not only can Stein’s ontological stance be “unsaid”, but Levinas’ ethical subjectivity can gain practical clarification from Stein’s empathic encounter between human persons. Indeed, there are certain similarities between Levinas and Stein that can begin a conversation between their thought. As we know, both Stein and Levinas were students of Husserl.\(^8\)

Both also ultimately found themselves dissatisfied with Husserlian phenomenology and ventured off on their own paths, although never dismissing their continued debt to Husserl. Stein and Levinas focused their writings on the conception of the human person

\(^7\) Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), xlviii, emphasis mine. Please refer to chapter three of this dissertation, the section entitled *The Eternal God – The Person par excellence*, for a presentation of Stein’s highly ontological writings about God especially as found in her final text, *Finite and Eternal Being*.

\(^8\) Obviously Stein and Levinas had very different relationships with Husserl. We remind the reader that Stein met Husserl at a much earlier phase of his work on phenomenology than Levinas and served as one of his assistants. It is apparent from Stein’s personal writings the very close relationship that she had with "the Master". See for example her autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family: 1891-1916*, trans. Josephine Koeppel (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1986); and her collected correspondence in *Self-Portrait in Letters: 1916-1942*, trans. Josephine Koeppel (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1993). Levinas, on the other hand, attended the very last class taught by Husserl before his retirement and many have argued that his approach to phenomenology is, in certain ways, particularly Heideggerian. Rudolf Bernet makes a note of this influence on Levinas in his article "Levinas's Critique of Husserl," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Despite these differences and certainly many others, it is yet an interesting point of contact between Levinas and Stein that both can trace the beginnings of their own philosophical careers to the field of phenomenology and both note a continued debt to Husserl throughout their work. See chapters one and three of this dissertation for more on the relationships Levinas and Stein had to Husserl and his phenomenological method.
and particularly emphasized the intersubjective enactment of human personhood. While the culmination of each one’s thought shows a divergence that may be insurmountable, it will be argued here that Stein’s concept of empathy provides a particularly potent point of possible contact with Levinas’ thought which allows the “translation” of Levinas’ diachronous, non-intentional ethical “sayings” into the realm of everyday life where “the third” demands justice for him or herself.⁹ Levinas admits that the ethical “saying” of the encounter between the self and the other inevitably modulates into “the said” of justice and law: “It is the necessary interruption of the Infinite being fixed in structures, community, and totality.”¹⁰ How this can happen without total amnesia for the anarchic “saying” of ethics can be found in Stein’s empathetic act. Here the alterity of the other is not only maintained but helps to shape the self as a unique and irreplaceable human person just as Levinas’ ethical encounter enacts the subjectivity of the self. Stein’s concept of empathy can also help to clarify how Levinas envisions the encounter between the human subject and the divine as a turn away from God and toward the other in ethical election and obedience. However, before we venture into this communication between Levinas and Stein, a few words must first be said (and most likely then unsaid!) about this “necessary interruption of the Infinite”, this unavoidable “betrayal”¹¹ of the otherwise than being of ethical subjectivity and encounter that issues in the time of justice

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⁹ See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 153-162. In this section Levinas discusses how the entrance of the third party disrupts the ethical dyad of "the saying", causing the birth of consciousness and thus of justice which is the thematized, concretized "said" of the ethical "saying". This will be discussed further below.

¹⁰ Ibid., 160, emphasis mine.

¹¹ See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 6-7.
and, most scandalously, the return of being and ontology. We also must take another look at Stein’s concept of empathy, looking more deeply or otherwise to show how it actually breaks away from a strict ontological dependence on being and the primacy of the solipsistic ego. In this way, the first part of this chapter will “set the stage”, preparing us for the dialogue between Levinas and Stein that will take place in the second part of this chapter.

Part I – Preparation

From the Saying to the Said – Ontology ‘Otherwise’?

We recall from our earlier chapter12 how Levinas, in his attempt to show the distinction between the self and the other, that is, to maintain the true alterity of the other and keep it from being subsumed by the all-encompassing totality of the conceptualizing ego, insists that the “time” of the other is quite different from that of the same. In Totality and Infinity the emphasis is more on the future as non-conceptual mystery whereas Otherwise than Being speaks of a diachronic and immemorial past.13 Whether future or past, and perhaps it is actually both, the other does not present him or herself under the bald light of the present in which consciousness and intentionality endlessly function. Another way Levinas discusses this situation is, as we know, through the distinction of the saying and the said. The diachronous time of the other is that of the saying whereas

12 See chapter two of this dissertation.

13 See for example Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 117. Here he speaks of how in Desire (which is ultimately desire for the other) there is "an unchartered future before me". See also Otherwise than Being, 88, where he speaks of the ethical command as coming from an "immemorial past".
the synchronous present of the intentional ego is that of the thematized and conceptual said. However, while Levinas insists on this distinction and separation, he also acknowledges, even insists, that diachronous time and synchronous time, that the saying and the said, have a necessary and unavoidable relationship. Levinas states:

The otherwise than being is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order to thus extract the otherwise than being from the said in which it already comes to signify but a being otherwise. Does the beyond being which philosophy states, and states by reason of the very transcendence of the beyond, fall unavoidably into the forms of the ancillary statement?.... Everything shows itself at the price of this betrayal, even the unsayable. In this betrayal the indiscretion with regard to the unsayable, which is probably the very task of philosophy, becomes possible.¹⁴

What Levinas seems to be implying is that ontological language is both inadequate to the ethical thought we think yet inescapable because we are thinking it! Such conceptual thought is the very realm of philosophy whose task it is to reflect upon the issues of human life. Conceptual language must be used when we speak (or write) about the ethical relationship, the other, and the responsible self enacted through the encounter with the other because, quite simply, when we speak about something we are necessarily in the conceptual realm of ontology. This about, as we briefly recall from chapter two, is the difference between the saying and the said. We know for Levinas that the ethical relationship between the self and the other, who is infinitely other – an enigma – is language.¹⁵ I am not called to speak about the other but to speak to and for the other, on the other’s behalf. This infinite response that is the ethical relationship, thus language, is the saying. The said is the conceptualization and thematization of the ego pronouncing

¹⁴ Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 7, italicized in the original except “already comes to signify” and the last two sentences which are my emphasis.

¹⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 39.
its judgments upon reality as captured within its intentional grasp, giving meaning to that which is. “Consciousness confers meaning… in taking the given, whether immanent or transcendent, ‘as this’ or ‘as that.’ To become conscious of is to ‘take as…’” The said is speaking about the other, conceptualizing and thematizing him or her. Now while it is true that “[t]he other is not first an object of understanding and then an interlocutor” and that “[t]o understand a person is already to speak to him”, we yet continue to speak about the other and our relationship to him or her. We cannot seem to help ourselves! The saying becomes a said, inadequate as it is. And so while Levinas claims that his task is “to conceive of the possibility of a break out of essence,” “to conceive the otherwise than being”, he also “recognizes that the language of theory is necessarily and unavoidably ontological”. Levinas admits of his own work that:

The very discussion which we are at this moment elaborating about signification, diachrony and the transcendence of the approach beyond being, a discussion that means to be philosophy, is a thematizing, a synchronizing of terms, a recourse to systematic language, a constant use of the verb being, a bringing back into the bosom of being all signification allegedly conceived beyond being …. The discussion thus remains ontological, as though the comprehension of being ordered all thought and thinking itself.

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18 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 8.


20 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 155, emphasis mine.
However, he is quick to remind his readers that:

our whole purpose was to ask if subjectivity, despite its foreignness to the said, is not stated by an abuse of language through which in the indiscretion of the said everything is shown. Everything is shown by indeed betraying its meaning, but philosophy is called upon to reduce that betrayal, by an abuse that justifies proximity itself in which the Infinite comes to pass.\(^{21}\)

So while Levinas believes, and I am in agreement with him, that the ethical relationship, the other, ethical subjectivity, and all the other notions entailed therein (ie. signification, proximity, substitution, hostage, etc.) do in fact escape the realm of being and ontology, it is philosophy’s task to reflect upon this and such a reflection cannot help but use the language of ontology. Such a discussion is ontological by nature because it is something said, written down, codified, thematized – unavoidably so. Levinas agrees that “there must be thematization, thought, history, and inscription,” but unless this ontologizing devolve into violence and murder “being must be understood on the basis of being’s other”.\(^{22}\) And so we are in a state of inescapable and inevitable tension – between the saying and the said, between the otherwise than being and being otherwise. How exactly does this tension happen? Why is it inevitable? Levinas tells us:

If proximity ordered to me only the other alone, there would have not been any problem... A question would not have been born, nor consciousness, nor-self-consciousness. The responsibility for the other is an immediacy antecedent to questions, it is proximity. It is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters.\(^{23}\)

And what does this third party do?

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 156, emphasis mine.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 16, emphasis original.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 157, emphasis mine.
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.24

The entrance of the third party, of all the other others who make up humanity, functions as the “hinge” that allows, indeed requires, the translation from the saying to the said. Again we recall from our previous chapter that the ethical dyad of the self and the other is continually interrupted by the entrance of the third party who places limits and exceptions upon the ethical responsibility of the self: “my responsibility for all can and has to manifest itself also in limiting itself”.25 This limitation is necessary for, suddenly, I am not only called to answer to and for the other, but also for the other other, the third, and indeed also for the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and so on! My ethical responsibility is limited, paradoxically, only by way of an infinite expansion to care for all humanity. But, as Levinas himself admits, this all-encompassing responsibility is impossible without “the necessary interruption of the Infinite being fixed in structures, community, and totality”.26 Thus in a paradoxical way, “[o]nly the possibility of the suspension of the ethical, then, is what makes the ethical possible,” that is, “this relation finds the ‘condition of its possibility’ in what always threatens to make it impossible”.27

The entrance of the third party disrupts, limits, and threatens the very possibility of the

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 128.
26 Ibid., 160.
ethical encounter between the self and the other. However this entrance is inescapable and unavoidable for “we are in the world”.

The diachronous time of the other is forever interrupted, is always already disturbed, by the other who pulls the self and the other into the synchronous time of the present, justice, and history.

Now we must remember that all these discussions of “time” and “entrances” are never chronological. Indeed, the encounter with the other is never only an encounter with the other but always already an encounter with the third party as well. “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice.” The third party is “present at the [very] encounter” of the self and the other. In other words, the encounter with the third party is just as “immediate” as is the encounter with the other. We noted above how for Levinas the ethical encounter is language, is the saying; but here we see that language is also justice, the said. How it can be both is due to the coming of the third party (who “brings” with him or her the need for consciousness and justice) who has always already arrived in the very encounter between the self and the other. Now we realize what is the answer to the question what do I have to do with justice? Everything! “Ethics cannot be first philosophy without also committing itself to inspiring a just and effective society.”


29 Ibid., 213, emphasis mine.

30 Ibid.

31 See for example Levinas, "Language and Proximity", 119, emphasis original: "The neighbor is precisely what has a meaning immediately, before one ascribes one to him.... Immediacy is the obsessive proximity of the neighbor...."

32 Bloechl, 144.
And so perhaps ethics and ontology are not as allergic to one another as once thought. Or rather, they are allergic but it is a situation we simply must learn to live with! Indeed, what Levinas has alerted us to is that we are actually not called to make a choice between the otherwise than being and the being otherwise as if we were confronted with an either/or dichotomy. Rather what we have is the both/and of a radical heteronomy. And this is precisely because “we are in the world” – in a world that is the realm of the third party, of the other others where justice, thematization, and the law are essential. We noted in chapter two how, for Levinas, “consciousness is born as the presence of a third party” and “the foundation of consciousness is justice”. Thus:

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.

Otherwise than being and being otherwise – the one implies the other. Quite simply, they cannot do without each other.

But what precisely does this all mean? How exactly does it take place? What are we to do with a situation where ontology is both inadequate and unavoidable, even necessary? How do we allow ontology to again have a voice without it becoming the inescapable and violent rant of a dictator? In his essay entitled “Through Being to Transcendence: Ontology in Levinas”, Adriaan Peperzak agrees with Levinas that the ontological traditions to date have failed to respect and preserve “the face, otherness,

[^33]: Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 160.
[^34]: Ibid., 157.
‘you-ness’, ‘me-ness’, singularity, saying, addressing, [and] greeting”.  

However he also cautions that “this does not necessarily mean that ontology is exhausted or is essentially incapable of taking the neglected phenomena into consideration. It rather means that ontology has not yet properly begun”. Indeed, Peperzak argues that “ethics and ontology are not enemies; they radically coincide”. This is precisely the point we made above about the otherwise than being and being otherwise. What is more, Peperzak states that “to show this [the coincidence of ethics and ontology] in detail seems to [him] the most urgent task of philosophy”. This task is precisely to show the availability of Levinas’ ethical thought that addresses the phenomena which are otherwise than being to the ontological realm of daily life. But it is not simply a return to the egological ontology of the Western philosophical tradition. As we noted above, it is an ontology exposed to the beyond being, “understood on the basis of being’s other”, being otherwise. It is ontology otherwise – a reflection upon who and what the other person is, who I am, what our relationship to one another is, and the world in which we live but rooted in the infinite alterity, the otherwise than being, of the other person whom I encounter face-to-face.

As stated in the introductory comments of this chapter, I believe that it is through

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35 Peperzak, ”Through Being to Transcendence,” 71.

36 Ibid., 71-72, emphasis original.

37 Ibid., 73.

38 Ibid.

39 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 16, emphasis original.

40 I would like to distinguish this notion of ontology otherwise from Gianni Vattimo’s notion of ”weak ontology” which is the idea of ”Being as event characterized by a tendency toward weakening”. While this concept is full of a richness and depth that
the event of empathy, as understood and presented in Edith Stein’s work, that such a “proper beginning” to an ontology otherwise can be found.

**Empathy as Ontology Otherwise?**

The following section of this chapter will present a reading of Stein’s empathetic act through the lens of Levinas’ ethical encounter. However, before we present this analysis it is important to show how Stein’s concept of empathy and her understanding of the human person as rooted therein can be understood as a kind of ontology otherwise. It was shown in the previous section how Levinas’ thought is in fact open to the return of ontology, although this return is to be strictly maintained on the basis of being’s other. Now we must see if Stein’s thought is open to an exposure beyond ontology – if it in fact enacts a form of ontology otherwise. That is, can empathy be “unsaid” and if so, how does this affect her understanding of the human person? Are there, in other words, any Levinasian moments in Stein? The answer is “yes” for, as it will be argued here, empathy enacts an event in which the face of the other is encountered. In this way a door is opened allowing one to understand empathy, which takes place in the “time” of being otherwise, as a form of ontology otherwise – a reflection upon who and what the other person is (and as we will see who and what I am) but rooted in the overwhelming and uncontainable difference of the other person whom I encounter.

deserves much greater treatment than a brief aside, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation. See, for example, Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D’Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 23.

41 Ian Leask, "Edith Stein and Others," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 33, no. 3 (October 2002): 290.
We recall that, for Stein, empathy is the act through which one comes into contact with the experience of foreign subjects and in this way encounters and recognizes the other as a human other or human person.\(^42\) It is “a kind of act of perceiving \textit{sui generis}” in which “the perceiving of foreign subjects and their experience” takes place.\(^43\) It is through empathizing with the other that I am able to both refrain from reducing the other to a mere object of my totalizing intentionality and come to understand the needs of the other so that I may (ethically – as we will see) respond to them. In this way, empathy can be understood as a type of face-to-face encounter that alludes to the ethical encounter found in Levinas’ writings. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. Rejecting other forms of intersubjective encounter where the primacy of place is still given to the intentional \textit{I},\(^44\) Stein reveals how empathy is “an act which is primordial as present experience though non-primordial in content”.\(^45\) That is, “the subject of the empathized experience… is not the subject empathizing, but another”.\(^46\) If I empathize with your experience of hearing good news, that experience never becomes \textit{my} primordial experience but always remains \textit{your} primordial experience. I am always aware of this separation between your \textit{primordial} experience and my \textit{non-primordial} experience of your experience. In this way


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 11 and 1.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 11-35. We recall that Stein makes it a point to not only differentiate her understanding of empathy from that of her contemporaries, but she also insists on how empathy is different from other forms of encountering foreign psychic life such as imitation, association, and analogy.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
“I feel, as it were, led by a primordial [experience] not experienced by me but still there, manifesting itself in my non-primordial experience”.\textsuperscript{47} There is a passivity in the act of empathy and an emphasis on the difference between the one who is empathizing and the other with whom I empathize. When I empathize with the other the other is not considered in relation to me, but rather “I transfer myself into his orientation”.\textsuperscript{48} That is, I situate myself beginning not with myself but with the other, being’s other. What is more, one finds in empathy a certain “deflection” from the other person. When I empathize with the experience of the other the aim of my intentional gaze is, like a beam of light, deflected from the face of the other and directed instead toward the content of his intentional gaze. When I empathize with the other, I cannot look upon his or her face and I certainly do not see the color of his or her eyes.\textsuperscript{49}

Now as I recognize that the experience of the other is not my own I also come to recognize that my “place” in the world is only one among many.\textsuperscript{50} I recognize that there are other human persons and that this world is larger than my own experience. Ian Leask discusses this experience as a “decentering” of the self and an “unsaying” of the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 11, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{49} See Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo}, trans Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 85. Levinas declares: “The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes!” As we know, to see the color of the other’s eyes represents, for Levinas, a reductive thematization of the other through the totalizing gaze of the intentional ego.

\textsuperscript{50} Stein, \textit{On Empathy}, 63: "I must no longer consider my own zero point as the zero point, but as a spatial point among many. By this means, and only by this means, I learn to see my living body as a physical body like others."
solipsistic primacy of the self.\(^{51}\) This decentering or unsaying of the primacy of the self comes into particular focus when, in empathizing with the other, one finds one’s gaze turned back upon the self. As we know, Stein calls this situation “reiterated empathy” where the primordial content of the other’s experience with which I am empathizing is in fact myself.\(^{52}\) It is here that empathy, in an exceptional way, helps to constitute me as a person and reveals the primacy of the other for my self-constitution.

Now there is an awareness of how ‘I’ am only a self because of my position in a communal matrix…; now we can see that “the constitution of the foreign individual was a condition for the full constitution of our own individual”.\(^{53}\)

We recall from above that in the empathetic encounter one situates oneself in relation to the other, submitting oneself to the other’s intentionality or point of view. Stein states: “I represent [the experience of the foreign individual] to myself empathically when I transfer myself into his orientation.”\(^{54}\) When I gaze deep into the black holes of the pupils of the other’s eyes, beyond the color of the irises, I do not see the other but rather see myself, and not as I see myself but rather as the other sees me. I see myself reflected in the eyes of the other who beholds me in a certain way, with a certain understanding. But this is her experience of me and not my own experience of myself. I can never experience

\(^{51}\) Ian Leask, "Edith Stein and Others," 289-290. See also Angela Ales Bello, "From Empathy to Solidarity: Intersubjective Connections According to Edith Stein," in *Analecta Husserliana Vol. XLVIII*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 369. This author also notes how Stein’s notion of empathy does not necessarily privilege “a subjective starting point” but how rather “the starting point might even be alterity”.

\(^{52}\) Stein, *On Empathy*, 63.

\(^{53}\) Leask, 290. He is here quoting Stein. See her *On the Problem of Empathy*, 88.

\(^{54}\) Stein, *On Empathy*, 67, emphasis mine.
myself the way you experience me, at least not primordially. In this way I do not have to allow myself to be reduced to the other’s vision of me. Rather I can take this non-primordial experience and add it to my own primordial experiences that shape me as person. As we will see in the following section, in the dialogue between Stein and Levinas, this shaping of self is particularly significant in the encounter between the self and the other.

In addition to receiving (non-primordially) an experience of the self, it is through empathizing with the other that we come to realize that “[i]f we take the self as the standard, we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality.”55 What is more, “we come to false conclusions if we empathically take our individual characteristic as a basis instead of our type”.56 That is, empathizing with the other enables one to realize that one’s own experience can never be the standard for the other, or any others. In this way Stein shows us how the recognition of one’s own particularity can only happen in light of one’s encounter with the other which happens through the act of empathy. She reveals how my notion of “selfness… is first brought into relief in contrast with another when another is given”.57 I can only perceive and understand myself in relation to the other who is other than me, otherwise than me, being’s other. In this way empathy is a form of ontology otherwise. What is more the encounter with the face of the other requires an endless hermeneutic. The other defies all meanings that I can give to her for the lived experience of the events of her life (with which I empathize) are overwhelmed with an

55 Ibid., 116.

56 Ibid., 87, emphasis mine.

57 Ibid., 38, emphasis mine.
infinity of meanings. Even beyond her death, interpretation never comes to an end. Even beyond my death, other others will never be finished interpreting her life or my interpretation of her life, etc. We recall that Stein, too, is aware of this ineffable aspect of human persons: “What the person is… remains ever mysterious for him and for others, it is never completely disclosed nor disclosable.”\textsuperscript{58} As Levinas has proclaimed, the other is the non-thematizable and incomparable \textit{par excellence}.\textsuperscript{59} The other, as the encountered face, overwhelms my constituting gaze and shocks me with a counter-gaze that reveals me (non-primordially) to myself. The event of the encounter with this other is never ending and in fact encompasses a multitude of encounters, each its own unique event that demands an endless hermeneutic itself and within the infinite “totality” of the encounter. When I empathize with the other the comfortable world of my self-constituting ego is blown away by the encounter with the other whose face calls me to receive (both myself and the other) and respond.

We are now on the very threshold of ethical responsibility. As we know, for Levinas, the face is an ethical phenomenon for it speaks the harrowing words: “Thou shalt not kill”. Stein does not, it is true, note these particular words. However, it is my belief that, in “real time”, empathy is the means by which ethical subjectivity is awakened. And so it is now time to turn to the dialogue between Stein and Levinas, showing how empathy, a form of ontology otherwise, can be a real time analogue for the specifically \textit{ethical} encounter between the self and the other.


\textsuperscript{59} See chapter two of this dissertation.
Part II – Enactment
Empathy as a “bridge” into the time of the 3rd Party

Empathy “Unsaid” – Levinasian moments in Stein

We have shown how empathy can be understood as a form of ontology otherwise. Empathy is the event of the face-to-face. It is a perception and understanding of the world, myself, and the other person “on the basis of being’s other”. The task now is to show, directly, how empathy can function as a real time analogue for Levinas’ ethical encounter of the other and the self. That is, it will be shown how empathy is in fact “unsaid” and thus implicitly contains moments of Levinasian enactment. We know that for Stein, as for Levinas, intersubjectivity is the foundation of human personhood. In the “time” of justice, the realm of “the said”, empathy is the way in which one encounters the other as other, always maintaining the difference between the self and the other. We know that for Levinas, although unavoidable, the translation of “the saying” into “the said”, the translation of infinite ethical responsibility into the realm of justice that makes a “comparison between incomparables”, is a betrayal. And so how can this translation happen without simply descending back into the totalizing violence of intentional thought that Levinas demands we flee? How can one “remember” the immemorial call of the other that bestows on one a responsibility that can never be fulfilled and thus is never-ending? How can one encounter the other person as irreducibly other, incomprehensible mystery to me, and yet whose concrete needs I must discern and for which I must provide? Levinas declares that one must give to the other the very bread from one’s own

60 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 16.
mouth, but what if the other instead needs clean water or a vaccination or an education? Indeed, as one author notes: “Faces rarely implore without also indicating what it is they need.” But how can I refrain from reducing the other to a mere theme of my totalizing gaze and yet “see” their concrete needs so that my “here I am” is more than empty words? Stein’s concept of empathy provides an answer. Levinas himself alludes to the act of empathy when he states that the ethical response of substitution “makes possible the paradoxical psychological possibilities of putting oneself in the place of another”. Let us examine just how it is that empathy, a being otherwise, manifests an intimate link to the ethically enacted subjectivity that is otherwise than being.

“We are in the world”, Levinas declares. Stein too, with her realist approach to phenomenology, desires to remain within this world – here, now. It is a world where many others reside and thus her emphasis on empathy can be seen as performing the very intersubjective reduction that Levinas called for as early as his own dissertation. Indeed, years later, Levinas wrote again about the intersubjective reduction in an important essay

61 While Levinas’ writings may be accused of an abstract density that defies application to real life situations, Levinas is emphatic that this ethical relation can in fact only take place in our everyday, corporeal lives: "To give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one's own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one’s own fasting.... Signification, the-one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood." Otherwise than Being, 56 and 74.

62 Bloechl, 145.

63 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 146.

64 See chapter three of this dissertation, the section entitled Confronting "the Master" – Stein's Realism vs. Husserl's Idealism

entitled “Philosophy and Awakening”. In describing this reduction, Levinas’ words are strikingly similar to what we find in Stein’s writings on empathy. We take the liberty to quote from Levinas at length due to this fascinating consonance. He says of the

intersubjective reduction:

The explication of the meaning that an I other than me has for me – primordial me describes the way in which the Other Person tears me away from my hypostasis, from the here, at the heart of being or the center of the world in which, privileged, and in this sense primordial, I place myself. But the ultimate meaning of my “mineness” is revealed in this tearing away. In conferring the meaning of “I” to the other, and also in my alterity to myself through which I can confer onto the other the meaning of I, the here and the there come to be inverted into one another. It is not the homogenization of space that is thus constituted: I am the one – I so obviously primordial and hegemonic, so identical to myself, within my “own,” ever so comfortably installed in my body, in my hic et nunc – who moves into the background. I see myself from the other’s vantage point; I expose myself to the other person; I have things to account for.66

This experience of being torn away from oneself, removed from the center of one’s own universe, is precisely the de-centering that one experiences in empathizing with the other. For Levinas, it is precisely this de-centering of the self that happens in turning toward the other person that enacts one as a unique individual, that reveals the meaning of my “mineness”. As we have seen, it is through empathy that I am given to myself, enacted as myself, in turning away from myself and toward the other. This is nowhere more clear than in reiterated empathy, when the object of the other’s experience is myself (the other is turned toward, faces, me). The final sentence quoted above – “I see myself from the other’s vantage point; I expose myself to the other person” – is this not reiterated

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66 Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and Awakening," in Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 86, all italics original, save last sentence which is my emphasis.
empathy itself?! Indeed, is not empathy the way in which one performs the
\textit{intersubjective reduction} itself? Let us take a closer look at Stein.

For Stein, the world is necessarily intersubjective. The only way one can
understand this world and even one’s self is through the encounter with other human
persons. Being open to and receptive of others is, for Stein, a “natural” part of what it
means to be a human person.\footnote{Stein, \textit{Potency and Act}, 389 and 399.} Indeed, if we close ourselves off from others not only do
we diminish our understanding of the world around us (perhaps even to the point where it
is but a monadic illusion), we even destroy our capacity to be our own true selves.

By living this way [treating others as mere objects], they not only stay aloof from
others, but they seal off the depths of their very soul, cut themselves off from their
own depths, isolate their depths from the actuality of their life.\footnote{Ibid., 390.}

For Levinas too, it is only when we encounter other human persons and are concerned
with them, with their lives, that we are most truly, “authentically” ourselves.\footnote{See note 4 above.} Now of
course we can and do encounter the other on an objective level. According to Stein it is
only when we \textit{empathize} with the other that we encounter them specifically as a human
person, as one who, as Levinas would say, has a face. For both Stein and Levinas, the
world is necessarily intersubjective but they also both insist on the unique irreplaceability
of human persons. In Levinas’ ethical dyad it is of course the alterity of the other that
makes him or her irreducible to the same. The other is unique to the point where I cannot
even look upon his or her face, cannot even notice the color of his or her eyes.\footnote{See Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 85.}
subject, on the other hand, is elected to a responsibility that can never be passed to
another but rather is uniquely “mine”. Indeed, it is the call/demand of the other that
enacts the individuality of the self.

Through empathy the self and the other remain strictly separate and uniquely
individual as well. This is accomplished, in part, due to Stein’s insistence on the
difference between primordiality and non-primordiality. The experience of empathy is
primordial to me, but the content of this experience (the experience of the other person)
remains always foreign to me, that is, non-primordial. I can empathize with your
experience of dancing, but I remain firmly rooted to my position against the wall, looking
on. What is more, and as we noted above, there is a certain “deflection” from the other
person. I look at you, watching you dance, but my gaze actually never rests upon your
face. When I empathize, the aim of my intentional gaze is, like a beam of light, deflected
from the face of the other and directed instead toward the content of his intentional gaze.
When I empathize with the other I may see the color of her eyes but only briefly for my
gaze is never allowed to rest upon them but is turned immediately upon the object of her
regard. In this way, when one encounters the other person through the event of empathy
the egological hold is shaken loose. The self is de-centered, as we have seen, for the self
is no longer in control of the event but rather finds itself being led by the experience of
the other.71 There is a passivity in the act of empathy that seems at odds with the other
experiences of egological activity we commonly perform. Through this passivity,
deflection, and separation (primordiality vs. non-primordiality), the alterity of the other

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71 See Stein, On Empathy, 11.
person, his or her status as a unique and irreplaceable person, is maintained. Levinas states: “We is not the plural of I.”

Stein concurs: “‘I,’ ‘you,’ and ‘he’ are retained in ‘we.’” That is, even if we do or think or say something together, the individuality of each person is never lost. We are dancing together, but your experience is completely different and irreducible to mine. The other is never reduced to the self and the self never devolves into the other.

Let us reflect a little more on the individuality of the self. We know that Stein is adamant that every person as a person is unique and irreplaceable. Indeed, persons are so unique that who and what they are is inaccessible to the constituting consciousness.

What I am as a spiritual individual is not accessible to rational knowledge at all…. As something absolutely unique, it cannot be brought under general concepts; at most it can be denoted by a proper name.

We find this a particularly striking claim that certainly falls under the notion of ontology otherwise. For Stein, human personhood (to use her words) or human subjectivity (to use Levinas’ words) is unavailable to consciousness. It is not constituted by the consciousness but rather founds it: “We thus arrive at a being of the person that stands behind his conscious life but becomes actual in it and is its basis.”


73 Stein, On Empathy, 18.

74 Stein, Potency and Act, 124-125. See also chapter three of this dissertation.

75 Ibid., 178, emphasis mine. See chapter three of this dissertation for an explanation of what Stein means by “spiritual”.

76 Ibid., 185, emphasis mine.
consciousness has a strong place in Stein’s thought but it is not primary. It is rather based on that which stands behind (or perhaps “before”, as in an immemorial past?...) it. Stein accounts for this unique individuality in part through what she denotes as the “personal core”. The person’s core is “what he is in himself and what perdures as the how varies” and as such this only pertains to spiritual subjects.77 While the existence of the personal core as conceived by Stein is debatable, what she is trying to maintain is the unique irreplaceability of each and every person. However she also insists, as we know, that a person is shaped in and through his or her encounter with other persons. “Dealing with things outside ourselves is an essential part of human living.”78 Thus what stands behind the consciousness is a human person whose individual personhood is enacted through an encounter with that which is external to it – the world and, most importantly, those other human persons therein. Not only does my understanding of the world expand beyond my own limited horizon by coming into contact with the other person’s experiences of the world (experiences that could never and will never be mine); but also through reiterated empathy, I receive an experience of my very self that, while not my own, yet helps to shape me as a person. As Levinas says: “I see myself from the other’s vantage point; I expose myself to the other person”; or as Stein says: through reiterated empathy “I get the ‘image’ the other has of me”.79 When I receive back this image of myself (non-primordially, let us not forget!), it expands my own self-image and thus helps to shape me as person. We are all perhaps familiar with the feeling that certain others know us

77 Ibid., 183, emphasis original.
78 Ibid., 174.
79 Ibid., 88.
better than we know ourselves! Or as Stein comments: “It is possible for another to ‘judge me more accurately’ than I judge myself and give me clarity about myself.” In this way empathy is quite significant in how we shape and understand our very selves.

We… see the significance of knowledge of foreign personality for ‘knowledge of self’ in what has been said [about empathy]…. By empathy with differently composed personal structures we become clear on what we are not, what we are more or less than others.  

The self is de-centered, made aware that it is not the center of the world but rather that there is a great big world out there always beyond the self’s own limited experience. It is a world that can be experienced in such a multitude of ways that it is impossible for one person to ever experience them all. Indeed, it is impossible to experience the fullness of the world in two ways: it is impossible for me to experience in my life all that I have the potential to experience (I cannot be both an actress and an astronaut, there simply isn’t the time; I cannot visit both Paris and Japan this summer, there simply isn’t the money; etc. – we must make choices in our finite lives that close the door irrevocably on other choices); but it is also impossible for me to experience in my life, primordially, what you experience in your life, that is, the multitude of ways in which you experience the world. That is only open to me non-primordially, that is, through empathy. But, while I can never know what sky-diving would be like for me by empathizing with you, I can yet catch a glimpse of an experience that I will never know as my own that can expand my understanding of the world, even (perhaps especially) if it is an experience of myself given back to me.

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80 Stein, On Empathy, 89.

81 Ibid., 116.
However there is another way in which human personhood is enacted in its individuality through encountering what is other than itself, specifically other persons. Part of what, for Stein, reveals the unique individuality of the person are the values one has. How one obtains these values again shows how Stein’s thought can be seen as an ontology otherwise that allows it to function as a “said” for Levinas’ ethical “saying”. We recall that for Stein the person is seen as a psycho-physical-spiritual being.\(^82\) At the physical level causality functions while at the spiritual level we are motivated. While these different levels are inseparable in the human person, it is at the spiritual level and in motivation that Stein finds one’s human individuality or personhood enacted. Motivation is:

\[ \text{the connection that acts get into with one another: not a mere blending like that of simultaneously or sequentially ebbing phases of experiences, or the associative tying together of experiences, but an emerging of the one out of the other, a self fulfilling or being fulfilled of the one on the basis of the other for the sake of the other.} \(^83\) \]

We remember that a key difference between cause and motivation is that according to causality an event is necessary whereas in motivation the “transition from act to act” is optional.\(^84\) Values, according to Stein, belong to the realm of motivation. A value is the “stance” I take toward the attitudes that “befall” me. Attitudes belong to “to the objective

\(^82\) For the full treatment of this topic see chapter three of this dissertation, part C (\textit{The Spiritual Person}) of the section on empathy.


\(^84\) Ibid., 46, note 69.
whatever-it-is that it holds for”. That is, in the adoption of a value there is both a passive and active element for the self. The passive element is the attitude. I cannot choose the attitude that is appropriate to a specific phenomenon for they are inherent to that phenomenon. That is why Stein says motivation happens “on the basis of the other or for the sake of the other”. However, I can choose what stance I take toward that attitude. What is interesting is that, for Stein, even if I choose to disregard or deny the attitude appropriate to the phenomenon, “that doesn’t mean I eliminate it. That’s not under my control”. In other words, let us say that the appropriate attitude toward the other person is respect. I cannot change the fact that I owe the other person respect. However, I can choose to ignore or deny it. I can kill the other. But my potential and actualized capacity (to ignore the attitude, that is, to kill) does not change the inherent attitude that belongs to the other (the respect due to him or her). What is more, the stance I have taken to the attitude (either respecting the other person or choosing to kill him or her) reveals the value I hold for that attitude, reveals, in part who I am (for better or for worse!). Values are thus adopted through the “fiat!” which is a “letting it happen” to me. It seems that one can make a connection here between Stein’s fiat! and Levinas’ me voici. In both cases the self has been called upon to respond to an event that has befallen it, that it did not choose, and over which it has no control. Yet a response is necessary, unavoidable. I must say something but I cannot, only the me can respond – fiat! let it happen to me; me voici, here I am. Thus we can say that in the time of justice, the enactment of ethical

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85 Ibid., 48.
86 Ibid., 49.
87 Ibid., 55; and Potency and Act, 409.
responsibility is *motivated not caused* by the other’s plea/command not to kill. Through empathy I encounter another to whom, regardless of who I am or what I think, I owe a great deal of respect. Now it is true that Stein’s *fiat!* need not be an acquiescence to the cry of the other not to kill or an agreement to render unto the other the respect that is due. As we have said, one *can* choose to deny the attitude that befalls one. But still one can only passively respond to what has come to the self from outside of the self, beyond the self. I shape myself (by adopting a value-stance) in response to the other. It is *ontology otherwise.*

There is yet another aspect of how encountering what is beyond the self and adopting a value-stance towards what is beyond enacts one as an individual person. This aspect will also point toward a more ethical understanding of Stein’s encounter between human persons. For Stein, “the *what* lies in a *how*”, that is, what (or who) I am is, in part, determined by how I react (take a value-stance) toward what is other than myself.  

Stein claims that one is affected at different “depths” of their personhood by the phenomena that they encounter. So, for example, witnessing the birth of one’s child may strike one more deeply than the first time one experiences eating a plum. What is more, Stein notes that “it seems odd when [these phenomena] do not affect him at the right depth”. We would cast a puzzled look at the man who is elated over the plum and unmoved by his new-born child. Stein thus concludes:

88 Stein, *Potency and Act*, 178, emphasis original.

89 Ibid., 186: "We speak of various 'depths of the I' that apply to contents as such.... Contents have the feature of seizing the person at some depth or other."

90 Ibid.
These are all kinds of the person’s “give-and-take” with what befalls him and, depending on his like or dislike of the contact, not only grazes him on the surface but seizes him inwardly at greater or lesser depth by furthering and heightening his being or by diminishing and threatening it. ⁹¹

And so while one person might go wild for corgis (“They’re so collectible!”) and another cares more for cats, this is merely a part of the give-and-take that shapes us as who we are. However Stein is adamant that:

We are most strongly seized inwardly, and so the give-and-take is most intense, when the be-ing that we encounter is another person. ⁹²

Ultimately, in Stein’s opinion, whether or not you are a dog-lover or a cat-lover, your encounter with other human persons should have the greatest effect upon you and shape you as a person in your own right. ⁹³ “Here approval and disapproval take the form of love and hate.” ⁹⁴ What is more, for Stein the depth at which one receives the other person is “neither by the senses nor by the intellect”. ⁹⁵ While she doesn’t make this conclusion

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⁹¹ Ibid., 179.

⁹² Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁹³ We leave aside for now those who claim to have a greater attachment to animals than human persons. However, an excellent example of empathy with animals is found in the writings of Temple Grandin, such as her Thinking in Pictures: My Life With Autism (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). While having difficulty connecting with other human persons as is common in those who suffer from autism, Grandin has such empathy with cattle that she was able to revolutionize certain techniques in the cattle industry so to make it much more "humane" although, according to empathy, this is not the right word. Bovine-friendly would be better as she empathized with the cows as cows (the only way one could empathize with a cow) not as humans. As she states: “When I put myself in a cow’s place, I really have to be that cow and not a person in a cow costume…. I place myself inside its body and imagine what it experiences…. I also have to imagine what experiencing the world through the cow’s sensory system is like (p. 168).” This description fits perfectly with how Stein envisions the act of empathy.

⁹⁴ Stein, Potency and Act, 179.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 391.
herself, one wonders if this “depth” could not be below or prior to intentional consciousness? It would seem this conclusion is not entirely off base. We recall her statement that: “We thus arrive at a being of the person that stands behind his conscious life but becomes actual in it and is its basis.”96 So if our human personhood is enacted behind or prior to intentional consciousness, should not the encounter with and thus access to (if we dare use such a word) other human persons as persons, that is, at the depth of their personhood, also take place at a depth or point behind or prior to intentional consciousness? Again, this is not Stein’s conclusion, but she does seem to leave the door open to such an interpretation. And such an interpretation is precisely what one would make in an ontology otherwise.

And so we see that it is our encounter with other human persons that affects us most deeply and thus helps to shape us as persons in our own right. But what of ethics? Although Stein does not speak of this empathetic encounter in ethical terms, clearly there is a “moral dimension” in this encounter.97 Returning to her claim about attitude and value-stance-taking, we recall that attitudes are inherent to phenomena. I cannot choose what attitude is appropriate to something (or someone). I can only choose whether or not I allow myself to adopt that attitude, to let it be done to me (“according to thy will” to wax religious, but we will consider that in the next section), or deny it. And what attitude is appropriate to the other, to the human person as such? Ethical responsibility, to use Levinas’ word. Stein states: “I am what I am – or I am with what I am – for myself (and

96 Ibid., 185, emphasis mine.

97 Kathleen M. Haney, "Empathy and Ethics," Southwest Philosophy Review 10 (1994): 59. She also claims here that empathy is even a “moral obligation”.

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also for others) in a certain way." What way is this? It is for myself. And also for
others. The phrase is in parentheses. It is an aside. A thought beyond or otherwise than
the main thought. How can I be for myself – and also, especially, for others – if not by
the way of ethical enactment?! Does not the encounter with the other person as an other
person, which can only happen, according to Stein, through the act of empathy, always
already imply an ethical realm? Does it not require ethical subjectivity? I cannot choose
the attitude appropriate to the other person. I am commanded to respect him or her.
Ethical enactment is demanded whether or not I agree to it. The call is never silenced,
even if I turn my back upon it. But when I encounter the other person, through empathy,
as a person, “empathy becomes a precondition for ethical responsibility and, itself, an
ethical responsibility”. Two things are implied here. First, while Levinas says that
ethics is the precondition for empathy, this can only be from the perspective of the
diachronous realm of the other whose trace comes from an immemorial past. In the
synchronous realm of the present, where the saying has been translated into the said, the
order (such a metaphysical word!) is reversed. Empathy is at the root of ethics. When I
empathize with the other I encounter a human person who demands and commands my
respect and ethical enactment. However such a demand is found only because,
fantastically, the face of the other belies the trace of an immemorial past in which I have
always already been subjected to the other as hostage and substitute. As we have said

98 Stein, Potency and Act, 178, emphasis mine.

99 Haney, 61.

100 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 146, emphasis mine. We recall that his
claim that the ethical response of substitution “makes possible the paradoxical
psychological possibilities of putting oneself in the place of another”.

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before, the relationship between diachrony and synchrony is not chronological. However, as existing in the synchronous realm, we have no choice but to use such chronological language. Second, not only is empathy the precondition for ethics it is itself an ethical responsibility. That is, one is required, commanded even, to empathize with the other person because he or she is a human person. Again going back to Stein’s notion of attitude, we come to the conclusion that because the other is a person the encounter with him or her that is most appropriate to him or her as a person is through empathy. It “befalls me” (to use Stein’s words) to empathize with the other. Of course I can choose not to obey, but empathy is what is demanded of me when I encounter the face of the other. Thus empathy is itself an ethical requirement.

But what of it? So I am called to respect the other, to act ethically toward him or her. What does this mean? How does it look? What should and must I do? How does the ethical response of “here I am” (me voici) become an ethical enactment? How can I, respectfully (that is, without reducing the other to my constituting gaze – “I’ll tell you what’s good for you!”), discern what the other needs and wants? Here again empathy is the key. But first let us recall Levinas again. Through the intersubjective reduction (which is performed through empathy) “I see myself from the other’s vantage point; I expose myself to the other person; I have things to account for”.

This last part – I have things to account for – gives us pause. Why should I have things to account for when I see myself from the other’s point of view? And what precisely do I have to account for? As we know, Levinas is fond of quoting Pascal’s “That is my place in the sun” and

101 See note 66 above.
commenting on how “that is how the usurpation of the whole world began”. Perhaps when I see myself from the other’s vantage point (reiterated empathy) I realize that, according to the other person, I have taken the very bread from his or her mouth! That is, my existence necessarily uses up the very resources that the other needs for his or her own livelihood. The fact that I have been given a job means that countless others cannot have that job and the financial security it offers. They will not receive the paycheck I do and use to buy the food I put into my mouth. I have indeed usurped the other’s place and thus I have things to account for. However, it is not necessarily as simple as that. As we noted above: “Faces rarely implore without also indicating what it is they need.”

We also recall that Levinas insists that his work is not a moral code of conduct. However, ethical responsibility for the other is not some abstract, pie-in-the-sky notion. For Levinas ethical responsibility is entirely corporeal, entirely real:

The here I am signifies a being bound to giving with hands full, a being bound to corporeity; the body is the very condition of giving, with all that giving costs.… [A]pproached on the basis of responsibility for the other man, the psyche of the subject is the one-for-the-other, the one having to give to the other, and thus the one having hands for giving. Human subjectivity is of flesh and blood.

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102 This is one of the epigrams found at the beginning of Otherwise than Being.

103 Bloechl, 145.

104 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 120: "The ethical language we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral experience, independent of the description hitherto elaborated. The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics." See also Levinas, "The I and the Totality," 35: “I want to describe the relation of man to man. Justice does not constitute it; it is what makes justice possible.”

Levinas insists that “giving has from the outset a corporeal meaning” such that the paradigm for this giving is to give to the other the very break from my own mouth.\textsuperscript{106} However, as Levinas is not writing a moral code of conduct, this is not necessarily to be treated literally – unless of course, food is what the other needs (and very often, of course, it is). But and according to the famous statement: men and women cannot live on bread alone.\textsuperscript{107} Much more is required but how can I know what it is that you need? You specifically, a person of flesh and blood, here and now, in this very moment of encounter (which as an event is unique and unrepeatable). How can I know in which precise way I have usurped your place, what exactly I have taken from you and for which I owe you an account? Quite simply: I empathize with you.

Through empathizing with the other, one is able to discern the other’s concrete needs and wants indicated by their face. Through empathy, one’s gaze is turned from the face of the other to the necessary object of his or her primordial experience. The face encountered in the empathetic experience is the face that pleads and commands “thou shalt not kill”. But it is also a face that says: “I need shelter” or “I need work” or “I need medicine”, etc. That is, I must encounter you in your “flesh and blood”, in your life as you are living it.\textsuperscript{108} I can only determine what you require by turning away from myself and towards you and then allowing myself to be led to the aim of your gaze, to be led into your experiential realm, though it will never be mine. That is the enactment of empathy.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 190.

\textsuperscript{107} See Matthew 4:4 where Jesus states: "One does not live by bread alone". He is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

\textsuperscript{108} Bloechl, 145.
It is the event of the face-to-face encounter in which the self is de-centered and called to respond ethically to the other who demands my respect and attention, whose needs I must fulfill for I am always already responsible for him or her. I and no other. What is more, if I am called to be responsible even for the other’s responsibility, Levinas’ radical claim of substitution, this too can only happen through empathy. I can only know what you are responsible for by turning my gaze in the direction of your look. And when I allow myself to be led there, turned away from myself, held captive (like a hostage!) to your penetrating gaze, what do I discover? Of course we know that, according to Levinas, the other person’s responsibility is for the other other, the third party. And so I find that I am responsible not only for you, but for him and her also. All of humanity comes crashing down around me in the empathetic encounter with the one other. Human community is founded upon such ethical encounters which are empathetic encounters. We recall that Stein distinguishes between human community as founded upon relationships where we encounter others as persons, that is through empathetically engaging them, as opposed to mere associations where the other is objectified. And so empathy as an enactment of the ethical relationship is at the foundation of human society as specifically human. Truly human community can only take place when its members encounter one another as persons, that is, as those who have faces which beg and command me to respond ethically. This is done through the act of empathy in which I come to know the other person otherwise than through the precepts of a constituting ontology, but according to an ontology otherwise that is based on being’s other, which is the face of the other person.

109 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 117.

110 Stein, Beiträge, 130.
“Divine Deflection” – Empathizing with God: Ethical Responsibility for the Other

Enacts the Divine-Human Relationship

There is one last point of confluence between Levinas’ ethical philosophical project and Stein’s concept of empathy to address. This point is significant for it leads us to the third and concluding section of this dissertation, the theological significance of solidarity. To this point, Stein’s concept of empathy can help clarify Levinas’ understanding of the divine-human encounter and relationship.

When examined from the perspective of faith, the ethical-empathetic enactment of the human person can be connected to the human-divine encounter. For Levinas, as we know, the human encounter with God, if it is not to turn into idolatry, should never evoke the ontological claim “I believe in God” but rather should elect one as ethically responsible for the other, for which the only response can be “here I am”.\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in The Levinas Reader, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 184. See also Otherwise than Being, 149.} He is quite clear:

There can be no “knowledge” of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God…. It is our relations with men… that give to theological concepts the sole significance they admit of…. Without the signification they draw from ethics theological concepts remain empty and formal frameworks…. Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.\footnote{Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 78-79.}
For Levinas, religion sans the ethical is mere mythology.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, and as we recall from our earlier chapter, ethics is not only first philosophy but also first theology.

Holiness thus shows itself as an irreducible possibility of the human and God: being called by [the other]. \textit{An original ethical event which would also be first theology.}\textsuperscript{114}

Ethics is first theology because, according to Levinas, the human encounter with the divine \textit{is} to turn to the other in ethical obedience: “the desirable [God] orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence – the other”.\textsuperscript{115} “Levinas thus has recourse to a notion of a kind of divine ‘deflection,’ detouring, or deferral.”\textsuperscript{116} When the human person encounters the divine Other, he or she is immediately turned away from


\textsuperscript{115} Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 178, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{116} John D. Caputo, "To the Point of a Possible Confusion: God and il y a," in \textit{Levinas: The Face of the Other: The Fifteenth Annual Symposium of The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center}, ed. David L. Smith (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1988), 8. I was quite pleased when I came across this sentence for I had already conceived of the movement of empathy as a “deflection” (like a beam of light) from the face of the other to the content of their experience months before I read this essay.
God and to the other person. The movement toward God (à Dieu) is thus always already a farewell (adieu) to God. For Levinas, “ethics is the spiritual optics.”

It is a curious notion, ethics as a spiritual optics. What can it mean? How can responsibility for the other to which, apparently, I am ordered and ordained by God, be a form of divine vision? Happily this turn to the other through the divine encounter is made clearer in light of Stein’s concept of empathy. Stein only briefly alludes to the fact that the act of empathy is how “as believers [humans] comprehend the love, the anger, and the precepts of their God”. It is significant that she does not say empathy is how one knows God, but rather empathy is the way in which humans become aware of God’s own experiences. Here we find the human person turning in empathetic awareness towards the divine. As with all acts of empathy, the subjective gaze does not rest upon the other, here the divine Other, but rather is deflected to contemplate the content of the other’s experience, the content of the other’s intentional gaze. The movement of deflection that takes place when I empathize with an other human person thus, and as noted by Levinas’ himself, also applies to the empathetic relationship with the divine Other, God. But what could the content of God’s experience be? Upon what does the divine gaze rest? Through empathy one discerns that God’s gaze is upon the human other who is bathed in the light

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118 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 78.

119 Stein, On Empathy, 11.
of divine love and care. Immediately the subject turns his or her gaze from God’s face to the face of the other person. Here I propose a further step. Stein insists that, through empathy, the primordial experience of the other can never become my primordial experience. While this may be true for the intersubjective human encounter, can one argue that in the human-divine encounter the content of the empathized experience is such that the strict boundary between primordiality and non-primordiality is somehow transcended? While the subject’s perception of the other person can never be the same as God’s, thus maintaining the separation between the self and the divine Other, if the believer is to be truly obedient to God’s command must this command not become “one’s own”? Levinas states: “The Infinite… concerns me and encircles me and commands me by my own voice.” If, through empathy, one discerns God’s care for the other person and if one desires to be in relationship with this God, must not one take on the burden of responsibility for the other as one’s very own? One prays “Thy will be done” but who else is going to do it if not oneself? It is God’s will but my responsibility. As Levinas states: “To know God is to know what must be done” – and I am the one to do it. I am responsible for the other’s responsibility, even, perhaps especially, if it is the divine

120 One can also argue that God’s gaze encompasses the entire cosmos thus leading into ecological concerns. While a vitally important conversation for today’s world that is riddled with actual and potential environmental disasters, it is beyond the scope of this study.

121 Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 197, emphasis mine. See also Otherwise than Being, 151, emphasis mine: “… the Infinite speaks through the witness I bear of it, in my sincerity, in my saying without said, preoriginary saying which is said in the mouth of the very one that receives the witness.”

Other. One thus turns from the divine Other (adieu à Dieu) and turns to the human other with whom it is an ethical requirement to empathize so to discern his or her concrete needs. Levinas calls this turn to the other the “inspiration” of God. Through the empathetic encounter with God we perceive that ethical responsibility for the other is “the precept of God”. To invoke God’s name is to be provoked by God. This provocation happens when I empathetically encounter God thus turning my gaze toward the aim of God’s vision which is the human other. I am elected, chosen before I had a choice, to be responsible for the other. Ethics is a spiritual optics.

However, ethics is not only a spiritual optics. In addition to seeing the other with or through the eyes of God, ethics is also a form of “breathing for others” with the divine breath and a hearing of God’s voice in the face of the other. Let us reflect on these metaphors for a moment. As we just noted, for Levinas, the turn to the other is the “inspiration” of God. Inspiration refers to both the taking of breath into the lungs (breathing) and to motivation by a source external to the self. Levinas covers both of these connotations when he notes that the “possibility of inspiration” is:

the possibility of being the author of what had been breathed in unbeknownst to me, of having received, one knows not from where, that of which I am the author. In the responsibility for the other we are at the heart of the ambiguity of inspiration. The unheard-of saying is enigmatically in the anarchic response, in my responsibility for the other. The trace of infinity is this ambiguity in the

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124 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 149: “the ‘provocation’ coming from God, is in my invocation”. See also Caputo, "To the Point of a Possible Confusion,” 14, emphasis mine: "The provocation from God and the invocation from God: that is the same thing."
subject, in turns beginning and makeshift, a diachronic ambivalence which ethics makes possible.\textsuperscript{125}

This passage also offers support for understanding how empathetically coming to perceive the command of God slips or transforms into \textit{my} primordial experience of ethical responsibility for the other. As Levinas declares: “The Infinite… concerns me and encircles me and commands me \textit{by my own voice}.”\textsuperscript{126} I am inspired, by God, breathing in the divine breath which turns me toward the other whose life I am called to give this breath – now my breath – so he or she might live.

A human subject is an inspired body. It is moved by a breath that comes from an immemorial past. As respiration between this inspiration and the expiration of tiredness, old age, and death, \textit{a human life is breathing for others}, the repetition of obedience to the Good’s command.\textsuperscript{127}

\textit{Breathing for others} – is this not an example of substitution \textit{par excellence}?\textsuperscript{128} In Genesis we find God breathing the breath of life into the first human person.\textsuperscript{129} As an ethically

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\begin{quote}
125 Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 148-149. Although Levinas does not mention God in this passage, in the following section of \textit{Otherwise than Being}, “Witness and Prophecy” (149-152) Levinas directly mentions God who turns or inspires one toward the other in ethical responsibility, “here I am”.

126 Levinas, \textit{God, Death, and Time}, 197, emphasis mine. See also \textit{Otherwise than Being}, 151, emphasis mine: “… the Infinite speaks through the witness I bear of it, in my sincerity, in my saying without said, preoriginal saying \textit{which is said in the mouth of the very one that receives the witness}.”


128 I am reminded here of the icon in which Mary is holding the child Jesus whose face is turned toward hers in such intimate proximity that one can envision them breathing the same breath or, perhaps, one breath (the mother’s or the child’s?) being passed to the other.

129 See Genesis 2:7: "the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being."
\end{quote}
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enacted subject who is called to answer for the life of the other, am I not called to give to the other that very breath of life that I have received – is this not similar to giving the very bread from my own mouth? But there is more for it is upon the breath that the voice is carried. It is the voice that calls to me and commands me “do not kill”, but it is also my voice declaring “here I am!” or Stein’s “fiat!”. The voice of the other and the voice of the ethical subject both bear the traces of the divine voice. According to Levinas, “in the [divine] call, I am sent to the other person through whom that appeal signifies, to my fellow man for whom I have to fear”. God calls to us and we hear God’s voice, a voiceless voice, in the face of the other. “God himself, I do not hear. God only lets himself be heard in an affect which is not directed to him.” As Jean-Luc Marion states:

“And the voice which reveals, reveals exactly because it remains without voice, or more exactly because it remains without Name…. The Name – it has to be dwelt in without saying it, but by letting it say, name, and call us. The Name is not said, it calls.”

There is an anonymity about God who is both nameless and voiceless. Perhaps it is this anonymity which preserves the separation between God and the human person who has taken on the content of God’s experience (care for the other as revealed through empathy)

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130 Levinas, "Nonintentional Consciousness", 132.


as his or her own. Perhaps this is what Levinas meant when he proclaimed that “God writes straight with crooked lines.”\textsuperscript{133} For “if the eye that listens becomes a caress, it will be touched by the sincerity of things”.\textsuperscript{134} My empathetic gaze must hear the word of God in the face of the other who pleads with and commands me with an ineffable sincerity to respond ethically to him or her. Thus heard, my life is irrevocably “touched” by the other – touched, enucleated, transformed into the hostage substituting my very breath so that the other might live. This is the invocation of God that is the provocation by God that in turn becomes the witness to God. It is the inspiration of God directing us to the other whom I encounter in ethical responsibility. It is the only way in which God is glorified.\textsuperscript{135} Thus not only is the turn to God a turn to the human other, but the ethical response to and for the other is also a turn to or encounter with God. “The fear of God is the fear for others.”\textsuperscript{136}

Others – the word is plural for of course God’s gaze does not rest upon only one human other but upon all of humanity. One never encounters only one human other. We hear again Levinas cry: we are in the world as are millions of others who we encounter empathetically and to whom we are ethically beholden. We know that for Levinas the

\textsuperscript{133} Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 197.

\textsuperscript{134} Adriaan Peperzak, Philosophy Between Faith and Theology: Addresses to Catholic Intellectuals (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 134.

\textsuperscript{135} See Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 295: "The way in which the Infinite is glorified (its glorification) is not representation. It is produced, in inspiration, in the form of my responsibility for the neighbor or ethics."

entrance of the third party happens in the very encounter with the face of the other: “the epiphany of the face... attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity”.137 Thus the ethical encounter, made possible through empathy, enacts not only human personhood but is also at the very foundation of human society. And if the ethical-empathetic human encounter witnesses to the human-divine encounter, it is also the inspiration behind the formation of faith communities, of religion itself. As we have said, to offer testimony to God, to worship God, is not to declare one’s belief in God but rather is manifested in a heart held hostage to the needs of the human other and all others, God’s children for whom one can only respond “here I am”. As we noted above, if religion is not rooted in ethics it is merely a myth for the invocation of God is the provocation by God. To lose sight of this is to risk not only the illusions offered by mythology but also to fall into idolatry – to speak God’s name and face God directly so to capture God in my conceptualizing gaze and reduce God to a mere theme and object that I can manipulate.

We do well to heed Levinas’ words:

In the sign given to the other,... in my “here I am,” from the first present in the accusative, I bear witness to the Infinite.... “Here I am, in the name of God,” without referring myself directly to his presence. “Here I am,” just that! The word God is still absent from the phrase in which God is for the first time involved in words. It does not at all state “I believe in God.” To bear witness [to] God is precisely not to state this extraordinary word....138

137 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 213.

138 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 149, emphasis mine.
But this is not Levinas alone. It is a prophetic testimony to the glory of God in “the
signification of the-one-for-the-other” to which we find ourselves always already
called.\(^\text{139}\) It is an ancient message said anew.

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\text{I hate, I spurn your feasts, I take no pleasure in your solemnities;....}
\text{But if you would offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water,}
\text{and goodness like an unfailing stream. (Amos 5:21 & 24)}
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If faith in God is to be more than an idolatrous reduction of the divine to a
concept that can be controlled and manipulated, and if participation in a faith community
is to be more than a once-a-week hiatus from worldly concerns, then we must heed the
prophetic testimony to a “God beyond being” and to an empathetic encounter with that
God that breaks the bonds of onto-theology. It is a testimony that is manifested in the
relationship between Levinas’ anarchical ethical responsibility and Stein’s empathetic
enactment of human personhood. It is the philosophical attestation to the meaning behind
these words: “Do you love me?.... Feed my sheep.” (John 21:17)

**Conclusion – A Moment of Prayer**

We conclude this chapter with a brief reflection on prayer. What is prayer?
According to Adriaan Peperzak prayer is central to religion. It can be understood, “in its
deepest and simplest sense, that is, as the most originary and all-permeating responsivity
of an existence in devotion to the creative, all-permeating, and healing God.”\(^\text{140}\) In a
word, prayer is *relation*.\(^\text{141}\) What is more, Peperzak combines this understanding of

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 150.

\(^{140}\) Peperzak, *Philosophy Between Faith and Theology*, 91.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., emphasis mine.
prayer as our relation to God with Levinas’ view that “what we call ‘God’ can take on meaning only on the basis of these other [human, thus ethical] relationships”.  

Perperzak notes that “with regard to religion, Levinas’s main thesis hold that the relation to God (which I have named ‘prayer’) coincides with the relation to the other human person”.  

This is not a far-fetched conclusion for Levinas himself understands prayer from this ethical, thus relational, perspective.

The relation to the other is therefore not ontology. This bond with the other which is not reducible to the representation of the other, but to his invocation, and in which invocation is not preceded by an understanding, I call religion. The essence of discourse is prayer.

According to Levinas “true prayer” is “an offering of oneself, an outpouring of the soul”.  

An outpouring to whom or for what? One would assume it is to and for God. However, as we know, this to God (à Dieu) is always already a movement, or deflection, away from God (adieu). Thus:

Far from being a demand addressed to God, prayer, in this view, is the soul’s rising upward like the smoke of sacrifices, the soul’s delivering itself up to the heights – dis-inter-est-ing itself.

For Levinas discourse, speech, language is first and foremost to speak to someone. It is the saying of the other (“do not kill me”) and the saying of the self (“here I am”).

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142 Levinas, God, Death, and Time, 185.

143 Peperzak, Philosophy Between Faith and Theology, 94, emphasis mine.

144 Emmanuel Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?", 9, first emphasis original, second emphasis mine.


146 Ibid., 19.
Language is ethics. However, these words are also a prayer. If prayer is indeed a relation to God and if one’s relation to God is always already a turn to the other in ethical responsivity, that is, a relation with the other, then my relation with the other is a prayer to God. When I ethically respond to another person I am offering myself to them which is also an offering of myself to God, it is a prayer to God, my relationship with God. Thus prayer is “a matter of the how, not the what”. That is, prayer is not about the words we say (the what) but rather about doing something. Prayer is enactment, ethical enactment. However, this all happens by way of empathy. The divine-human encounter happens by way of empathy. Empathizing with God always already turns me toward empathizing with the other (human) person which in turn demands my ethical response to him or her. When we empathize with another, awakening us to ethical responsivity for this other, we are in relation with God which is prayer. Empathy is thus a form of prayer. Now, one has heard of the necessity to pray at all times. It seems an impossible task. However, if we are empathetically mindful in all our relationships with one another, and if such relationships are thus a form of ethical enactment, and further if ethical responsivity is a form of prayer, then cannot empathy enable us pray at all times? Indeed, enacting the prayer of ethical responsibility through empathy is the true meaning behind the claim that we humans are made “in the image of God”. According to Stein, God does not merely

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147 Caputo, “Adieu - sans Dieu”, 305, emphasis original. This is an excellent essay that traces certain similarities between Levinas and Derrida, especially the notion of ethics as hospitality and hospitality as prayer.

148 See Luke 18:1 and Ephesians 6:18

149 See Genesis 1:26-27. See also Levinas, “Judaism and Kenosis”, 111, italicized in the original: “As if through that responsibility, which constitutes man’s very identity, each one of us were similar to Elohim.” And see Levinas, “In the Image of God”, 159,
look upon humanity, God empathizes with human persons. Indeed, “God can comprehend people’s lives in no other way”.\(^{150}\) And so when we empathize with the other we offer up a prayer to God in which we manifest the very image of God.

One final word: solidarity. According to Levinas “the unconditionality of being hostage is not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition for all solidarity”.\(^{151}\) According to Stein, “the solidarity of individuals, which becomes visible in the influence of the attitudes of one upon the life of the others, is formative of community in the highest degree”.\(^{152}\) It would seem that ethically enacted subjectivity which is made possible in real time through the act of empathy leads necessarily to solidarity with others. When I empathize with you, I enter into solidarity with you – it is a deeply ethical event. It will be argued, in the final two chapters of this dissertation, that ethical-empathetically enacted solidarity with human persons is a manifestation of one’s relationship with God. Ethical-empathetically enacted solidarity will be seen as a prayer to God, the truest way to be in relation to God. Just as God empathizes with humanity, we will find God in solidarity with human persons. As we discussed above, humans must empathize with God so to discern God’s precepts and enter into relationship with this God. This empathetic

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\(^{150}\) Stein, *On Empathy*, 11.

\(^{151}\) Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 117.

\(^{152}\) Stein, *Beiträge*, 214, emphasis original.
turn to God immediately and necessarily turns us toward human others with whom one then encounters empathetically. However, empathizing with the other is not the end of the encounter for such empathetic experience of the other moves one to enter into solidarity with him or her. Thus, just as the empathetic relationship with the other witnesses to the human-divine encounter, being in solidarity with one another also manifests the image of God in which humans are made. This movement from the ethical-empathetic encounter with the other person to being in solidarity with the other is the topic of our final two chapters. There are, of course, numerous ways to discuss the phenomenon of solidarity. Due to constraints of time and space we will focus our discussion on solidarity in an analysis of how it is understood and enacted in the Christian tradition, specifically in Roman Catholicism. As we will see, entering into solidarity with the other, which is a response to the ethical-empathetic encounter with the other, manifests and enacts one’s spirituality and discipleship. It is worship and liturgy. It is the very founding principle of the formation of religious community. However, before we can make this argument we must first understand exactly what solidarity is. This is the task of our next chapter. In addition, we will explore the presence of the concept of solidarity, that is its enactment, within the Christian tradition. It will be argued that being in solidarity with others, as a natural outcome of empathizing with others, is an essential component of Christian identity.
CHAPTER FIVE

We – for the Other
Solidarity as a Fundamental Principle within the Catholic Tradition

Introduction

As discussed at the close of the last chapter, there are multiple ways in which one can present the concept of solidarity as related to the ethical-empathetic enactment of human personhood. Solidarity is a popular word in today’s world. It makes appearances in the realm of politics and political theory, in sociology and psychology. It is invoked in the conference rooms of the corporate world and in the tenuous realm of international relations. It has also become the word of choice in much religious chatter and in theological writings. With so many possible avenues of analysis, one must choose how to focus one’s research. As noted in the previous chapter, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to analyze the presence and enactment of solidarity in the Christian tradition, and even more specifically, in Roman Catholicism. Now even with this narrowing down of our topic, there are yet many paths down which one could travel within the Roman Catholic tradition. One could take a historical approach, tracing the presence of solidarity in the Christian tradition from its earliest enactment on the shores of Galilee, before the word was even in use, to its first official appearance in papal writings in 1961,\(^1\) culminating with its multiple appearances in contemporary religious texts. Alternately, one could focus their analysis scripturally seeking out passages that

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manifest, if not the word itself, at least the spirit of solidarity. Another way to approach the topic could be to pick one or two areas of Christian theology – Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Sacramentology, Morality, etc. – and analyze how the concept of solidarity fits into this particular aspect of Christian thought. Again, there are so many choices! In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the writings of Pope John Paul II as representative of the official understanding of what solidarity is and how it functions in the Roman Catholic tradition. This choice is not purely arbitrary. In certain ways, this selection makes perfect sense, fitting in quite nicely with the discussion that has taken us to this point. Before his election as pope, John Paul II, then known as Karol Wojtyła, was quite familiar with the phenomenological tradition. His habilitation thesis, the writing of which enabled him to teach in the philosophy department of the Catholic University of Lublin, focused on the ethical writings of Max Scheler. While his Catholic faith always ran as an undercurrent to all his writings, prior to his election as the Roman Pontiff, Wojtyła participated in numerous philosophical and particularly phenomenological conferences. His major text, *The Acting Person*, admittedly works in the realm of phenomenology. What is more, one can trace throughout his writings, both prior to

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3 Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), xiv: “The author of the present study owes everything to the systems of metaphysics, of anthropology, and of Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics on the one hand, and to phenomenology, above all in Sheler’s interpretation, and through Sheler’s critique also to Kant, on the other hand.” See also Andrew N. Woznicki, “The Christian Humanism of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 53 (1979): 28. Here the author describes the methodology of *The Acting Person* “as based on both the classical theory of Aristotelico-Thomistic metaphysics with its terminology, and on the contemporary methods typical of
becoming pope and throughout his pontificate, an emphasis on the human person.\textsuperscript{4} From this perspective, John Paul II seems a suitable person to add into the dialogue between Levinas and Stein. Indeed, as pope, John Paul had the opportunity to meet Levinas in 1983 at a philosophical seminar held at Castel Gandolfo. Not only was John Paul familiar with Levinas’ writings, he also thought highly of Levinas’ work.\textsuperscript{5} As for Stein, the former pope thought so very highly of her that he canonized her as a saint in 1998.\textsuperscript{6} Although Wojtyła had to give up much of his purely philosophical and phenomenological endeavors after his move to Rome in 1978, certain authors argue that he never completely forsook his phenomenological roots.\textsuperscript{7} In this way, John Paul II can be seen as a type of phenomenology, hermeneutics and even linguistics”. It is interesting to note that *The Acting Person* attempts to bring Thomism and phenomenology together just as Stein’s *Finite and Eternal Being* also tried to put these two traditions in dialogue (see chapter three of this dissertation).

\textsuperscript{4} See John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 199-200: “I had long been interested in man as person…. when I discovered my priestly vocation, man became the central theme of my pastoral work” (emphasis original) and “So the development of my studies centered on man – on the human person….”

\textsuperscript{5} See for example, John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 35-36 and 210-211.

\textsuperscript{6} We will not enter here into the debate over the controversy of Stein’s canonization. For the purposes of this study, we merely wish to show John Paul's familiarity with and appreciation of both the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein.

\textsuperscript{7} Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, ”The Origins of the Philosophy of John Paul the Second,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 53 (1979): 16: “Many elements of philosophical reflection lie hidden among the several hundred items published by Karol Wojtyła, both before and after his election to the See of Peter…” See also Hans Köchler, ”Karol Wojtyła’s Notion of the Irreducible in Man and the Quest for a Just World Order,” in *Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Legacy*, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 166: “I identified, however, a persistence of his original
Janus figure, looking in two different directions, bridging two different realms. He has one foot planted in the realm of phenomenology and one in Catholic theology. In either stance, his concern is with the human person. What is more, on the Catholic side of things, to date no other pope has written so extensively on the concept of solidarity as has John Paul II. And so we turn to his writings, both his more phenomenologically oriented writings prior to becoming pope and his encyclicals as representative of the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, to analyze the concept of solidarity. Once we have grasped a basic understanding of what, from the perspective of Roman Catholicism, solidarity is, we will move in our final and concluding chapter to examine how the concept of solidarity has been employed within Catholic theological texts to bring a fresh understanding to certain areas such as spirituality, discipleship, ecclesiology, and worship and liturgy.

**A Preliminary Concern: Why Solidarity?**

Before we turn to the writings of John Paul II, it seems imperative to show, briefly, how solidarity has become such an important concept within the Christian tradition, and specifically within Roman Catholicism. Theologian Dieter T. Hessel claims that solidarity ought to be the “ethical norm that may focus the church’s social involvement” thus giving “impetus to mission in society” and offering “a framework for phenomenological approach… in many of the pronouncements he made as head of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly those dealing with social responsibility…”
scholarly research and for program planning by church leaders”. 8 According to Anselm Min, “solidarity with others” is precisely the paradigm needed for contemporary theology if it is to have any relevance in today’s global world. 9 We will examine the concept in much greater detail below, but it will be helpful to introduce a working definition of solidarity at this point. According to John Paul II, solidarity is:

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\text{a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all (38).}
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What this commitment entails (from the Christian perspective) is a full commitment to [the world], unreserved participation in its situation, in the promise given it by creation, in its responsibility for the arrogance, sloth and falsehood which reign within it, in its suffering under the resultant distress, but primarily and supremely in the free grace of God demonstrated and addressed to it in Jesus Christ, and therefore in its hope…. The solidarity of the community with the world consists… [in making] itself known to others as akin to them, rejoicing with them that do rejoice and weeping with them that weep (Rom 12:15),…. by accepting the fact that it must be honestly and unreservedly among them and with them, on the same level and footing, in the same boat and within the same limits as any or all of them. 11


10 John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," in The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical "On Social Justice", ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 41, emphasis in the original. Please note that all references to church documents and encyclicals will place the paragraph numbering as found in the body of the text as a parenthetical at the end of the quote and the page number of the text in the footnote.

Thus solidarity is some form of unifying principle among people that clearly carries with it an ethical significance that is manifested in certain actions with and for others. As we will see, the concept of solidarity as it is discussed and enacted within the Christian (again, specifically Catholic) tradition is intimately linked with the church’s sense of mission to the entire world and particularly in the form of acts of social justice.12 What is more, solidarity functions both at the level of the individual human person and as a structural element within the life of the community composed of these individual human persons.

While the first official – that is papal – mention of solidarity appeared in John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961), solidarity featured much more prominently in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). Although the word *solidarity* is not used, the very opening passage of this document manifests the spirit of solidarity:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men…. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history (1).13

According to the Christian understanding of the nature of human persons, there is an interdependence among humans due to their common origin in the one God. What is

12 For an excellent overview of the Catholic social justice tradition see Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983). Here the author traces the development of the church’s teaching on issues of social justice from what is considered to be the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), to *Centesimus Annus*, written one hundred years later in 1991.

more, it is this God that desires for humans to be, not only in community with one another, but even deeper, in solidarity with one another:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when he prayed to the Father, “that all may be one… as we are one” (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason. For he implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and in the union of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (24).

Thus “God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity…. This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection” (32). In this way, solidarity is seen to be a fundamental aspect of the human person and particularly of the human person as created by God and in God’s image. From the very moment of creation humans are called to be in relationship with one another: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him” (Genesis 2:18-19). Now obviously there are many types of human relations which can range from the banal to the most intimate, healthy to neurotic. However, and as we will show in greater detail below, at the root of all authentic human relations where human personhood is recognized and supported, is the response of solidarity to the other. It is a response called forth by the empathetic encounter with the other, which is, as has been shown, the way in which we encounter others as human persons.

We recall that that empathetic encounter with the other rests upon the anarchical ethical encounter of the self and other. In this way, empathizing with the other always already carries with it an ethical obligation. I must respond to the other with whom I

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14 Ibid., 180.

15 Ibid., 184-185.
empathize and not merely observe him or her – I must rejoice when she rejoices and weep when he weeps, but even more than that, I must act with him or her. All response to the other, if it is human and if it reflects the level of human personhood, is an ethical response. Entering into solidarity with the other, as will be shown more clearly below, manifests this ethical response.

Now as we noted above, solidarity is not only paradigmatic of human relations, it is also a key structural and thus constitutive feature of the church itself, the community of believers. Only a few years following the publication of Gaudium et Spes, the World Synod of Bishops made a bold claim about the identity and authentic functioning of the (Catholic) church:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.16

At the root of such social justice, that is as the attitude which is the motivation behind such action, is the commitment of solidarity. As we will see, solidarity among persons and within human community, particularly here within the community of believers, will manifest itself in “action on behalf of justice”.

Common parlance among theologians today on issues of ecclesiology is the view that “ministry precedes and produces theology, not the reverse” which also means that

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“ministry precedes and determines the Church”.\(^{17}\) Now one must ask: what can be the particular ministry or role of the church? Simply, it is to do the ministry of God – “All ministry is God’s ministry.”\(^{18}\) But this leads to a further question: what is the ministry of God? How is God concerned with this world? We raised this question in our previous chapter: how can the believer discern the precepts of God? We recall our answer: one turns in empathetic awareness to this God and finds his or her gaze turned upon the face of the human other to whom one is obligated to respond with the only response that is both human and at the level of personhood or subjectivity: *me voici*, here I am. To translate this into a specifically Christian context means to understand this obligation as rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:

> And the fact that He [Jesus] was moved with compassion means originally that He could not and would not close His mind to the existence and situation of the multitude, nor hold Himself aloof from it, but that *it affected Him, that it went right to His heart, that He made it His own, that He could not but identify Himself with them.* Only He could do this with the breadth with which He did so. *But His community cannot follow any other line.*\(^{19}\)

Clearly the Christian understands the life of Jesus of Nazareth as enacting solidarity with human persons and, indeed, all of humanity – “*He made it His own*”. His followers, if they are to be *his*, and if they are to *follow*, that is emulate him, must “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). This is what the commitment of solidarity entails and why it manifests itself in “action on behalf of justice” for the world, both on the individual level and as a constitutive aspect of the community of believers itself.

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{19}\) Barth, 508, emphasis mine.
In all the documents of the tradition, then, the theory of justice is rooted in a philosophical view of the nature of the person as essentially social and simultaneously in an explicitly Christian notion of love as mutuality and as response in the concrete, especially to those in need.²⁰

In this way “response to God in faith and response to the neighbor in love and solidarity are inseparable”.²¹ Now that we see how and why solidarity with others is a key feature of the life of the church, let us take a closer examination of what precisely the phenomenon of solidarity is. For this we turn to the writings of John Paul II.

Solidarity as the Response of the Ethical-Empathetic Encounter with the Other

People are probably more familiar with John Paul II’s theological writings on solidarity during his time as Roman Pontiff. However as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, prior to becoming pope, Karol Wojtyła had quite a prolific career as both a philosopher and theologian. During this time he also wrote on the concept of solidarity, approaching it from a more philosophical and, specifically, phenomenological perspective. In this section we will first examine these more philosophical writings. We will close this chapter with a reflection on solidarity as addressed in the encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, written by John Paul II in 1987. In between these two sections we will also elicit the aid of Józef Tischner, compatriot and personal friend of John Paul II. Tischner was not only a student of Roman Ingarden, the famous Polish phenomenologist and close friend of Edith Stein, he was also an avid reader of and highly


²¹ Ibid., 225.
influenced by Levinas’ works. In addition, he served as the chaplain of Solidarność, the Polish Workers’ Union, and wrote a key text on solidarity, *The Spirit of Solidarity*, in which he expands upon the topic from a phenomenologically-friendly perspective. Tischner’s writings on solidarity, which are quite harmonious with the pope’s, will help to provide a more comprehensive explication than the writings of John Paul alone can provide.

*The Acting Person – A Prelude to Solidarity*

Before we can address Wojtyła’s explicit writings on solidarity, it is necessary to briefly expand upon his understanding of the human person for his writings on solidarity only make sense in this light. For Wojtyła, the best way to approach the human subject as specifically *human* and as a *person*, is not from the Cartesian emphasis on thinking but rather from the perspective of action. That is, the human person reveals him or herself “in the actual *enacting* of his [or her] existence.” This is the claim that he makes in his most

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23 Weigel, 419.


26 Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, vii, emphasis original.
comprehensive approach to the question of the human person, *The Acting Person*. He states: “For our position is that action serves as a particular moment of apprehending – that is, of experiencing – the person.” This is because “action reveals the person, and we look at the person through his action”.  

Now for the purposes of this dissertation, we need not address every nuance of Wojtyła’s conception of the human person. Here we will only focus on those aspects that most directly impress upon his understanding of solidarity as an enacting moment of the human person.

The human person *is* an acting person. That is, “before all else, as a philosopher Karol Wojtyła is interested in man as a dynamic subject, who is able to fulfill himself by fulfilling acts which correspond to him as a person with regard to their contents and the manner in which they are realized”. Numerous things are implied in this one sentence. First we find the aforementioned emphasis on the self-revelatory nature of human actions. But there is a qualification – it appears that not all acts reveal the person, or correspond to the person, to the same degree or intensity. That is, depending on the *content* of the act and the *manner* in which it is realized, certain acts are more self-revelatory of the person than others, or “correspond to him as a person”. This will become a key distinction when we look specifically at the act of solidarity. This qualification of the content and manner of performing acts brings us directly into the realm of morality. For the pope, all actions “have a moral value” and it is precisely “this

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27 Ibid., 10-11, emphasis original.

moral aspect… [that] allows us to reach a better understanding of the human being insofar as he is a person” for from this moral perspective of action “the person emerges into view more completely than in ‘pure’ action”.\textsuperscript{29} Throughout Wojtyła’s writings on the human person, he emphasizes that human acts, as revelatory of the person, involve the aspects of choice, responsibility, morality, self-determination, self-governance, and self-possession.

Approaching the human person from the perspective of self-revelatory acts implies the notion of choice. We are finite and contingent creatures. We cannot perform all possible acts that are available to us, and certain actions are outside our realm of possibility due to certain physical limitations and limitations of time, space, and culture. Thus we must choose in each and every moment what few actions we will perform and thus what multitude of actions we will not perform.

The affirmation, the acknowledgement of truth, of the person and his dignity at the level of cognition, is also a summons to affirm this truth by an act of choice, i.e., by an act which in a given situation corresponds to man as a person.\textsuperscript{30}

Now if I make a choice for a certain action over and against all other possible actions that I could choose in that moment, I am responsible for that choice and that action.

The cardinal point in this problem may be seen when meditating on the nature of human acting which, in the rule, implies a choice between various possible alternatives. The problem of responsibility is directly linked to the axiological (normative) problem.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Wojtyła, \textit{The Acting Person}, 11-13.

\textsuperscript{30} Szostek, 63.

As responsible for my choices and actions, I am also a moral agent. The content of my choice of action and the manner in which I realize it can be good or bad. This brings us into the realm of value. When I choose to perform certain actions, I realize (or fail to realize) certain values which both shape and reveal me as the unique and individual human person that I am. There is an efficacy to my actions which is why Wojtyła speaks of the self-determination of the person through his or her acts.

This first definition of self-determination in the experience of human action involves a sense of efficacy on the part of the personal self: “I act” means “I am the efficient cause” of my action and of my self-actualization as a subject, which is not the case when something merely “happens” in me…. My sense of efficacy as an acting subject in relation to my activity is intimately connected with a sense of responsibility for that activity…32

He goes on to clarify that:

Self-determination manifests itself both in elementary willing (“I will”) and in choice and decision, which arise from an awareness of values, a weighing of motives, and also not infrequently a struggle and conflict of motives within an individual.33

It is through this willing, this choice, that I move in a certain direction. But I do not only determine which direction I will go for “through it [the choice for a certain direction or value or action] I simultaneously determine myself as well”.34 We see that the choices we make (and the subsequent actions performed according to those choices) affect who we are as persons. The values one realizes through one’s actions “will necessarily mean a modification of the acting person, who, in turn, will perform in a modified way decisions


33 Ibid., 190.

34 Ibid., 191.
based on intentions of the will”. Wojtyła concludes: “Self-determination thus corresponds to the becoming of a human being as a human being.” That is, the choices for actions that I make mark me as a unique and individual person. No one else can make this choice and perform this action in precisely the same way that I am, at this very moment, here and now, making this choice and performing this action. What is more, as we just noted, the choice for and fulfillment of this particular action (as opposed to that action) realizes certain values that shape and reveal the person in his or her unique individuality. In this way, the actions one chooses to perform determine who one is as a unique and irreplaceable human person. That is, “the efficacy that is also self-determination fully discloses the person as a subjective structure of self-governance and

35 Köchler, "The Dialectical Conception of Self-Development", 76-77.

36 Wojtyła, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination, 192.


38 Peter J. Colosi, "The Uniqueness of Persons in the Life and Thought of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II, with Emphasis on His Indebtedness to Max Scheler," in Karol Wojtyła’s Philosophical Legacy, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 68. Here the author offers an excellent quote from John Crosby that truly captures the unique individuality of each person that is found throughout Wojtyła’s writings (emphasis mine): “The loss of any person would not be a negligible loss on the grounds that so many persons remain, but would be an almost infinitely great loss, as if the only person in existence had been lost.” This recalls for us the claim made by Stein that “every one of us, every individual, is unique in kind, I mean, each of us is our own species”. See Edith Stein, Potency and Act, trans. Walter Redmond (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2009), 395. Levinas too, of course, upheld the incommensurable irreplaceability of each and every person.
self-possession". Through the efficacy of my choices I determine who I am. I possess and govern myself. I am responsible for myself and the choices that make me who I am. 

According to Wojtyła, human actions “reveal the wholeness, originality, and unrepeatability of each human being”.

Now these actions are, of course, not performed in an isolated vacuum. Wojtyła is fully aware that, in acting, the human person “usually – if not always – … in one way or another acts ‘together with others’”. My actions directly and indirectly affect others and visa versa. Thus my self-enactment is always already ethical. In this way the morality of my actions is two-fold. As we have just discussed, my actions are moral because they necessarily imply choice and thus responsibility. But my actions are also always already moral, or ethical, because of the intersubjective realm in which I necessarily perform them. Although Levinas does not place the same emphasis directly upon human action per se, Wojtyła’s view of self-possession and thus responsibility for one’s own actions, seems to be quite harmonious with Levinas’ insistence on the responsibility of the ethical self who states “here I am” in response to the encounter with the other. This

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40 See Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 199 (emphasis original): "Through the aspect of the self-determination manifested in my action, I who am the subject of that action discover and simultaneously confirm myself as a person in possession of myself. To the essence of my I, or self, belongs not just self-consciousness, but more importantly self-possession. Self-consciousness conditions self-possession, which manifests itself primarily in action. Thus action leads us into the very depths of the human I, or self.”

41 Karol Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?," in Person and Community: Selected Essays, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 199.

42 Wojtyła, The Acting Person, 315, note 75.
correspondence in thought is especially strong in light of Wojtyła’s recognition of the necessarily ethical aspect of all human actions. Wojtyła discusses this intersubjective and thus ethical aspect of the human person through his concepts of participation and alienation.43 As we will see, participation is key to understanding Wojtyła’s explication of solidarity.

Wojtyła ultimately claims that we not only act “together with others” but “[a]s human beings, we are capable of participating in the very humanity of other people”.44 There is much to unpack in this bold claim. First it should be noted that, for Wojtyła, “[w]hen I construct an image of the person as subject on the basis of the experience of the human being, I draw especially upon the experience of my own self, but never in isolation from or in opposition to others”. That is, “I must include both others and myself in the whole process of understanding the human being”.45 While in certain ways it may seem that Wojtyła privileges the self and the experience of the I in a way that Levinas might claim is reductionistic,46 through the notion of participation Wojtyła attempts to

43 Ibid., "In this way in the place of 'intersubjectivity' as a purely cognitive category we have now, so to speak, introduced 'participation'". Wojtyła entitled the final chapter of his book, "Intersubjectivity by Participation" (emphasis mine).

44 Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 200.

45 Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community", 221, emphasis mine.

46 See for example Wojtyła's comment in The Acting Person, 316, note 77: "From the position of this counterproposition the essential knowledge of man as the person is the knowledge that emerges in his relations to other persons. While acknowledging the validity of this epistemological position this author - after due consideration to the arguments for and against - still holds that a sound knowledge of the subject in himself (of the person through the action) opens the way to a deeper understanding of human intersubjectivity..." Levinas and Stein could be included as representatives of this "counterproposition". However, with Wojtyła's prior acknowledgement (p. 315, note 75) that all human action is necessarily "together with others", it would seem he erects an
prevent a reduction of the other to the self (or visa versa). In fact, the notion of participation is precisely the way in which Wojtyła attempts to keep the self and the other as separate and unique individuals while acknowledging that human persons also act together and can participate in each other’s lives. Participation is thus “the property by virtue of which we as persons exist and act together with others, while not ceasing to be ourselves or to fulfill ourselves in action, in our own acts”. That is, participation “serves… to specify and express what it is that safeguards us as persons along with the personalistic nature and value of our activity as we exist and act together with others in different systems of social life”. Much like Stein’s emphasis on the separation between the self and the other via the difference between primordially and non-primordially held experiences, Wojtyła too insists on an irreducible difference between the self and the other according to human experience. This difference, or disparity, is clearly evident when one is the object of one’s own experience, that is, when I am self-aware (self-conscious) of my experiences as uniquely mine. Wojtyła calls this an “inner experience”. As such, this inner experience is non-transferable beyond myself: “Self-consciousness, like self-possession, as the name itself suggests, is not transferable beyond unnecessary (and impossible) separation of human action vs. human action together with others for the sake of his analysis.

47 Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 200, emphasis mine.

48 Wojtyła, The Acting Person, 5-7. We are here, of course, in the realm of the classic issue of the existence of other egos beyond my own and how I can know that such egos exist. Wojtyła did not himself deal directly with the epistemological problem of how one comes to know the other I. Rather, he accepts that this is indeed experientially possible and directs his efforts instead to what this encounter is like and the consequences thereof. See Szostek, 65. We, of course, believe that Wojtyła deals with this issue in a way consonant with Stein’s approach and ultimately able to be put into dialogue with Levinas’ views.
the individual concrete I, or self, that experiences itself and consequently understands itself in this manner.” 49 Self-consciousness is always and only ever a primordial experience of the self. I, obviously, cannot be self-conscious of you nor self-aware of your self-consciousness. Now, while I can never experience the other as a self, or I, the way I experience myself this way, this does not mean I cannot recognize that the other experiences him or herself precisely as a self, or I. 50 Recognizing that the other is also an I, is a fundamental aspect of participation and thus deserves a more in-depth examination.

Wojtyła states, “[t]he consciousness that the other is another I stands at the basis of what in Osoba i czyn [The Acting Person] I defined as participation”. 51 In this way, we see that, for Wojtyła, to act together with others, participation, can only happen at the level of human personhood. As we have already seen, actions manifest the human being as a unique and individual person. Thus acting with others will also manifest one’s personhood. But this with is important for it implies that the other is no mere object for me that I use in my actions (such as in I act with, that is, use a computer to type these sentences). When I act with others I do not use them as some means to a desired end. Rather, in acting with others, I am, precisely acting with other human persons, who are personal subjects in their own right. This is why recognition of the other as an other I is

49 Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 199. See also The Acting Person, 7: “...the experience had from the inside is only possible in relation to the man who is myself, and... this inner experience can never be had in relation to any man but myself. All other men are included in experience had from the outside, termed 'outer experience.'”

50 Ibid., 199-200 (italicized in the original): "Although I cannot experientially transfer what constitutes my own I beyond myself, this does not mean that I cannot understand that the other is constituted in a similar fashion - that the other is also an I."

51 Ibid., 200, italicized in the original.
fundamental to participation. In this way also, Wojtyla makes the further claim (alluded to above) that “[a]s human beings, we are capable of participating in the very humanity of other people, and because of this every human being can be our neighbor”. 52 Here too, at this level of participation in the very humanity of the other (who is my neighbor), recognition that the other is an I is crucial: “participation in that being’s humanity [is] a participation arising from my awareness that this being is another I” and “[a]nother person is a neighbor to me not just because we share a like humanity, but chiefly because the other is another I”. 53 Now, how one comes to recognize the personal subjectivity of the other is precisely the point at which Levinas might raise his hand in objection. According to Wojtyla, to recognize the selfhood of the other “I must become aware of and experience, among overall properties of that other ‘human being’, the same kind of property that determines my own I”. That is, “I as though transfer what is given to me as my own I beyond myself to one of the others, who, as a result, appears primarily as a different I, another I, my neighbor”. 54 The property that determines myself as an I is, as we have seen above, self-determination through self-possession and self-governance. Thus recognition that the other is also an I means, for Wojtyla, that the other is also constituted as a human person as I am through self-possession and self-determination. 55

52 Ibid., italicized in the original.

53 Ibid., 200-201, italicized in the original, emphasis on "is" is mine.

54 Ibid., 202 and 200-201, italicized in the original.

55 Ibid., 200.
Clearly there is here a movement from myself to the other.\textsuperscript{56} While Wojtyła does seem to respect the absolute difference between the self and the other, this movement (from the self to the other) is one which Levinas would reject. Therefore, I would like to propose an amendment at this point of Wojtyła’s schema.

It seems to me that there is a potential confluence of thought between Stein’s concept of empathy and Wojtyła’s notion of participation. Obviously participation cannot be reduced to empathy for empathy is not an “acting together with others”. Rather, empathy is what \textit{enables} one to act together with others \textit{as others}, that is, as human persons which is, as we have seen, constitutive of participation. One can only participate with other human I’s, or human persons. At the same time, when we participate with others, we remain, and in some way, enact ourselves as persons too. Participation thus is, “namely, the ability to exist and act together with others in such a way that in this existing and acting we remain ourselves and actualize ourselves, which means our own I’s”.\textsuperscript{57} To participate in the humanity of others, that is, to act together with others, is precisely the way one enacts one’s self as a unique and individual person. Wojtyła himself notes this constitutive aspect of participation:

\begin{quote}
The person – as that “man who acts together with others” – is in a certain manner constituted through participation in his own being itself. Thus participation is seen as a specific constituent of the person.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} This seems similar to Husserl's approach to the foreign ego where the self is given primacy of place. See the final section of the introduction to this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{57} Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 200, italicized in the original.

\textsuperscript{58} Wojtyła, \textit{The Acting Person}, 316, note 77.
Now in what other way can one both recognize the personhood of the other and maintain one’s own personhood than through the act of empathy? And so perhaps we might amend Wojtyla’s comment on the transfer of my self-constitutive properties to the other as the way in which one recognizes the selfhood of the other to seeing empathy at the foundation of participation. It is through empathizing with the other that I recognize him or her as a personal subject, an I. Thus it is through empathy that I can participate, act together with, others and in their very humanity. This could even be referred to as “a kind of empathy of subjectivity”.\textsuperscript{59} Further supporting this amendment of empathy is Wojtyla’s comment that “the I–other relationship is not universal but always interhuman, unique, and unrepeatable in each and every instance”.\textsuperscript{60} Here I believe both Stein and Levinas would agree with the late pope. To participate in the humanity of others is no mere acknowledgement of our common humanity, but to meet the other, face to face, as a human person, another I.

To participate in the humanity of another human being means to be vitally related to the other as a particular human being, and not just related to what makes the other (\textit{in abstracto}) a human being,… [T]his \textit{thou} – like the I –is always a someone: the \textit{thou} is some other I.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Stephen M. Matuszak, ”Person, Encounter, Communion: The Legacy and Vision of Pope John Paul,” in \textit{Karol Wojtyla’s Philosophical Legacy}, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008), 227. I had already made the connection between Wojtyla’s participation and Stein’s empathy prior to reading this essay and so it was a pleasant confirmation of my thoughts when I came across Matuszak’s claim for some type of “empathy of subjectivity” in Wojtyla’s notion of participation.

\textsuperscript{60} Wojtyla, “Participation or Alienation?”, 201.

\textsuperscript{61} Wojtyla, ”The Person: Subject and Community”, 237 and 241, italicized in the original.
This is an encounter with the other at the level of their personal human subjectivity which is made possible through the act of empathy. I may be so bold to claim that Wojtyła would not entirely disagree. His emphasis on human action as constitutive and revelatory of the human person is consistent with Stein’s claim that empathy is constitutive of the human person. Empathy is precisely a human act in which I enact myself as a person and encounter the other as a person. Indeed, one can even find a version of Stein’s reiterated empathy in Wojtyła’s writings.

We recall that reiterated empathy is when, in empathizing with the experience of the other person, I discern that the object of his or her experience is in fact myself. Thus I am, in a way, given back or returned to myself through the other’s experience of myself. In this way empathy is profoundly constitutive of the self. Now in Wojtyła’s writings we also find a type of “reflexivity” in the relation with the other:

The relation to a thou is in its essential structure always a relation to another, and yet, because one member of this relation is an I, the relation – in a way peculiar to itself – demonstrates the ability to return to the I from which it proceeded.

Wojtyła then goes on to claim that:

When the relation directed from my I to a thou returns to the I from which it proceeded, the reflexivity of this relation (which need not yet be a mutual relation involving the counter-relation thou–I) contains the element of specifically constituting my I through its relation to the thou.

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63 Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community", 242, italicized in the original.

64 Ibid., italicized in the original.
He does not use the word empathy, but clearly his thoughts are here consonant with what we find in Stein’s writings. Indeed, Wojtyła clinches the deal for us when he concludes that:

the *thou* assists me in more fully discovering and even confirming my own *I*: the *thou* contributes to my self-affirmation. In its basic form, the *I–thou* relationship, far from leading me away from my subjectivity, in some sense more firmly grounds me in it.⁶⁵

“[I]n some sense” – Stein’s notion of reiterated empathy provides the explication of *in what sense* participating in the humanity of the other helps to constitute and enact my human subjectivity as well.⁶⁶ However, Wojtyła insists that it is not merely another person with whom I act together, for this other is also my *neighbor*. To understand the significance of who the neighbor is and how the neighbor functions within participation (beyond the self-constitutive function which we have just discussed) leads us to a brief exploration of Wojtyla’s understanding of human community.

Wojtyła makes a distinction between two different “dimensions” of human community: *I–thou* relationships and *we* relationships.⁶⁷ We have already presented the foundation of the communal experience of the *I–thou* relationship in our discussion above on how participation in the humanity of the other is also a form of reiterated empathy. This reflexivity of the *I–thou* relationship is at the basis of it becoming a form of human

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⁶⁵ Ibid., 242-243, italicized in the original.

⁶⁶ See Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 294-295: "We have presented in this respect participation as a dynamic enactment of the person. Enactment, which is the person’s essential feature, is manifested in that performance of actions ‘together with others,’ in that cooperation and coexistence which simultaneously serves the fulfillment of the person."

⁶⁷ Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community", 240.
community but, for Wojtyła, is not yet an actual form of human community. For the *I–thou* relationship to become a form of human community it must become reciprocal:

> Even the unilateral relation of an *I* to a *thou* is already a real experience of an interpersonal relationship, although the full experience of such a relationship occurs only when the *I–thou* relationship has a reciprocal character: when a *thou* that for me becomes a specific other, and thus “also another human being,” simultaneously makes me its *thou*; when two people mutually become an *I* and a *thou* for each other and experience their relationship in this manner. Only then, it seems to me, do we observe the full character of the community proper to an interpersonal *I–thou* relationship.

The *I–thou* relationship is a form of one to one relationship where the emphasis is on the persons themselves and not the multiplicity. As we will see when we describe the *we* relationship, there the emphasis is on the multiplicity and only indirectly on the persons. Now while, as we saw above, in the *I–thou* relationship the *thou* is always a particular human person, not humanity or humanness in general, Wojtyła insists that the *I–thou* relationship can be, and indeed ought to be had with all human persons: “Potentially, therefore, the *I–thou* relationship is directed away from me toward all human beings, while actually it always connects me with some one person.” Now what distinguishes *we* relationships from *I–thou* relationships is not only the emphasis on the multiplicity but also the presence of the *common good*. For Wojtyła, the common good is the “single value” which relates all the various *I*s of the community to one another and unites them. The *we* dimension of human community thus has a different orientation from the *I–thou*

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68 Ibid., 242.

69 Ibid., 243, italicized in the original.

70 Ibid., 246.

71 Ibid., 241-242, italicized in the original.
dimension for the *we* is directed and determined by the common good.\textsuperscript{72} This common good has both an objective and subjective dimension. Objectively, the community strives to attain some particular good. Subjectively, the common good “consists in that which conditions and somehow initiates in the persons acting together their participation, and thereby develops and shapes in them a subjective community of acting”.\textsuperscript{73} This subjective aspect of the common good is important for it mitigates the concern of some who claim that participation in human community diminishes or even abolishes the individual human person.\textsuperscript{74} Wojtyła assures us that, from his perspective, it is the individual person who willfully chooses the common good as his or her own good and, as his or her own good, the good of the individual thus serves the community:

In such communities of being… each of its members expects to be allowed to choose what others choose and because they choose, and that his choice will be *his own good* that serves the fulfillment of *his own* person. At the same time, owing to the same ability of participation, man expects that in communities founded on the common good his own actions will serve the community and help to maintain and enrich it.\textsuperscript{75}

We recall that participation is precisely the way in which humans act together and yet maintain their individual subjectivity. Wojtyła’s understanding of the subjective aspect of the common good, that it is both willfully chosen by the individual and enhances the community, thus follows from his notion of participation.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 247.

\textsuperscript{73} Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 281.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., see 273-274.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 283, emphasis original.
There is another aspect of Wojtyła’s conception of the neighbor that bears upon both the I–thou relationship and the we relationship. We recall that the I–thou relationship, which rests upon the basis of the other as neighbor, can and ought to be had with every human person one encounters. This is important for Wojtyła also claims this I–thou relationship is more fundamental and thus constitutive of all forms of authentic human community, including the we relationships. “Membership of any community presupposes the fact that men are neighbors…”

In this way, Wojtyła also claims that the neighbor is therefore the fundamental “reference system” for all forms of human community, both the I–thou relationship and the we:

> The ability to share in the humanness itself of every man [in which way every man is my neighbor] is the very core of all participation and the condition of the personalistic value of all acting and existing “together with others.”

The only way human community is possible as distinctly human is for all its members to recognize each other as neighbors, that is, to recognize the other and all others as individual human persons. The relation to the neighbor is thus “the ultimate reference point” for all forms of human community and “the ultimate criterion in the development of the coexistence and cooperation of men in the communities and societies that are established at different levels and according to different intracommunal bonds.”

The relation to the other as my neighbor enables communities to be authentically human. This bears a striking resemblance to Stein’s claim that human community is based upon the

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76 Ibid., 293.

77 Ibid., 295, italicized in the original.

78 Ibid., 296 and 298.
subject to subject relationship, not subject to object. That is in communities the members recognize one another as human persons, are neighbors to one another.79

Now while Wojtyła insists on the founding principle of the relation to the neighbor, thus the I–thou relationship, at the basis of all forms of human community, he also acknowledges that the concepts neighbor and member in a community “overlap and interpenetrate in the objective order of things”.80 He verifies this by pointing to “the fact that everybody is a member of a community – even of several communities at once – as well as… the fact that everybody is a neighbor”.81 Thus, although the I–thou relationship, the relation to the neighbor, is presupposed in all forms of community, the common good, which is the particular aspect of the we relationship, can also inform the I–thou relationship:

In this relation [the we] the I and the thou also find their mutual relationship in a new dimension: they find their I–thou through the common good, which establishes a new union between them.82

79 See Edith Stein, Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities, trans. Mary Catherine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000), 130 (hereafter cited as Beiträge as following popular practice, see p. xix). See also chapter three of this dissertation for our analysis of Stein’s understanding of human community.

80 Wojtyła, The Acting Person, 298.

81 Ibid.

82 Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community", 247, italicized in the original. Wojtyła offers marriage as an example of how the we dimension and the common good can enrich the I–thou relationship: “The best example of this is marriage, in which a clearly delineated I–thou relationship, an interpersonal relationship, takes on a social dimension when the spouses accept into this relationship the set of values that may be defined as the common good of marriage and – at least potentially – of family.”
According to Wojtyła, the *I–thou* relationship can thus be enhanced and enriched by the common good of the *we*, adding another dimension to its one on one relation. However, ultimately all participation, all acting together with others, is rooted in the recognition of the other as another *I*, as a human person, and thus as my neighbor.

Wojtyła’s emphasis on the other as neighbor is also directly linked to the Biblical commandment of love: “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). He claims that “the commandment of love is simply the call to experience another being as another *I*, the call to participate in another’s humanity, which is concretized in the person of the other just as mine is in my person”.⁸³ The command to love the other, my *neighbor*, is thus a part of the fundamental reference system of the relation to the neighbor. Indeed, the love command *confirms* the relation to the neighbor as the fundamental reference system or criterion for acting together with others as participation in the humanity of the other.⁸⁴

The love command:

> has itself a thoroughly communal character; it tells what is necessary for a community to be formed, but more than anything else it brings into prominence what is necessary for a *community to be truly human*. It also tells what determines the true dimension of participation…. The commandment of love is also the measure of the tasks and demands that have to be faced by all men – all persons and all communities – if the whole good contained in the acting and being “together with others” is to become a reality.⁸⁵

For Wojtyla, the Biblical commandment to love the other (my neighbor) is the external manifestation of an internal impulse within the human person. Thus it is not imposed from without, forced upon me, but springs from my very self, from myself as a human

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⁸³ Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?”, 203.


⁸⁵ Ibid., 296 and 298-299, emphasis original.
subject or person. However this impulse is not enacted only once and is satisfied but is manifested in every encounter I have with another human being. As Levinas would say, I have an infinite responsibility with which I am never finished. In this way, participation is not seen as an already accomplished fact but rather as a task always to be accomplished and which is never completed. Of participation as a task he states:

Experiencing another human being, one of the others, as another I always involves a discreet choice. First of all, it involves choosing this particular human being among others, which simply means that this particular one from among the others is hic et nunc given to me and assigned to me. The choice here consists in my acceptance of this particular individual’s I, my affirmation of the person.

Participation as a task of recognizing the personhood of the other, that is, of loving the other who is my neighbor, is saying “here I am” to the face of the other. It is to be struck with an unavoidable assignation in which I fear murder more than death. While participation is verified by such positive experiences as love and friendship, according to Wojtyła the reality of participating in the humanity of the other (that is of recognizing the other as a human person) is made even clearer in its negative verifications.

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87 Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?”, 203, italicized in the original. It is interesting that Wojtyła speaks of the other person as “assigned to me”. Levinas too, as we know, speaks of the “assignation of me by another”. See *Otherwise than Being*, 100-101. Wojtyła does not speak of whence this assignation comes. One would assume, looking forward to his papal writings, that he would answer that the other is assigned to me by God. Levinas would not reject this outright for, as we discussed at the end of the previous chapter, God turns me to the other. However, this assignation does not require a divine origin for Levinas. I believe that for Wojtyła, he would claim the divine element in this assignment is necessary.

Such feelings or attitudes as hatred, animosity, aggression, and jealousy, when their subjective complexity is more deeply analyzed, show that they are based on nothing other than the lived experience of another human being as another I. Only this can explain the spiritual oppressiveness of such feelings or attitudes as animosity, hatred, aggression, and jealousy. The torment associated with them shows at least that I am not indifferent to the human being as another I.  

This bears a striking resemblance to Levinas’ claim that “[t]he other is the sole being I can wish to kill”. Wojtyła names such negative verifications of participation alienation:

Alienation basically means the negation of participation, for it renders participation difficult or even impossible. It devastates the I–other relationship, weakens the ability to experience another human being as another I, and inhibits the possibility of friendship and the spontaneous powers of community (communion personarum).

With this distinction between participation and alienation Wojtyła claims that the “central problem of life for humanity in our times, perhaps in all times, is this: participation or alienation?” That is, it is of utmost importance to discern whether our human relations and social structures are those that allow for and manifest participation or are they obstacles to participation, thus manifesting a state of alienation? In this way the task of participation is one with which we are never finished. Thus “[i]t follows that the matter of the dignity of the human person is always more of a call and a demand than an already

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89 Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?”, 205, italicized in the original.

90 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 198.

91 Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?", 206. Wojtyła notes (p. 205) that his notion of alienation is developed as an alternative to Marx's understanding of alienation.

92 Ibid., italicized in the original.
accomplished fact, or rather it is a fact worked out by human beings, both in the collective and in the individual sense”.

We have traced Wojtyła’s thoughts on the human person as the one who manifests him or herself through the actions he or she performs. Particularly, the human person is the one who participates in the humanity of the other, that is, recognizes the human subjectivity of the other, and in this way enacts him or herself through acting together with others. Now we are at last ready to address the issue of solidarity which is fundamentally rooted in Wojtyła’s understanding of the human person as an acting person. As we will see, solidarity is an authentic enactment of the human person acting together with others. It is an authentic attitude of participation.

*The Acting Person – Solidarity as an Enactment of Human Personhood*

Prior to his becoming pope, Wojtyła wrote a brief section on solidarity in his text *The Acting Person*, covering a mere eight pages. Although brief, as rooted in his preceding comments on the acting person and participation as the enactment of the human person acting together with others, much can be gleaned from these few pages. Before we begin unpacking Wojtyła’s explication of solidarity, a caveat is in order – one that Wojtyła himself offers to his readers. He states that his consideration of solidarity, as found in *The Acting Person*, is limited to “the personalistic perspective and in this sense

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That is, while his discussion of solidarity certainly brings us to the threshold of ethics, his concerns keep him focused on the “personalistic significance” of solidarity – “the value of the fulfillment of an action [here, that of solidarity] rather than that type of value of a performed action which issues from its relation to ethical norms”. Wojtyła focuses on how solidarity is an enactment of the human person. Let us turn now to his presentation of this concept.

First it must be noted that, for Wojtyła, solidarity is seen as an authentic attitude of participation. Solidarity is:

the natural consequence of the fact that human beings live and act together; it is the attitude of a community, in which the common good properly conditions and initiates participation, and participation in turn properly serves the common good, fosters it, and furthers its realization.  

Now as we know from our previous discussion, participation is that aspect of the human person whereby he or she exists and acts together with others, recognizing these others as human persons themselves, while maintaining and indeed enacting one’s own human subjectivity. If solidarity is an authentic attitude of participation, then this means that when one enters into solidarity with others one is both recognizing these others as human persons and enacting oneself as a person by entering into solidarity with them. How does one enter into solidarity with others or adopt an attitude of solidarity toward others? The answer to this is rooted in the common good: one chooses the common good as one’s own good. Then, as one’s own good, it serves to foster and further the realization of the

95 Ibid., 284.
96 Ibid., emphasis original.
97 Ibid., 284-285.
good of the entire community of which one is a member. Thus solidarity is the fundamental attitude of all authentically human communities. This is the very same point that Stein made:

First of all it must be said that the solidarity of individuals, which becomes visible in the influence of the attitudes of one upon the life of the others, is formative of community in the highest degree. To put it more precisely: Where the individuals are “open” to one another, where the attitudes of one don’t bounce off of the other but rather penetrate him and deploy their efficacy, there a communal life subsists, there the two are members of one whole; and without such a reciprocal relationship community isn’t possible.98

Wojtyła qualifies the attitude of solidarity, commenting on how it implies “a constant readiness to accept and to realize one’s share in the community because of one’s membership within that particular community”.99 Highlighting this issue of “one’s share” is important, especially when we turn to solidarity in the Christian social justice tradition. It must be linked with the principle of subsidiarity which features strongly in the teaching of the church on issues of social justice. The principle of subsidiarity simply states that “no larger or higher association should ‘arrogate to itself the functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower societies’”.100 On a personal level, subsidiarity is about accepting and keeping to one’s own share in the life of the community and not infringing upon the place that others hold therein. This is what Wojtyła has in mind when he states that “solidarity prevents trespass upon other people’s

98 Stein, Beiträge, 214, emphasis original.


100 Dorr, 80. He is here quoting from the encyclical Quadragesimo Anno, which offers the first explicit articulation of the principle of subsidiarity.
obligations and duties, and seizing things belonging to others”.

However, he also admits that there are certain situations where one is, by virtue of the attitude of solidarity, called to step in and aid others in the realization of their own obligations and duties. In fact, “[i]n such a situation, to keep strictly to one’s own share would mean… [a] lack of solidarity”. What Wojtyła seems to have in mind here are those situations where personal or structural obstacles have arisen that prevent all members from fully participating in the life of the community and enacting their full human personhood. This is the situation of alienation, the negation of participation, spoken of in our previous section. In the face of such obstacles to full participation solidarity actually calls for opposition. Indeed, according to Wojtyła, “the attitude of ‘solidarity’ cannot be dissociated from that of ‘opposition’”. Now people can be opposed to the life and functioning of the community for many reasons and in many ways. Certainly these reasons and relations are not always positive or life-affirming. However, opposition as a manifestation of solidarity does not reject the common good or participation but rather confirms it. Those who stand in opposition do not do so in rejection of the community, but rather in protest against that which has become unhealthy in the community and thus an obstacle to the common good and true participation. Those who manifest this form of positive opposition:

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 284.

104 Ibid., 286.
seek their own place and a constructive role within the community; they seek for that participation and that attitude to the common good which would allow them a better, a fuller, and a more, effective share of the communal life…. There can be no doubt that this kind of opposition is essentially constructive; it is a condition of the correct structure of communities and of the correct functioning of their inner system.\textsuperscript{105}

In this way, opposition as rooted in the attitude of solidarity acts as a type of “checks and balance” for the community to ensure that no obstacles are allowed to develop and tarnish the true life of the community. Or if such obstacles do develop, the stance of opposition raises awareness to this unjust situation so that action can be taken to amend it. Thus Wojtyła states that dialogue is an essential component of communal life. That is, dialogue “that is operative in the formation and the strengthening of interhuman solidarity also through the attitude of opposition” and this despite the “difficulties that it may bring with it along the way”.\textsuperscript{106} What is crucial, according to Wojtyła, is how solidarity and opposition serve the authentic enactment of human persons in community with one another, that is, acting together with others. Solidarity and opposition (as rooted in solidarity) are thus “authentic inasmuch as each respects the personalistic value of the action”.\textsuperscript{107}

To further clarify his position, Wojtyła offers two types of inauthentic attitudes of human participation: conformism and noninvolvement. Conformism is basically a type of sham solidarity and thus a denial of participation. Conformism “consists primarily in an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., italicized in the original.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 287.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 288, emphasis original.
\end{itemize}
attitude of compliance or resignation, in a specific form of passivity.\textsuperscript{108} When one conforms to the community one appears to be participating in communal life but in reality one has actually withdrawn from the community and is in fact indifferent to the common good of the community. Conformism thus is:

\begin{quote}
    a specific form of individualism leading to an evasion from the community, which is seen as a threat to the good of the individual, accompanied by a need to dissimulate oneself from the community behind a mask of external appearances. Hence conformism brings uniformity rather than unity.\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

Noninvolvement seems to be the opposite of conformism but is in fact rooted in the same over-emphasis on the good of the individual. “Noninvolvement is nothing but a withdrawal.”\textsuperscript{110} Here one is completely uninvolved in the life of the community, is absent from the community. Now Wojtyła does admit that the unfortunate situation may arise where the community has become so dysfunctional that those who do in fact care for the common good see no other way to combat the obstacles than through a total withdrawal from the community. However, “[i]f the members of a community see the only solution to their personal problems in withdrawal from the communal life, this is a sure sign that the common good in this community is conceived of erroneously”.\textsuperscript{111} Both cases reveal a rejection or denial of participation and thus they prevent a full enactment of the human person. This is made clear in comparison with solidarity and opposition as authentic

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 289.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 290, italicized in the original.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 291.
forms of participation which are attitudes “that [allow] man to find the fulfillment of himself in complementing others”.

It is interesting to note that Wojtyła’s presentation of opposition in The Acting Person seems to focus on opposition adopted on behalf of one’s own inability to fully participation in the life of the community. As noted above when people stand up in opposition, “they seek for that participation and that attitude to the common good which would allow them a better, a fuller, and a more, effective share of the communal life”. As we will see in our following two sections, opposition rooted in solidarity can also be adopted on behalf of others’ inability to fully participate in the life of the community. What will be maintained in the presentation of solidarity in his papal writings is how solidarity is both an enactment of the human person as such and at the foundation of all authentic human communities.

What we have tried to show in this section is how solidarity is also linked to empathy and ethics (as Levinas understands the term). This we have done by showing how participation, which is a recognition of the personal subjectivity of the other, is enabled by empathizing with the other. Solidarity as an authentic attitude of participation is thus also rooted in empathy. Now although Wojtyła chose to keep his discussion of solidarity at the pre-ethical level, as we will see in the following two sections, solidarity not only enacts the human person as acting together with others, but has a specifically ethical characteristic. Entering into solidarity with others is a manifestation of Levinas’ “here I am” in the time of justice, the realm of the said.

112 Ibid., 285.

113 Ibid., 286, emphasis on “that” is original, emphasis on “them” is mine.
“We – for the Other”

Before we turn our attention to Wojtyła’s later writings on solidarity, after he became Pope John Paul II, we would like to take a diversion into the thought of Józef Tischner. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Tischner, a Christian philosopher, was a personal friend of Karol Wojtyła and the two remained in close contact even after Wojtyła’s election as the Roman Pontiff. As a former student of Roman Ingarten and highly influenced by the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, the tenor of his writings fits nicely within the atmosphere of this present work. Happily, he also wrote a text on solidarity, *The Spirit of Solidarity*, in which he examines “the area of life that is illuminated by the idea of solidarity”.114 It is interesting to note that he makes a rather Levinasian claim in his text. He states that his “task here is not to give advice or to formulate prohibitions or directives; it is something more essential” (6). This sounds strikingly similar to Levinas’ claim that he is not providing his readers with an ethical system, but rather is focusing on the anarchical relationship that precedes all ethical systems.115 What is more, Tischner also rejects the “metaphysical style of thinking about life in society” (27). Indeed, he claims that metaphysical thought is the cause of certain “illusions” when it comes to thinking about human relations and thus “must now be totally discarded” (27-28). In place of metaphysics he proposes ethics as “the proper way of thinking about life in society” (28). One can almost see Levinas nodding his head in

114 Tischner, *The Spirit of Solidarity*, 6. For full bibliographic information on this text see note 24 above. For ease of reading, throughout this section, references to Tischner’s text will appear as parenthetical citations.

115 See chapter two of this dissertation.
approval and agreement. In respect to solidarity, according to Tischner, “more important that the [metaphysical] question ‘How is it?’ is the [ethical] question ‘Whom does it serve?’” (28, emphasis mine). The emphasis is clearly on the human other and the relationship that is had with him or her and not on some ontological analysis of solidarity.

Now it is also important to note that while Tischner clearly takes a phenomenological approach to his topic, he also makes reference to the Christian faith perspective. This is in part due to the context in which his reflection on solidarity is rooted. Tischner takes as his starting point the reality of the Polish workers’ movement, Solidarność, that radically changed the political and economic situation of Poland in 1980. A fundamental characteristic of this movement was the Catholic faith of its participants. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Church played a crucial, underlying role in the Polish Solidarity movement of the 1980’s. It seemed, to the Polish people held hostage to the Communist take-over after World War II, that the church offered the only place where one could experience freedom and human dignity. In this way, the vision of the human person and authentic human life offered by the Christian faith perspective seemed a legitimate and much preferred alternative to the oppressive conditions of communist-run Poland. Thus the references that will be made to, for example, certain passages in the Gospels are pertinent to the actual lived-experience of solidarity manifested in the Polish

116 See Tischner, The Spirit of Solidarity, vii: "Solidarity's hope for a better tomorrow has been fueled by a profound belief in God. Its religious nature is spontaneous, widespread, and genuinely profound."

117 Karłowicz, Dariusz, "'Solidarity' as Church," Thinking In Values, no. 1 (2007): 148-149 and150-152. Thinking In Values is an online journal dedicated to making the thought of Józef Tischner available to English speaking audiences as, sadly, much of his work to date has not yet been translated into English. The journal can be found online at: http://www.tischner.org.pl/thinking.php.
workers’ movement. Obviously not all experiences of solidarity have such religious connections. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, which is examining solidarity as found in the Christian social justice tradition, such a connection is therefore not at all allergic to this project. Tischner’s writings can thus be understood as providing the “philosophical content” for the faith perspective underlying the real-life experience of solidarity upon which he bases his reflections (viii). In his writings we find expressed the “maxims that guide Solidarity members in their quest for a just society” (viii).

According to Tischner, at its most profound level solidarity is a “solidarity of consciences” (4). Already we have entered the realm of ethics, although not of an ethical system for “conscience is prior to those systems” (6). Conscience is the “natural human ‘ethical sense’… independent of the various ethical systems” (6). This seems quite similar to Levinas’ claim that human persons are always already ethical due to the encounter with and call of the other from an immemorial past. For Tischner there is also a call, the call of conscience within us and it “calls above all for people to want to have a conscience” (7, emphasis mine). That is, the “ethic of solidarity” is an “ethic of conscience” for the movement towards others is one that is not enforced from without but comes from within (6-7). Solidarity is thus a virtue “born of itself, spontaneously, from the heart” (3). In this way Tischner makes a distinction between generic forms of human togetherness and solidarity. Quite simply, one can be together with others and not be in solidarity. Solidarity, as we will see, involves a specific form of being together with others. At its core though, “authentic solidarity… is solidarity of consciences” (7).

Indeed, this aspect of the conscience is so crucial for Tischner that he makes the claim: “It is impossible to be in solidarity with people who have no conscience” (7). This bold
statement can perhaps be clarified by recalling Stein’s view that a human community is such only when its members relate to one another at the level of human personhood, that is, subject to subject. If human togetherness is a form of solidarity and solidarity is constitutive of the very formation of human community, then those who refuse to encounter its members as human persons cut themselves off from true participation in this community. The necessity of having a conscience, of the call to want to have a conscience, is thus the call to want to recognize the other as a human person. It is a call to participation, as Wojtyła understood this term. This call to have a conscience leads Tischner to refer to solidarity as an “ethics of awakening” (70). Metaphorically, solidarity “represents a huge forest planted by awakened consciences” (80, emphasis mine). But to what is the conscience awakened, or called to realize?

Very simply, “a person is always in solidarity with someone and for someone” (6). In this way, a plain answer to the above question is that the conscience is awakened by and thus turned toward the other person. Dobrosław Kot notes the importance of prepositions in Tischner’s explication of solidarity. We find the prepositions with, for, and toward, but not against. Tischner offers the Parable of the Good Samaritan as paradigmatic of the ethic of solidarity (8). The Samaritan hears the cry of the wounded man and responds to him. Several things are happening within this simple description.

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118 See Stein, Beiträge, 130-131. As noted above, in a community the members relate at the level of human personhood, that is subject to subject, whereas in an association (or society) the members relate subject to object. As we will see, for Tischner too, solidarity is a highly human, thus personal, act. This is why he emphasizes the conscience.

First there is the wounded man crying out for help. This seems to be the motivating force, the wounded other. But it is a specific type of injury that most arouses our sympathy and outrage: it is “a wound inflicted on one person by another” (8, emphasis mine). Here we are in the realm of human morality for it is not some natural disaster that has inflicted the wound. While this type of injury can certainly call forth the virtue of solidarity with others, here Tischner is focusing on a specific form of solidarity, “the solidarity with those who suffer at the hands of others” (9, emphasis mine). So we see that the with of solidarity implies “those who have been wounded by other people” (8). However, this is not quite accurate for it actually refers to the for. To be with the wounded other is to be for him or her. “There is someone who needs help and another person, a man-in-solidarity, is needed just for him.” In this way, Tischner claims that to be in solidarity with the other is to “carry the burden of another person” (2). This is precisely what the Good Samaritan did in the parable. He stopped in his tracks, quit the path of his own concerns, and turned to the other so to bear the burden of this wounded other who was so grievously injured by someone else. In this way, according to the ethic of solidarity, “the

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120 I am reminded here of the spontaneous acts of goodwill after the earthquakes in Haiti and Japan. Certainly these too are expressions of solidarity with the wounded other. However, the cause of the injury is different than, for example, the unjust working conditions in Poland at the time of the Solidarity Movement. The latter was a form of injustice caused by humans while the former two situations (Haiti and Japan) were the result of natural disasters and, while tragic in their own right, there is nothing “unjust” about an earthquake. Now, the resulting situation in, for example, Haiti, where over a year later people are still living in squalor in “tent cities”, could be a situation of injustice. But the initial cause of the “injury” was not human-made.

121 Kot, 101, italicized in the original.

122 Tischner also here acknowledges that this notion of carrying another's burden is pulled from the scriptures (Galatians, 6:2).
burden of one’s fellow human often becomes greater than one’s own” (3). For the Samaritan, the needs of the injured man on the side of the street were clearly more important than whatever he had been on his way to do.

Reflecting on Tischner’s writings, Chantal Millon-Delsol states that solidarity is thus “the love that responds to the wound and to the shared experience of otherness”.123 For Delsol, solidarity is a type of “face to face sharing”.124 What is shared is a common human reality of insufficiency and finiteness.125 But in this common reality alterity remains and in fact is necessary, for solidarity is not based on human equality. According to Delsol, “equality is the opposite of solidarity which connotes the need for the other”.126 Tischner also recognizes the necessity of otherness when he speaks of solidarity as a form of dialogue (10). His brief analysis of dialogue also bears a remarkable similarity to some of Stein’s comments on empathy. According to Tischner, an honest dialogue requires the partners to be open to one another so to “feel’ the point of view of another” (11). That is, a dialogue requires a certain difference between the partners or there is, quite simply, nothing to discuss. But how does one come to “feel” the other’s point of view?

Tischner’s answer is worth an extended quote:

[W]e must look at ourselves as if from the outside, I with your eyes and you with mine…. As long as I look at myself exclusively with my own eyes, I know only part of the truth. As long as you look at yourself with your own eyes, you, too, know only part of the truth. Likewise, when I look at you and consider only what

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124 Ibid., 80.
125 Ibid., 82-83.
126 Ibid., 84.
I myself see and when you look at me and take into account only what you see, both of us are subject to a partial illusion. The full truth is the fruit of our experiences in common – yours about me and mine about you.…

The first condition of dialogue is an ability to “feel” the point of view of another. It is not simply a question of compassion but of something more – the recognition that someone else, from his point of view, is always to some extent right…. When I undertake a dialogue I am thereby ready to make the personal truth of someone else a part of my truth about that someone and to make the truth about me a part of someone else’s truth. Dialogue is a building of reciprocity (11).

Clearly this passage is consonant with Stein’s explanation of how one empathizes with the other. To “‘feel’ the point of view of another” is precisely “the perceiving of foreign subjects and their experience”. Tischner even comes quite close to her notion of reiterated empathy when he both warns against only perceiving myself from my own perspective (and the other only from his or her own eyes) and claims the need to take into account your experience of me (and mine of you). If solidarity is indeed a form of dialogue then clearly it rests upon the foundation of empathetically encountering the other person for I can only dialogue with another person. We recall too that Wojtyła insists on the reciprocity of the I–thou relationship if it is to become a form of human community and he also speaks of dialogue as a necessary component of being in solidarity with others. Now as to what “constitutes the main theme of the dialogue that grows out of the ethics of solidarity” (12), Tischner states: “Generally speaking, it is suffering – the suffering of one human being caused by another. This kind of suffering rouses a particular indignation” (12). And so we see that, although dialogue requires the alterity of the partners, there is also a certain commonality, as Delsol noted although Tischner’s commonality is perhaps not quite the same as Delsol’s. According to Tischner

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127 Stein, On Empathy, 1.
there must be a “common grammar” (24). It is the grammar of ethics: “Ethics are the
grammar of relationships between people, and their principle, human dignity” (24). One
can claim that the overwhelming presence in this grammar are the words the suffering
other. Because the emphasis is on the suffering other, there is a “high moral standing to
the words of solidarity” (13). Now in his text Tischner focuses not only on the one
wounded by someone else, but even furthermore to the suffering of the exploited worker.
He wants his writings to “refer to concrete reality” and the experience upon which he is
basing his reflections – the unjust situation of Polish workers in the 1980’s – thus refers
to “the suffering of a worker coming from the hands of his or her neighbor” (12). Again,
this limitation is not endemic of all forms of solidarity. We recall that Wojtyła insisted on
the solidarity of all humanity. With Tischner’s emphasis on the one who suffers “at the
hands of others” (9), clearly this opens up solidity for someone to anyone who is
suffering due to someone else. And, as we alluded to above, solidarity can be with
anyone who is suffering at all, regardless of the cause. Tischner himself states that
solidarity is open to all people (3). This brings us back to our consideration of
prepositions.

We now understand the for (“solidarity is for someone”), but what of the with (“a
person is always in solidarity with someone”)? The with in this case actually refers to
those who come together for this wounded other. Thus, there are actually two aspects or
moments of solidarity. One is first and foremost in solidarity with, or rather, for the
suffering other. But one can also enter into solidarity with others who are also for the
wounded one. That is, a “community of people who want to help gathers around the one
in need… We are in solidarity with each other for him”. It is important to note that there is no against here but rather a toward everyone. Tischner states: solidarity “turns toward all and not against anyone” (3). This is quite interesting for while the workers movement in Poland clearly manifested the type of opposition to injustice that Wojtyła says is inseparable from solidarity, keeping in line with Tischner’s thought, this opposition is not against someone, that is against other persons, but is rather against the unjust situation. This is an important distinction for, as such, that means a community grounded in solidarity for the wounded one is open to everyone. This was certainly true of the Solidarity Movement in Poland:

The solidarity community did not acknowledge anyone as an enemy, which was proved by the fact that it was open to everyone who wished to participate in it. Everyone who wanted to have a conscience, regardless of his background, could become its member.129

What this also guards against is the type of opposition to other persons as, for example, envisioned by Karl Marx and his revolution of the poor against the rich.130 And so the dialogue of solidarity for the wounded and suffering other is a dialogue in which all people of goodwill, those who have a conscience (and want to have a conscience), are

128 Kot, 101, italicized in the original.


130 Remember that Wojtyła upheld his notion of opposition as an alternative to Marx's understanding. See Wojtyła, “Participation of Alienation?”, 205. This will be an important point when we look at the writings of Liberation Theology in the next chapter for, as we will see, one of the concerns voiced by Rome against Liberation Theology is its potential to adopt a more Marxist stance in relation to opposition. As will be argued in the next chapter, this is not what is called for in liberation texts. Rather, it is precisely the situation of injustice that is opposed, not people per se. Those who participate in the unjust situation are not turned against, but rather are called to a conversion of heart that will motivate them to join in solidarity with and for the suffering other.
called to participate. This awakening of consciences to the cry of the suffering other thus means that I “realize that another’s suffering is not their own business, but my trouble as well”.\footnote{Kot, 99, emphasis mine.} How this realization takes place is precisely the content of the previous chapter. One empathizes with the other, recognizing this other as a human person. And in this recognition of the other human person is an encounter with the pleading face who commands me not to kill.

Ultimately for Tischner, solidarity, that is solidarity of consciences, “is an ethical movement the basis of which is fidelity” (86). That is, faithfulness is the grounding principle of solidarity.\footnote{Charles Taylor, "Several Reflections on the Theme of Solidarity," \textit{Thinking In Values}, no. 1 (2007): 71. See also Kot, 100.} Tischner highlights this fundamental principle by describing what destroys it and thus destroys solidarity: betrayal.

Betrayal is a cardinal sin against the solidarity of consciences. It is not so much betrayal understood as an abandonment of ideals as it is an outright betrayal of a human being. Betrayal is breaking the bonds of fidelity (83).

Tischner clearly presents betrayal at a personalistic level and thus also as ethical, or rather, anti-ethical. The possibility of betrayal rests upon the prerequisite of “‘being with someone,’ ‘being-together-with-someone’” (84). This sounds strikingly similar to Wojtyła’s “acting together with others”, of which solidarity is an authentic manifestation. That is, in both aspects of solidarity (\textit{being for} and \textit{being with}) there is an element of trust. When we enter into relationships with other people, act together with others, if these relationships are to be authentic the members must be true, or faithful to one
another. I must not lie about who I am or my actions and motivations. And I trust that you will also be honest in your dealings with me. Thus:

A man who shows solidarity is, first of all, a faithful man. Uniting in faithfulness builds trust. Only when I trust that someone will not let me down, can I lay my hope in his hands. I trust that he has a conscience and that this conscience obliges him to be faithful.\footnote{Kot, 101.}

Authentic human bonds, that is social bonds between persons, can only develop where there is faithfulness and trust between its members. I am under an obligation to be faithful to you, this is my responsibility: “Responsibility can be only where fidelity is” (95).\footnote{See also Taylor, 71.}

This is why solidarity is, at its heart, an ethical movement. Although the consequences of action on behalf of solidarity with the suffering other might have a political component (such as the consequences of the Solidarity Movement in Poland which were instrumental in the overthrow of the communist-backed government), at its most fundamental level, solidarity is not motivated by political aspirations, but is ethical. Tischner himself insists upon this. In a later reflection upon the events of 1980 he states: “In the final analysis, the conflicts were of an ethical character and not only political or economic.”\footnote{Józef Tischner, "Perspectives of the New Ethos of Work," Thinking In Values, no. 1 (2007): 31, emphasis mine. This is a translated excerpt from his essay Polska jest Ojczyzną (Poland is the Motherland). See also Stawrowski, 165, emphasis mine: “First, from the very beginning the solidarity community was grounded in ethical values, and the deepest values at that. Second, the bond it was building was a phenomenon radically and programmatically apolitical.” While the Catholic Church played an important role in the Polish Workers’ Movement, as we have noted, Stawrowski claims that solidarity is not only apolitical but also nondenominational (p. 166, emphasis mine): “The thing is that the language in which this deep bond was expressed was not a language of any particular denomination, but the language of ethics.” The point is that at its most fundamental level solidarity is about the face to face encounter between human persons regardless of race, gender, political preferences, or religious affiliation. In this way}
about human persons and human relations. It is not solidarity that is political, but rather
the political realm that always already has an ethical component because it is based upon
and affects human relations. Sadly, we do not always remain faithful to those with whom
we are in relation. We often abuse our faithfulness and betray the trust others have placed
in us. With his reflections rooted in the solidarity of the Polish Workers’ Movement,
Tischner often refers to this betrayal as a form of *exploitation* (16-21). According to
Tischner, “the basic sign of exploitation is *needless suffering*” (17, emphasis original).
This needless suffering may not only be physical, it can be emotional, psychological, or
spiritual (18). But what is key for Tischner is that this form of suffering is caused by
human persons, it is, “directly or indirectly, someone else’s doing – someone somehow
associated with me” (18). We noted above how Tischner focuses on a particular form of
solidarity – “the solidarity with those who suffer at the hands of others” (9). Again, one
can obviously be in solidarity with those whose suffering is not due to human causes (ie.
with someone who is ill or the victim of a natural disaster), but it seems that Tischner’s
focus is at the service of bringing forth the truly personal aspect of solidarity. As Tischner
notes, “an exploited person is an ‘abused’ person” (22). This exploitation is thus “a form
of betrayal of humankind” (24). Using such terms as exploitation and abuse awakens the
conscience to protest and rebel. “To rebel against moral exploitation is a basic duty of
conscience” (24). Indeed, those who have a conscience cannot help but raise their voices

solidarity is rooted in the ethical encounter Levinas describes where I do not even notice
the color of the other’s eyes. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations
with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press,
1985), 85: “The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his
eyes!”

136 Taylor, 71.
against such needless suffering. To protest such human exploitation and betrayal means that one has recognized the other as a human person whose cry for help cannot be ignored. What is more, it is in such acts of solidarity for this suffering other that I enact my humanity as well.

In this way, in the attitude of solidarity there is a balance between the good of others, the common good, and the good of the individual. We noted above how Wojtyła insisted that in participation, or acting together with others, there is a balance between the common good and the individual good.

In a solidarity community the good of a person is tantamount to the good of the group. A community is exceptional because its growth coincides with the development and perfection of an individual…. People in a community are concerned with the good of others, especially those in need, but at the same time this devotion helps them in their individual development.¹³⁷

That the individual is not overwhelmed by the good of others is largely due to the characteristic that solidarity comes from within. As we noted above, solidarity “does not need to be imposed from the outside by force. This virtue is born of itself; spontaneously, from the heart” (3). Solidarity is rooted in the conscience of the individual person. And, as Levinas and Stein have clearly shown us, it is only when I turn to the other that I discover the truth of my own self and enact my human subjectivity. “An individual in his

¹³⁷ Workowski, 110. See also Jacek Salij, "On Solidarity Somewhat Theologically," Thinking In Values, no. 1 (2007): 87-88 where he discusses the “twofold foundation” of solidarity: “the Greek idea of the common good” and “the Christian teachings on the human person”. Salij states that “this twofold foundation protects the balance between interests of an individual and the community”. 336
being-for-others reveals his own face, his true self.” Let us conclude with Tischner’s own summation of his thoughts:

Conscience is the foundation of solidarity, and the stimulus for its development is the cry for help from someone wounded by another human being. Solidarity establishes specific, interpersonal bonds; one person joins with another to tend to the one who needs care. I am with you, you are with me, we are together – for him. We – for him. We, not to look at each other, but for him. Which comes first here? Is “we” first, or is “for him” first? The communion of solidarity differs from many other communions in that “for him” is first and “we” comes later. First is the wounded one and the cry of pain. Later, the conscience speaks, since it is able to hear and understand this cry. This is all it takes for communion to spring up (9, emphasis mine).

The “we – for him”, or we – for the other, is strikingly consonant with Levinas’ thought. Here the ethical me voici is translated into the realm of the said. Solidarity recognizes the other as a human person calling out to me in need. It is a recognition made possible through the empathetic encounter with this other. Thus we also have a consonance with Stein’s thought. Solidarity understood as the we – for the other harkens to the immemorial call of the other and manifests the inspiration of the other that gives witness to God.

We have made little mention of God thus far in this section. While the references made to God and faith raised by Tischner in his text are clearly from the Christian perspective, what he says has a certain consonance with the claims made at the conclusion of our previous chapter. We noted above how solidarity can be described as carrying another’s burden. This has a specifically religious connotation for Tischner for to carry another’s burden is to “fulfill God’s law” (2, cf. Galatians 6:2). As a Christian

\[138\] Workowski, 108. He also states (p. 112), summarizing the views of Scheler, Stein, and Hildebrand: “In a solidarity community a person is an independent subject who, for his full development, needs relationships with other people.”
himself, Tischner further qualifies this by indicating that this concern for and assistance given to the other person is the way in which “the disciple of Christ fulfills His law” (3). We recall Stein’s claim that the act of empathy is how “as believers [humans] comprehend the love, the anger, and the precepts of their God”. And we recall how Levinas helps us to see that the encounter with God turns us to the other such that we discern that the command of God is to ethically respond to the other. Another way to say this is, according to Tischner, that to carry another’s burden is to fulfill the law of God. Tischner also insists that the motivation to be in solidarity for the other must come from within, that is from the conscience. He also claims that “conscience is the voice of God” (7). This is a classic Christian precept. But again, we can interpret this in light of our claims from the previous chapter. The awakened conscience that turns in solidarity to the suffering other has heard the voice of God commanding one to turn to the other. The face of God is not beheld. Only the voice is heard, but it is heard within, as from myself and not from God at all. The command comes from a faceless Face and a voiceless Voice. In this way, the turn to the other in solidarity does not speak the name of God, does not say “I believe in God” but rather insists “here I am” for you. In this way the dialogue of solidarity built upon the common grammar of ethics can be a prophetic testimony to God, without speaking the divine name. Solidarity is a said founded upon an ethical saying. But it is also prayer.

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139 Stein, On Empathy, 11.
140 See for example, Gaudium et Spes, paragraph 16.
141 See Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 149.
During prayer, a human being faces another human being…. Let us remember, during prayer a human being faces not only God but also another human being. This human being wants to see in the other the measure of himself. Do not forget. Whatever you say and do today – you are a measure (104).

The dialogue of solidarity with someone and for someone is a prayer. It is a prayer in which I stand before the other, acknowledging his or her personhood. It is a prayer of encounter in which my own selfhood is measured and enacted. But it is also a prayer said with others, that is, a communal prayer. Liturgy is itself a form of communal prayer and worship. If solidarity can be seen as a form of communal prayer, then it can also be a form of liturgy and worship, although it is worship of God without speaking God’s name or turning to this God. The community bonded by solidarity is turned in prayer to the other who needs them. Thus to the question “Why solidarity?”, Tischner has but one response: “Solidarity: because this is the right way” (6).

An Encyclical on Solidarity

We conclude this chapter by returning to the thought of Karol Wojtyła although we will refer to him here as John Paul II for it is to his papal writings that we now turn. As pope, John Paul referred to solidarity in his very first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). His later encyclical, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), is known, in part, for its brief

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142 We will return to this point in the next chapter.

section on the solidarity of workers.\textsuperscript{144} However, it was not until 1987, almost ten years into his pontificate, that he produced an encyclical in which he expanded upon the nature of solidarity. \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis}, known in English as \textit{On Social Concern}, was John Paul’s seventh encyclical. His explication on the nature of solidarity covers a mere four pages, however, the spirit of solidarity permeates throughout the text. The true aim of the encyclical is “to emphasize, through a theological investigation of the present world, the need for a fuller and more nuanced concept of development” (4/5).\textsuperscript{145} Additionally, the encyclical aims to offer certain examples of how its understanding of development can be put into effect (4/5). Why solidarity features so strongly in \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} is due to the pope’s view that “in order to be genuine, development must be achieved within the framework of \textit{solidarity} and \textit{freedom}, without ever sacrificing either of them under whatever pretext” (33/35, emphasis original). Let us briefly consider this concept of development.

The “fuller and more nuanced” understanding of development offered in \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} stands in opposition to the understanding of development that, at the time of its writing, held sway in the secular world. Anchoring his text in the tradition of \textit{Populorum Progressio}, written by Pope Paul VI in 1967, John Paul wants to broaden

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{145} For ease of reading, in this section all references to \textit{Sollicitudo Rei Socialis} will be placed in parenthetical citations. Two numbers will be included. The first number refers to the paragraph numbering found in the encyclical itself. The second number refers to the page number of this particular publication. Please see note 10 above for full bibliographic information on this text.
\end{itemize}
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the concept of development from its use in the social and economic sciences (8/7).

According to John Paul,

true development cannot consist in the simple accumulation of wealth and in the greater availability of goods and services, if this is gained at the expense of the development of the masses, and without due consideration for the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the human being (9/9, emphasis original).

Rather, true or authentic human development necessarily contains a moral dimension. Indeed, there is a “moral obligation… to take into consideration” which is the “duty of solidarity” (9/9, emphasis original). We cannot yet discuss solidarity. First it must be understood that development, as presented in Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, “must be measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his interior dimension” (29/28, emphasis original). That is, the pope is attempting to give development a more human, and we can also say humane, understanding. Now while the pope acknowledges that development will manifest itself in unique ways according to the different human cultures and societies that exist in this world, what is intrinsic to all forms of human development is its social nature (29/29). This social element is intrinsic to human development precisely because it is human, that is of human persons, and as should be abundantly clear at this point of our study, human persons are intrinsically social thus ethical.

Now as for solidarity, its spirit begins to creep in when John Paul emphasizes that there is but one world in which all the different human cultures and societies live despite

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146 See paragraph 44, p. 48: "In order to take this path [of human development], the nations themselves will have to identify their own priorities and clearly recognize their own needs, according to the particular conditions or their people, their geographical setting and their cultural traditions" (emphasis original).
the tendency to divide the world into East or West, North or South, First, Second, or Third World. The pope insists that there is a “unity of the world, that is, the unity of the human race” (14/13, emphasis original). Sadly he finds that this unity has been “seriously compromised” due to “the various forms of exploitation and of economic, social, political and even religious oppression of the individual and his or her rights, discrimination of every type, especially the exceptionally odious form based on difference of race” (15/13, emphasis original). However, seeing a glimmer of hope, he also notes that:

At the same time, in a world divided and beset by every type of conflict, the conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane (26/25, emphasis original).

It is due to this interdependence of all peoples and nations that the pope declares of “authentic development: either all the nations of the world participate, or it will not be true development” (17/16, emphasis original). That is, peace and justice are “either for all or for none” (26/25, emphasis original). The pope believes so strongly in this conviction that he raises commitment to the development of all people to the level of a moral obligation for all people:

A deeper study of these harsh words will make us commit ourselves more resolutely to the duty, which is urgent for everyone today, to work together for the full development of others: “development of the whole human being and of all people” (30/31, emphasis original).

What is more, this duty is not merely individual, but as pertains to all individual persons, it is also the duty of the societies and nations to which we as individuals belong.

“Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all, and must be shared by the four parts of the world: East and West, North and South” (32/33, emphasis original). And just as societies and nations
commit to assisting the development of individuals, so too “peoples or nations… have a right to their own full development” (32/33, emphasis original). According to John Paul, at its most fundamental level, “true development must be based on love of God and neighbor, and must help to promote the relationships between individuals and society” (33/35, emphasis original). Again insisting on the inadequate view of development as limited to the economic and political realm, the pope emphasizes the moral thus human characteristic of development which necessarily highlights personal responsibility (35/37). This at last brings him to discuss the nature of solidarity itself which, as noted above, forms the framework for authentic human development.

The fifth chapter of Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, offers a “theological reading of modern problems” (35/37, this is also the title of the chapter). John Paul now interprets the breakdown of human unity through exploitation and oppression as a form of sin. Such mistreatment of others is sinful for God “requires from people clear-cut attitudes which express themselves also in actions or omissions towards one’s neighbor” (36/38). He refers directly to the Ten Commandments as paradigmatic of the appropriate attitude that one should have towards God and neighbor. Indeed, “not to observe these is to offend God and hurt one’s neighbor, and… also involves interference in the process of the development of peoples” (36/38-39). According to the pope’s assessment of the current world situation, such hurt and interference has taken and is taking place. Speaking theologically (as he is in this section of the encyclical), to amend this sinful situation requires a “conversion”.

This conversion specifically entails a relationship to God, to the sin committed, to its consequences and hence to one’s neighbor, either an individual or a community (38/40).
This conversion will manifest itself in “the positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations” (38/40, emphasis original). This is the crucial part for the pope – when the interdependence of all persons and nations is “accepted as a moral category” (38/40-41, emphasis original) – for it brings us at last to solidarity. Let us quote from the pope at length:

> When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue”, is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all…. [It is] a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to “lose oneself” for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to “serve him” instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage (38/41, emphasis original).

Solidarity is thus rooted in a sense of responsibility for the other. From the perspective of faith, this responsibility is inspired by the commandments of God. We are called to love and care for the other. This is why John Paul insists that “true development must be based on love of God and neighbor” (33/35, emphasis original). This makes sense in light of our conclusions in the previous chapter. We recall again Stein’s claim that an act of empathy is how “as believers [humans] comprehend the love, the anger, and the precepts of their God”.\(^{147}\) And we recall that the content of God’s experience with which we empathize is, in part, love and care for the human other. Thus, as Levinas insists, “the desirable [God] orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence –

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\(^{147}\) Stein, *On Empathy*, 11.
the other”.148 We also recall the pope’s earlier comments that “the commandment of love is simply the call to experience another being as another I, the call to participate in another’s humanity, which is concretized in the person of the other just as mine is in my person”.149 In this way, solidarity is a true manifestation of the ethical-empathetic person who has entered into a relationship with a God who empathizes with and cares for us.150

Key to enacting the virtue of solidarity is the recognition of the other as a human person (39/41). The pope states:

*Solidarity* helps us to see the “other” – whether a person, people or nation – not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our “neighbor,” a “helper”…, to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the *religious awareness* of individuals and peoples (39/42, emphasis original).

Here much that we have said before comes to mind. First, there is an emphasis on the other as a human person, thus the personalistic aspect of solidarity, that is, of acting together with others who are recognized as human persons. However here we find something strange. John Paul claims that it is *solidarity* that helps one to see the other as a human person. This seems to be a reversal of his previous views as found in *The Acting Person*. We recall that solidarity is an authentic attitude of participating in the humanity of the other person, that is, recognizing the personhood of the other. It would seem then that such participation is enabled by this recognition and not the other way around. That


149 Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?”, 203.

150 See Stein, *On Empathy*, 11: "God can comprehend people's lives in no other way" than through empathizing with us.
is, I “see” the other as a person. This recognition then moves me to enter into solidarity with him or her. The encounter with the other (through empathy) as the one who calls out to me must take place first. I have always already found myself obligated to the other and recognize the humanity and subjectivity of the other. It is through this ethical obligation that I recognize my responsibility and duty to be in solidarity with the other. And so, by the “time” I have entered into solidarity with the other, I have already “seen” him or her as a human person. Now we are clearly speaking here of solidarity as for someone. In a moment, we will also show how the pope’s words also reflect the solidarity with someone. First, we would like to note that here the pope’s language is almost synonymous with Stein’s concept of the association as that form of human relation where “one person approaches another as subject to object”\textsuperscript{151}. This form of relationship, according to John Paul, is completely inappropriate to the attitude of solidarity. According to the virtue of solidarity, people relate to one another as human persons. Thus the form of togetherness that results is an authentic human community where, as Stein upholds, “solidarity prevails”\textsuperscript{152}. The pope’s words reveal their indebtedness to his previous analysis of human participation as acting and being together with others in such a way that I recognize the human subjectivity of the other. Solidarity thus understood is clearly an example of Tischner’s awakened conscience to the suffering other who needs my help. Here, the suffering of the other is spoken of as underdevelopment caused by exploitation and oppression. To end this suffering involves a conversion to the other manifested in the moral value of transforming interdependence into solidarity (39/42). “In

\textsuperscript{151} Stein, Beiträge, 130.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
this way, the solidarity which we propose is the \textit{path to peace and at the same time to development}” (39/42, emphasis original).

Towards the end of the above quote, John Paul speaks of “the importance of reawakening the \textit{religious awareness} of individuals and peoples”. This religious awareness can be understood, à la Levinas, as the “inspiration” of God that turns us toward the other.\footnote{Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 184.} It is the awareness that when we are turned to the other, loving the neighbor in need, we \textit{are} in relation with God. Solidarity with the other manifests an encounter with the God who turns us toward the other. Now while the pope calls for a global solidarity (45/50), thus appealing to all people throughout the world,\footnote{The pope states at the conclusion of his encyclical: "I wish to \textit{appeal} with simplicity and humility to \textit{everyone}, to all men and women without exception" (47/52, emphasis original). This seems to be in line with the view that solidarity is not \textit{against} anyone but rather \textit{towards} all people. That is, the solidarity community (solidarity \textit{with} someone) is open to all people. See Stawrowski, “Solidarity Means a Bond”, 167.} for the peace and prosperity of all the peoples and nations of the world can only be accomplished thus (45/49); he also offers a specific call to solidarity within the church itself. The pope, as leader of the Roman Catholic Church, gives solidarity a specifically \textit{Christian} interpretation by claiming that the “\textit{model of the unity} of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our \textit{solidarity} [is] the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons” (40/43, emphasis original). This Christian perspective is, of course, one that Levinas would not embrace, however it makes sense in light of the pope’s own religious context. John Paul even goes on to link solidarity with the very life of the church: “This specifically Christian communion… is the \textit{soul} of the Church’s vocation to be a ‘sacrament’” (40/44, emphasis original). Thus,
By virtue of her own evangelical duty, the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good” (39/41).

That is, solidarity ought to be a fundamental characteristic and virtue of the life of the church itself. The church “calls us and… tirelessly promotes… the exercise of the human and Christian solidarity” (40/44). Thus the church manifests solidarity with someone for the other. In this way, the church ought to be the example par excellence of solidarity, of the we – for the other. We recall the claim of the World Synod of Bishops noted at the beginning of this chapter: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” 155 Such action and participation can only be accomplished through the virtue of solidarity.

This claim, that the church can and ought to be a manifestation of a solidarity community, of the we – for the other, will serve as the point of exploration in our final chapter. John Paul II declares in his encyclical that “the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest” (46/51, emphasis original). We recall Tischner’s claim that solidarity is enacted specifically for the wounded and suffering other, specifically in his reflections, the exploited worker. John Paul’s encyclical seems to broaden this focus to include all those who are poor and suffering. As we will see in our final chapter this call to enter into solidarity with the suffering other who is poor, oppressed, and outcast has found particular focus in the writings of Liberation Theology

155 Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World”, 289, emphasis mine.
where they speak of an option for the poor. We will close this study reflecting upon the theme of solidarity as it appears in these liberation writings for it is here that the virtue of solidarity as the we – for the other has been deeply embraced. It is in the thought of Liberation Theology that we find reflections on the human-divine relation (from a Christian perspective) that are most akin to Levinas’ insistence that it is only through the ethical relationship with the other that one can enter into relationship with God: “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.”156 What is more, we will find in these writings the consequences of this recognition – that not only does my ethical relationship with the other witness to God, but it can also be a form of spirituality, prayer, and even liturgy. It is in Liberation Theology that solidarity as the we – for the other is truly a solidarity of awakened consciences – consciences awakened to the suffering others who are the poor, oppressed, and outcast in our very midst. Consciences awakened to the precepts of God that come to me as from a voiceless Voice who commands: Love thy neighbor. Bear another’s burden.

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156 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 78.
CHAPTER SIX

Ethical-Empathy as a Philosophical Framework
for Christian Solidarity in the Liberation Tradition

Introduction

It needs to be realized, however, that for us Latin Americans the question is not precisely “How are we to do theology after Auschwitz?”…. Our task here is to find the words with which to talk about God in the midst of the starvation of millions, the humiliation of races regarded as inferior, discrimination against women, especially women who are poor, systematic social injustice, a persistent high rate of infant mortality, those who simply “disappear” or are deprived of their freedom, the sufferings of peoples who are struggling for their right to live, the exiles and the refugees, terrorism of every kind, and the corpse-filled common graves of Ayacucho. What we must deal with is not the past but, unfortunately, a cruel present and a dark tunnel with no apparent end.¹

We recall from our first chapter that one of Levinas’ great concerns, perhaps the underlying anguish that pulses throughout his work, is how to philosophize and speak of morality after Auschwitz, that is after the very failure of philosophy and morality.² While this is a vital question that perhaps can never be adequately answered, in the above quote we find a radical questioning of this important and very real concern. For, while the Holocaust of World War II may have come to an end with the allied liberation of Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen (to name but a few of those places of nightmare and death), it is a well known fact that genocide, torture, and death of the innocent continue throughout the world and to this very day. Indeed, in certain countries the banal³


² See the end of chapter one.

³ Certainly the situation of poverty is never banal for those who suffer under it. I simply mean to point out that the gross disregard for human life does not only happen in such extreme situations as was found during World War II, in the killing fields of.
situation of poverty and unemployment that results from social, economic, and governmental supported injustice has reached epidemic proportions. And so perhaps the question is not so much how to speak of humanity and God after Auschwitz, but how to speak of the human person and God now – in the midst of the injustice that still exists today and in response to the anguished cries of millions of innocent victims whose Thou shalt not kill have been and still are ignored?

This question has received much attention from the theologies of liberation. I say theologies, for it is important to recognize that many forms of theology have been grouped under the umbrella term of “liberation theology”. Feminist theology, Black theology, theologies springing up in Asia and Africa, even certain forms of theology found in Europe and North America have been labeled as liberationist whether or not their proponents accept the title. Here, in this concluding chapter we will focus only on the form of Liberation Theology that is indigenous to Latin America. This choice is somewhat pragmatic due to the prolific writing done from this context and the accessibility of these texts to an English speaking audience. However, Latin American Liberation Theology is also recognized as the foundational source of the liberation movement. And so it is perhaps wise to turn to these authors who gave birth and shape to this fascinating and highly relevant form of theology.

Cambodia, in Bosnia or Rwanda, etc., but also manifests itself everyday and everywhere in the faces of the poor masses amongst us and whom we often overlook.


5 All forms of thought are of course based on that which preceded it. The political theology of, for example, Johann Baptist Metz can be seen as preceding the liberation
While a systematic presentation of the theology of liberation is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that its guiding concern is “how to proclaim God as Father in an inhuman world”. That is, it is “not so much a theology about suffering as it is a theology written from suffering”.

How are we to talk about a God who is revealed as love in a situation characterized by poverty and oppression? How are we to proclaim the God of life to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly? How are we to acknowledge that God makes us a free gift of love and justice when we have before us the suffering of the innocent? What words are we to use in telling those who are not even regarded as persons that they are the daughters and sons of God?

These are the agonizing questions that Liberation Theology attempts to answer. They are challenging questions and potentially ‘dangerous’ for they threaten those who live in comfort and hold positions of power at the expense of those less fortunate than themselves. However, they are also questions of hope for although they point to the

movement. However, it is not our purpose here to trace the historical roots of Liberation Theology. The particular form of theology developed in Latin American in the 1960's and 70's was the first to bear the name of Liberation Theology, and so in that sense, it is foundational for the other forms of theology that have been grouped under this same title. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 5. In the introduction to this text Nickoloff claims that “theology of liberation” was first used at a gathering of priests in Chimbote a month before the now famous Medellín conference in the summer of 1968.


7 Paul G. Crowley, "Theology in the Light of Human Suffering: A Note on "Taking the Crucified Down from the Cross""," in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 16, emphasis original. This quote is referring directly to the writings of Jon Sobrino, however it is a point that can be applied to all of Latin American Liberation Theology as the previous and following quotes from Gutiérrez make quite clear.

reality that all is not well in the world, that a life of poverty and affliction is not what God has intended for humankind, there is also a recognition that such injustice is a situation that must be remedied if we truly believe in a God of love and life. There is hope that the terrible reality of oppression and innocent death can in fact be remedied – someday and somehow – for God desires the life of even the least person on earth. However, this can only happen if we who are here on earth work for such a transformation. Indeed, according to the theologians of liberation, it is not so much because we believe in God that people are required to work against the situations of injustice and oppression that compose the reality of our world. Rather it is because we believe in a God of love and life that one recognizes the obligation to work for the end of suffering and oppression. The type of God one believes in is, as we will see, pivotal to Liberation Theology. Thus Liberation Theology has drawn both harsh critics and faithful followers for its attempt to understand God and a faith-filled following of this God (both on an individual and communal level, that is, as church) “from within a commitment to the poor and marginalized”. 9 However, if one makes a careful reading of the many books, articles, essays, and speeches from this tradition, one finds not so much a radical dissent from Mother Church, but rather a radical dedication to Jesus’ proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

This is a message of radical hope and love to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized of the world. Those who believe in the God who has declared this message of life and liberation are called to make God’s message a reality. It is the message and task that is proclaimed from every page of text and transcribed word of the theology of liberation.

At the ends of the previous two chapters, I alluded to a potential harmony between the ethical-empathetic enactment of human personhood as found in the dialogue between the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein and the concept of solidarity as elucidated by Liberation Theology. In the last chapter we explored the notion of solidarity from both a philosophical and theological perspective, showing its general resonance with the ethically-empathetic enactment of human personhood. In this chapter I will explore directly the place of solidarity within Liberation Theology, showing its resonance with all that has been discussed thus far in this dissertation. In this way, this chapter will serve as a conclusion to our reflections on and analysis of Levinas’ ethical philosophy and Stein’s concept of empathy. These reflections will serve to show one way in which the philosophical thought of these two writers can be both practically embraced and made manifest in the real, concrete lives of human persons here and now. Reflecting on the precepts and themes of Liberation Theology naturally focuses our thought in a spiritual and religious direction, and one that is decidedly Roman Catholic.10 This is a deliberate but by no means essential focusing for, as has been commented in previous

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10 Although there is no monopoly by Roman Catholicism in the area of Liberation Theology, we will limit our focus here to its specifically Roman Catholic manifestation.
chapters, the thought of Levinas and Stein has an application beyond the realm of organized religion although perhaps not beyond the realm of ‘spirituality’, if we understand spirituality in its most basic and generic form as “the way a person leads his or her life”. Thus all human persons have a spirituality and one that is decidedly ethical for how one leads his or her life always already involves ethical responsibility toward the other. And so although the practical disclosure of the ethical-empathetic person can take many forms, this closing chapter will attempt to show the harmony between the ethically-empathetic human person and the faithful follower of Christ as envisioned by Latin American Liberation Theology. As we will see, to believe in the God of love and life and to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ means precisely to recognize the face of the other who is the victim of oppression and injustice. It is to enter into solidarity with the poor and marginalized so that my love of neighbor truly is love and worship of this God of love and life. What is more, this recognition of the other and entrance into solidarity with him or her is a reality that has a decidedly communal component. That is, solidarity with the poor and marginalized is an individual commitment made with others so that we may be for the other. Understood from a religious perspective, this communal solidarity with the suffering other, Tischner’s we – for the other, is the essential nature of the church.

There are four main sections to this chapter. First we will explore more directly certain points of harmony between Liberation Theology and the overall tenor of Levinas’ and Stein’s thought. Next we will reflect on the notion of a preferential option for the poor. This is perhaps the all-encompassing precept of Liberation Theology. As we will

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see, it is also synonymous with the act of solidarity. The third section will explore how Liberation Theology presents this preferential option (aka: solidarity) as a key component of one’s individual spirituality, that is, as a living out of one’s faith in God and, specifically here, Jesus Christ. Lastly, we will reflect upon solidarity at the communal level of the church. Here it will be shown how, according to Liberation Theology, the very nature and meaning of the church is intimately tied to this option for the poor such that the prayer and worship of the church can be found in its acts of solidarity with and for the poor.

**Why Liberation Theology?**

It is important at the outset of this chapter to explore how Liberation Theology can enter into the dialogue that has taken place here thus far. That is, what recommends Liberation Theology to the philosophical thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein? While the following three sections of this chapter will help to answer this question, in this section we will explore certain points of contact between these two realms that will form a basis for the analysis that is to come.

To begin with, we recall Levinas’ overall disdain for theology as a form of onto-theology. As we know, for Levinas Western theology – that is, European and North American theology – falls into the same totalizing, intentional trap for which he criticized Western philosophy.\(^\text{12}\) Liberation Theology also finds fault with European theology and Western/Northern Theology in general. Indeed, Liberation Theology offers itself as a

new way of doing theology that breaks with the trends and emphases of European
Theology. In chapter one of his ground-breaking text, *The True Church and the Poor*,
Jon Sobrino offers an excellent reflection on the difference between European Theology
and Liberation Theology. While he is careful to note that Liberation Theology does not
reject European Theology outright, Sobrino does claim that, ultimately, European
Theology has been found inadequate to speak to the concrete reality of the Latin
American situation which is a situation of gross injustice, oppression, and poverty. This
is, in part, why the theology of liberation developed – to offer a way to speak of God that
can truly resonate in the lives of the Latin American people, that is to speak of God from
within a situation of suffering (as we have noted). This is perhaps the crucial difference
between European theology and Latin American theology – its starting point. As Sobrino
notes, for European Theology, the primary interlocutor is the atheist. Thus, the task of
European Theology is to explain and justify the position of faith in God. However,
according to the liberationist theologians, faith in God (or the lack thereof, that is, atheism) is not the issue. For Liberation Theology, the primary interlocutor is not the non-believer but the “non-person” – the poor, outcast, and wretched of the earth. The
reality of the situation is that “in Latin America… unbelief is minimal; by contrast,

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15 Ibid., 18.
misery and poverty are maximal”. Thus while European Theology focuses on a “crisis of meaning” and attempts to rationally explain sinful human reality; Liberation Theology is rather concerned with the “crisis of reality” and aims to transform the sinful reality of the world. According to Sobrino,

European theology is generally interested in explaining the truth of the faith and in clarifying its meaning when it is obscured. The concern that has stirred this theology to its major achievements has been pastoral, although relevant only to a cultural elite. The questions to which it has sought answers are these: How is it possible to believe today? What meaning can faith have today when its meaning seems to have been lost? The task has been to recover the meaning of faith.

Latin American theology is interested in liberating the real world from its wretched state, since it is this objective situation that has obscured the meaning of faith. Its task is not primarily to restore meaning to the faith in the presence of the wretched conditions of the real world. It is to transform this real world and at the same time recover the meaning of the faith. The task, therefore, is not to understand the faith differently, but to allow a new faith to spring from a new practice.

In this way, we see that Liberation Theology offers a radical turn to the other who cries out to us. It is an “irruption” of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed into the spotlight of history. It is a “new presence of those who had actually been absent in our society and in the church”. Coming from a country of poverty and oppression, Gustavo Gutiérrez


17 Sobrino, The True Church and The Poor, 16-17.

18 Ibid., 20-21.


20 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor," in Mysterium Liberationis, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 235. He goes on to clarify (emphasis original): “By absent we mean of little or no significance, as well as being without the opportunity to manifest their sufferings, solidarities, projects, and hopes.” These absent ones are the “others” who have been reduced so much as to be almost nothing in the eyes of the privileged and powerful, thus “non-persons”. 
also perceives a real tension between the power and culture of Western and Northern
countries (most notably the United States of America) and the struggling countries of
South America. What he finds alarming is the threat of assimilation where the fate of
these poorer countries “was to be absorbed by the superior culture and religion” of the
conquering and colonializing nations of the West.21 This threat of assimilation is an
excellent example of the totalizing trend of Western thought that reduces the other to the
same. What is required to combat or even prevent this totalizing reduction is a profound
“letting be” and respect for the otherness of these minority cultures and spiritualities.
Even more so, not only should this otherness be given the space to flourish, it should
even be entered into through the participation of solidarity:

The perspective of the “underside of history” is an obligation still in full force. The
perception of the otherness of the poor and oppressed (in social, racial, cultural and
gender terms) enables us to understand how they can enjoy a keen sense of God,
which does not disdain celebration and joy, in the midst of a situation of
expropriation and a struggle for justice. By unknown paths the experience of
oppression has turned out to be fruitful ground for the mystical dimension of
Christian life.22

In this way, Liberation Theology offers a type of de-centering of European theology and
the European perspective which Sobrino sees as both historically and geographically
anachronistic.23 European history and culture is no longer considered the center and


22 Ibid., 161.

23 Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor, 36. It is worth noting Sobrino’s words
in full: “My criticism is directed more to European theology’s lack of self-criticism in its
accomplishments and, above all, to the historical anachronism of which it is guilty when
it supposes that a theological understanding that proved liberating in a particular
historical situation must continue to be liberating. Such an outlook implies that theology
is profoundly ahistorical. To this historical anachronism must be added a geographical
pinnacle of humanity. Rather it is one aspect among many. According to liberation theologians, it is time for the European (and we may add North American) perspective to relinquish its totalizing grasp, sit back, and listen to other voices – here the voices of the wretched of Latin America, “the other” to the European “self”. This is certainly a movement that is in harmony with Levinas’ thought.

This de-centering of European Theology and focus instead on the poor and oppressed shows how Liberation Theology offers an epistemological break and new hermeneutics for theology in general. Quite simply, the epistemological and hermeneutical center of Liberation Theology is the perspective and life of the poor and oppressed. “The poor in Latin America have made us realize that living as Christians in our contemporary world, with an open eye and an open heart for the real problems of people, challenges us to break out of our individualism and elitism and start listening to the Bible with new ears.” What is more, the world of the poor is the epistemological center because, in the estimation of the liberation tradition, it is “the privileged locus of the presence and

anachronism. European theology was not conscious that it was theologizing from the vantage point of the geopolitical center of the world. It failed to see that the world is not identical with this center and cannot be understood from the standpoint of the center. It failed to realize that the world is instead a whole in which center and periphery are in tension and that from the properly Christian standpoint it is the periphery (the poor) or at least the repercussions at the periphery that are the privileged source of theological understanding.”

24 West, 129-130.

revelation of God". That is, the face of God is to be found in the pleading, vulnerable faces of the poor and oppressed. Here too is a point in harmony with Levinas’ view that the trace of God passes in the face of the other. As we will see, just as Levinas insists that the turn to God is always already and necessarily a turn to the other, so in Liberation Theology we find a profound link between love of God and love of one’s neighbor. Indeed, in 1979, the Latin American bishops declared in an official document that “the love of God, which is the root of our dignity, necessarily becomes loving communion with other human beings and fraternal participation” (327). There is no path to God save through the human other. Or, as Levinas puts it: “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.” We will reflect more on this new way of confronting and understanding reality from “the underside of history” when we examine the preferential option for the poor below. As we will see, according to Liberation Theology, it is only in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed that human life and spirituality, faith in and relationship with God, are possible and have any meaning at all. The reality of the poor offers the all-encompassing framework for the


27 See Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: 15th Anniversary Edition, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 110-116. In this section, entitled "Conversion to the Neighbor", Gutiérrez shows this link between the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor. We will return to this crucial theme throughout this chapter.


theology of liberation. This emphasis on “the others” who are the victims of society, the “non-persons”, certainly offers a point of connection between Levinas’ thought and Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology focuses on real human life and faith as it is lived among and in relationship with others. Again, just as for Levinas the turn to God necessarily is a turn to the other, so too for Liberation Theology one can only turn to God through the human other, and particularly through the suffering other.\(^{30}\) Thus, Liberation Theology witnesses to a de-centering of the self toward relationship with the poor and suffering other who gives meaning and purpose to my life. It is a similar type of de-centering as that found in Levinas’ thought.

Another point of contact with Levinas’ thought and Liberation Theology is its methodology in which praxis is emphasized over reflection and analysis. Again turning to Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the “founding fathers” of Liberation Theology, he has claimed from his very first writings to his most recent that “the theology of liberation is reflection on practice in the light of faith”.\(^{31}\) He is adamant that theology is the “second step” and must follow after the “first step” of pastoral activity which is manifested as “commitment to the service of others”.\(^{32}\) For Gutiérrez, theology is ultimately a language. “It attempts to speak a word about the mysterious reality that believers call God. It is logos about theos”.\(^{33}\) However, before we can ever speak of this mysterious reality by which humans are called to enter into a relationship of love and hope, first we must have the space of

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\(^{30}\) Oliveros, 6-7.

\(^{31}\) Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology”, 27, emphasis mine.

\(^{32}\) Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 9.

\(^{33}\) Gustavo Gutiérrez, The Density of the Present: Selected Writings, 186.
silence. “God is first contemplated when we do God’s will and allow God to reign; only after that do we think about God”.  

Put directly:

We must first establish ourselves on the terrain of spirituality and practice; only subsequently is it possible to formulate discourse on God in an authentic and respectful way…. The mystery of God comes to life in contemplation and in the practice of God’s plan for human history; only in a second phase can this life inspire appropriate reasoning and relevant speech…. In view of all this we can say that the first stage is silence, the second is speech.

This notion of theology following after or flowing from spirituality is succinctly revealed in Gutiérrez’s phrase that “our methodology is our spirituality”. We will address spirituality and its practice in a later section. What is important to note here is how the method of Liberation Theology – act first, reflect later – seems akin to Levinas’ dethroning of ontology for ethics as first philosophy. First is doing – acting, responding to the other in need, only then can we speak of being (if being is spoken of at all). There is an ethical emphasis in the theology of liberation that is quite in harmony with the ethical priority upon which Levinas also insists. It is the priority of the ethical saying over the thematized and concretized said. As we will see the spirituality of liberation can be likened to an ethical saying in which the trace of God passes, while theology is the said into which this spirituality evolves (devolves?). Ultimately, Liberation Theology is deeply concerned with the interhuman reality and witnessing to how this reality is one

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34 Gutiérrez, On Job, xiii, emphasis mine.
35 Ibid., emphasis mine.
that testifies to the God of love and life, rejecting the idols of oppression, injustice, and death. As Levinas himself said: “To know God is to know what must be done.”

Two final points are worth mentioning here. First, if it is true, as argued in our preceding chapter, that the ethical-empathetic enactment of the human person naturally manifests itself in acts of solidarity with others, and especially with suffering others, and if we are focusing our study now in a purely theological vein, then it would seem imperative to find a version of theology that also acknowledges the importance of solidarity in human lives. Nowhere is the ethic and virtue of solidarity more embraced than in Liberation Theology. As we will see below, within the liberation tradition solidarity is synonymous with one of its key precepts, the preferential option for the poor. Also, and as will be discussed in much greater length, solidarity is a crucial aspect of one’s spirituality (understood here as a living out of one’s faith in, thus a following of, Christ). The word solidarity is found throughout the writings of Liberation Theology and, I would hazard to say, its spirit permeates the whole of this tradition. Thus, examining solidarity from a liberationist perspective seems a natural and relevant way to conclude this dissertation. What is more (and this is the second point), although not cited frequently, liberationist theologians are not strangers to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Indeed, it would seem that these theologians have found a philosophical compatriot in Levinas whose turn to the other and language of ethical responsibility is happily akin to

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their own theological concerns. For example, Gutiérrez was himself familiar with the Jewish philosopher. At one point he even places his own understanding of poverty within the margins of Levinas’ thought:

After the Holocaust Emmanuel Levinas insightfully developed an ethic of the other, holding up the face of someone who says “don’t kill me!” and thinking of God as Otherness. Poverty and its consequences are the great challenge of our time. Poverty which in the last analysis means early and unjust death, destroying persons, families, and nations.  

The situation of unjust destruction and death caused by poverty are clearly manifestations of the pleading face of the other who cries out in his or her suffering. One could claim that the theologians of liberation and Levinas are speaking very much of the same reality though from somewhat different perspectives. With that said, let us now address the option for the poor which is a manifestation of the solidarity of the ethically-empathetic person.

**Solidarity and the Preferential Option for the Poor**

The theology of liberation, like any theology is about God. God and God’s love are, ultimately, its only theme.  

As we enter into an analysis of one of Liberation Theology’s more controversial precepts, it is important to keep this emphasis on God in mind for ultimately, the preferential option for the poor is rooted in a particular understanding of who God is and what God wills for humanity. As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Liberation Theology is deeply concerned with how to speak of God amidst human suffering and

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40 Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology", 19.
oppression. Liberationist theologians are not concerned with proving God’s existence but with “proving that God is with the poor and their struggle for justice today.” Thus “it is not enough to say, ‘I believe in God.’ I must specify in what God I believe”.  

For the proponents of Liberation Theology the God they believe in can be summed up as the *God of life*.  

Now this image of God is certainly not unique to Liberation Theology. Drawing their understanding of God from the Scriptures, this God of life hears the cries of the wretched of the earth. This is the God of the Exodus who liberated the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. It is especially the God of the prophets who chastises the rich and affluent for their neglect of the poor and needy. It is the God of Jesus Christ who sent his son to announce the Good News to the least of society, who ate with sinners and tax collectors, who healed lepers, and who challenged the political and religious elite so smug in their positions of power and prosperity. It is a God in solidarity with humanity, especially the poor and oppressed, who are God’s special friends.  

It is the God of whom St. Irenaeus declared “The glory of God is the living human being”.  

If it is true that God glories in human life, then, while God of course desires life for all people, it is the situations where that life is most threatened and oppressed that gain God’s particular attention. Liberation theology declares in outrage that such situations are not and cannot be the will of God! “The cargo of inhuman, cruel death with which all of this misery and oppression is laden

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41 Richard, "Theology in the Theology of Liberation", 152.

42 Ibid., 164.


44 As quoted in Richard, 164.
is contrary to the will of the God of Christian revelation, who is a God of life.”45 What is more, any other image of God or God’s will is simply idolatrous. Liberation Theology has made this connection between the oppression of human life and an idolatrous image of God blatantly apparent:

What is actually opposed to Christian faith in Latin America is not atheism, then, but idolatry, both the idolatrous manipulation of the true God, and the replacement of that God with other gods created by human beings. Throughout the entire history of Latin America, the oppressors of the people have almost always declared themselves to be believers – which is tantamount to an idolatrous perversion of the name of God. The Conquistadors were all Christian, and colonization was carried out in the name of God. Likewise those responsible for slavery were Christians, supported by Christian European nations. As for the Church, it endorsed slavery for centuries. Today all of the military dictators, and practically all of those responsible for economic, political, and ideological oppression, are Christian. Domination, consequently, has always been basically idolatrous, thereby involving a serious threat to the faith of a people both poor and believing. The danger to faith, then, does not come from the atheistic revolutionaries but from the idolatrous oppressors.46

It is towards the poor whose lives are threatened that God directs the divine gaze. As we know from our previous chapters, it is in the direction of God’s gaze that we too are called to look. And so while there is an awareness that these “unjust and inhumane” situations “cannot be willed by God”, there is also the “awareness that liberation is

45 Gutiérrez, “Option for the Poor”, 237. See also Oliveros, “History of the Theology of Liberation”, 4: “Purely and simply, the daily experience of the unjust poverty in which millions of our fellow Latin Americans are obliged to live…. is not the will of God.”

46 Richard, 155. The 1986 film The Mission, directed by Roland Joffé, offers a poignant look at the situation of oppression and injustice in South America during the colonial era where the Catholic Church turned a blind eye even to those indigenous peoples who had converted to Christianity.
attainable, indeed part and parcel of God’s salvific plan”.\(^{47}\) That is, the God of life rejects these situations of inhuman injustice and wills the life of the oppressed. But such a desire for the life of the oppressed is meaningless if it is not actually worked towards in the concrete reality of daily life. That is, the oppressed can only gain life if they are liberated from their wretched states of oppression. In this way the platitude that God desires life takes on real weight when carried through to this practical conclusion. If it is the will of God for humanity to have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10), then those who believe in this God are called to manifest and enact God’s will here and now – enabling life where it is most weak and vulnerable, replacing the threat of death with the promise of life. Thus “real belief in God entails solidarity with the poor so as to ease their undeserved suffering by establishing ‘uprightness and judgment’”.\(^{48}\) This is precisely the message of the Scriptures. It is found in the Hebrew Scriptures and proclaimed vehemently in the prophetic tradition: “You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8) for “him who glories, [glories] in this, that in his prudence he knows me, knows that I, the Lord, bring about kindness, justice and uprightness on the earth” (Jeremiah 9: 23). It is also the message of the Christian Scriptures where Jesus walked among the poor and needy and whose followers are called to exemplify such love and action on behalf of “the least ones” (Matthew 25:31-46): “If anyone says, ‘I love God’, but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a


\(^{48}\) Gutiérrez, On Job, 48.
brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21). As we have noted above: “To know God is to know what must be done”.49 Life and liberation are attainable, but only if those who claim to believe in this God do God’s will by working toward the liberation of the poor and oppressed. “But if a man has enough to live on, and yet when he sees his brother in need shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him? My children, love must not be a matter of words or talk; it must be genuine and show itself in action” (1 John 3:17-18, emphasis mine).50 Coming to this realization that the situations of poverty and injustice in our world are against the will of God reflects the notion of an awakened conscience that Tischner claims is an essential aspect of solidarity, that inspires one to enter into solidarity with the suffering other.51 Such action on behalf of love is also called making a preferential option for the poor. Let us take a closer look at this preferential option.

As we have seen, Gutiérrez has claimed that both the theology of liberation and the spirituality behind it “must start from a commitment to the poor”.52 We have already shown how this commitment is linked to a particular image of God and God’s will. But to more fully understand this preference, we also must consider the notion of poverty for in

49 Levinas, Difficult Freedom, 17.

50 This is the rendering of the verse as found in Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 113-114.

51 See our section on Tischner’s analysis of solidarity in chapter five of this dissertation.

Liberation Theology it has more than one definition. In fact it has three: real or material poverty which is unjust and “wholly contrary to the will of God”, spiritual poverty which is “an attitude of openness and acceptance towards the will of God”, and poverty as a commitment of “solidarity with the [real/material] poor and in protest against poverty”.

To these three definitions of poverty are linked three understandings of liberation: political and social liberation, “which points towards the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice, especially with regard to socio-economic structures”; human liberation, which “means liberating human beings of all those things – not just in the social sphere – that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity”; and “liberation from selfishness and sin”.

It is in the connection between the three types of poverty and the three understandings of liberation that the concept of the preferential option for the poor is found. We will consider each word in its own right.

Poverty. Poverty (here material poverty), as we have seen, is unjust and ultimately means death. Thus, when speaking of poverty we are speaking of a real threat to life which is also a rejection of God for God gives life not death. Poverty therefore reveals selfishness and sin and thus it is contrary to the will of God. When we speak of the poor, we therefore mean the “non-persons, the in-significant, those who do not count in society and all too often in Christian churches as well”. The poor are the “insignificant

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54 Ibid., 26.

55 Gutiérrez, Essential Writings, 144.

56 Ibid, emphasis original.
in society but not before God” for as we have seen, God has a special place in his heart for the poor.\textsuperscript{57}

Preference. Preference implies both God’s universal love for all humankind but also his especial choice of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.\textsuperscript{58} This notion of preference is one of the more controversial aspects of Liberation Theology for Christianity emphasizes God’s \textit{universal} love and salvation for \textit{all} people. However, the advocates of this preference point out that “the very term \textit{preference} obviously excludes any exclusivity; it simply points to who ought to be first – not the only – objects of our solidarity”.\textsuperscript{59} A preference thus reveals a select choice out of a larger whole. The whole is all of humankind while the preference is for the poor and marginalized. We recall how for Levinas justice is “a comparison between incomparables and a synopsis, a togetherness and contemporaneousness”.\textsuperscript{60} To make a comparison can also be understood as making a preference. I am ethically beholden to both the other and the third party but when facing both of them, a choice must be made. To whom will I offer my piece of bread? How else can I decide save by making a comparison? And, as Levinas states: “There must be a justice among incomparable ones.”\textsuperscript{61} This is so for it would be the

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 145.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor", 239, italicized in the original. See also Gutiérrez, \textit{Essential Writings}, 120, where he states that “the universality of Christian love is incompatible with any exclusion of persons but not with a preference for some”.

\textsuperscript{60} Emmanuel Levinas \textit{Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence}, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 16.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
height of injustice to offer my piece of bread to the one who already has an abundance of bread while ignoring the starving beggar on the street.

According to the Scriptural tradition that Christians look to as normative for their understanding of God and the human-divine relationship, God makes such a preference for the wretched of the earth, particularly those who are suffering at the hands of other human persons. Christians therefore, as people who say ‘yes’ to this God, are also called to make this preference for the poor. Why does God make this preference? Not because the poor are particularly good and certainly not because they are “better” than anyone else, for all of humanity is made in the image and likeness of God. I believe Gutiérrez makes this point that the poor are not necessarily good (“if they are, fine!”) for two reasons. First, Gutiérrez want to avoid any idealization of the poor and the state of poverty. To idealize the poor may lead to the temptation of not working to change their status of poverty and oppression because it must be God’s will and a blessing (why or how else would the poor be so “good”?). We will return to this point below. Second, it takes away any notion of merit - that the poor deserve my preferential treatment because they are such good people and even perhaps somehow better than I am. With blatant honesty Gutiérrez notes:

All the poor are good, some say, in order to justify the preference for them. Someone who says that gives me the impression of never having seen a poor person up close. For the poor are human beings; they include very good people, but there are also some among them who are not good.

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62 Gutiérrez, Essential Writings, 146.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., emphasis mine.
The poor are “sinners” just like we all are. Their poverty does not make them any better or worse people than anyone else. This acknowledgement also takes away any justification of not offering a preference to the poor and oppressed due to any ‘bad behavior’. In other words, this preference is not conditioned upon the merit of the one who is chosen but is infinitely demanded of me. It is an obligation that is “blind” in the sense that we find in Levinas – one cannot see the face of the other which prevents making our preference (or failing to do so) on the basis of the color of the skin, hair, eyes, etc., or on the basis of some perceived merit. Gutiérrez of course gives the reason behind this preference a theological interpretation. The poor and oppressed are preferred by God not because they are good but rather “because first of all God is good and prefers the forgotten, the oppressed, the poor, the abandoned”. God loved us first, for which we ought to be eternally grateful and respond in love for one another, but especially for the poor, for they are the ones whom God himself raises up to a special place of privilege among humankind. God has chosen the poor and if we are to be open to the will of God then we will find ourselves turned toward the poor as well regardless of how “good” or “bad” they are. This is a choice that requires humility and openness on our part to the will of God (which of course we perceive empathetically). The choice for the poor thus requires an attitude of spiritual poverty.

Option. The option for the poor is made when we choose to make God’s preference of the poor our own. When we make the option for the poor we enter into solidarity with the poor. “[O]ption relates to the idea of commitment that... means

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65 Ibid., emphasis mine.
solidarity with the poor and rejection of poverty as something contrary to the will of
God”.  

Now it is important to note that, for advocates of this position, this “option for
the poor is not optional”.  

That is, if one proclaims belief in the God of life and claims to be in relationship with this God, making an option of love for and solidarity with the poor is a necessity of such a faith position. It is “the ethical requirement in order to be a
follower of Jesus”.  

Again and again, liberationist theologians proclaim the precept that
“love for God is unavoidably expressed through love of one’s neighbor…. To love one’s brother, to love all persons, is a necessary and indispensable mediation of the love of God; it is to love God”.  

But, as we have noted above, while God loves all people, he has a special place in his heart for the poor and wretched of the earth. In this way the believer’s option for the poor is also a “theocentric, prophetic option”.

When you come in to visit me,

who asks these things of you?....

Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes;

cease doing evil; learn to do good.

Make justice your aim: redress the wronged,

hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow. (Isaiah 1:12 & 16)

A point of clarification is necessary here. While it is true that, according to the logic laid out by the theology of liberation, a preferential option for the poor is also a theocentric option, it is important to note that one does not make such a choice so that one can encounter God and be in relationship with this God. That is:

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66 Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology", 27.

67 Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor", 240, emphasis mine.

68 Ibid., 247, emphasis original.

69 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 115, emphasis original.
the neighbor is *not* an occasion, an instrument, for becoming closer to God. We are dealing with a real love of persons *for their own sake* and not “for the love of God”, as the well-intended but ambiguous and ill-used cliché would have it – ambiguous and ill-used because many seem to interpret it in a sense which forgets that the love for God is expressed in a true love for persons themselves. This is the only way to have a true encounter with God. That my action towards another is at the same time an action towards God does not detract from its truth and concreteness, but rather gives it even greater meaning and import.  

In our estimation, this is a point of clarification that again strikes a certain resonance with Levinas’ thought. We recall from our previous chapters Levinas’ insistence that, while the turn to the neighbor is “inspired” by the turn to the divine Infinite, God remains almost absent, so to speak, from our encounter with the other, or at least in the background. That is, God’s presence is never the focus or goal of our relationship with the other person. The other demands our ethical response by his or her own fact of being a human person. God, if God comes to mind at all here, is merely an afterthought.

While I do not think the liberationist theologians would go so far as to say that God is a mere afterthought in our encounters with human others, I do believe there is a harmony between the two positions here. We do not enter into solidarity with the suffering poor so to prove to God how much we love him and gain those proverbial stars in heaven. Rather, we enter into solidarity with the poor simply because it is the right thing to do, the human thing to do.  

The fact that God also loves the poor only adds a certain depth and

70 Ibid., 116, emphasis mine.

71 See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 149: “‘Here I am, in the name of God,’ without referring myself directly to his presence. ‘Here I am,’ just that! The word God is still absent from the phrase in which God is for the first time involved in words…. To bear witness [to] God is precisely not to state this extraordinary word.”

72 This is in fact a version of the classic argument of morality known as the Euthyphro Dilemma: are things right and wrong because the gods declared it so or are things good and bad in and of themselves, despite the gods? Here Levinas and the
particular coloration to the meaning of our enacted love. But that is not where our focus should be. Our focus is ever and always on the suffering face of the other.

To make a preferential option for the poor involves liberation from sin and selfishness as the root causes of all injustice so to be free to work towards ending real/material poverty, to be free to love and to serve the weak and the lowly. This double understanding of freedom – freedom from sin and freedom for love of others – is inseparable and can trace its presence in Christian theology not only to the Scriptures, but also to as important a figure as Thomas Aquinas. The liberation from sin, which for Christians is understood to be made possible through Christ, grants the individual a freedom that has a purpose: “the attainment of love and communion”. To state it negatively, failure to strive toward this goal, would be a misuse of our human freedom. “This freedom is one that must be put at the service of others”. This work of liberation thus leads toward the creation not only of a new and just society but also of a new type of human person, freed from sin and in solidarity with all their brothers and sisters. To

liberationist theologians seem to answering that certain things are right and wrong of themselves, without any need to appeal to God's judgment on the matter. The suffering other demands my ethical response whether or not I turn to God first, second, or at all.

It is noted that this understanding of freedom is certainly not limited to the Christian perspective.

Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, 92.

Ibid.

Ibid., 33, emphasis mine.

See Magana, "Ecclesiology in the Theology of Liberation", 209: "What we promote is the creation of a subject characterized by solidarity and capable of seeing to it that history moves in the direction of the justice and communion of the Reign of God."

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make a preferential option for the poor is thus to enter into a way of life, to embrace a spirituality of liberation as the way of following Christ. And the one who makes this preferential option for the poor has encountered the poor empathetically and has ethics as their first philosophy. We will return to this issue of spirituality below but first, a few more words on solidarity are necessary.

It is striking when we recall one of Tischner’s designations of solidarity as “bearing another’s burden”\textsuperscript{78} that Jon Sobrino wrote an essay on solidarity entitled “Bearing with One Another in Faith”.\textsuperscript{79} Ultimately his essay is concerned with the phenomenon of solidarity at the communal level, that is “as a basic way for churches to relate to one another”.\textsuperscript{80} We will return to this issue in our section on the church below. However, before Sobrino’s reflection on this communal aspect of solidarity, he offers a brief analysis of what he considers the more basic form of solidarity – that is, solidarity with the poor and oppressed.\textsuperscript{81} His conception of solidarity is worth an extended look.

Solidarity, according to Sobrino, is:

a process of mutual giving and receiving and is raised to the level of faith (although it takes its origins from ethical practices carried out in ongoing history)…. This is the way for Christians and churches to relate to one another in accordance with the well-known Pauline admonition, “Bear with one another.” This is a conception of Christian life and a way of practicing it in which reference to “the other” is essential, both in giving and in receiving both on the human level and on ecclesial and Christian levels, and the level of relationship with God, both in seeing in the other the ethical demand of responsibility and in finding

\textsuperscript{78} See our section on Tischner in chapter five of this dissertation.


\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 12. The above quote is the title of a section of this essay.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 4.
graciousness in that other. Solidarity is therefore the Christian way to overcome, in principle, individualism, whether personal or collective, both at the level of our involvement in history and on the level of faith.\textsuperscript{82}

Much of what Sobrino packed into those few sentences bears a great resonance with our analysis of solidarity as presented in the previous chapter. Not only do we find a common emphasis on the notion of “bearing with one another”, we also find a Levinasian insistence on ethical responsibility and a turn to the other. We find too an implied rejection of individualism that echoes not only Levinas and Stein but also Wotyła and Tischner. It is also interesting to note Sobrino’s parenthetical aside that solidarity is a reality beyond a purely religious and, specifically here, Christian interpretation. This too seems to coincide with what we have found in Levinas, Stein, Wotyła, and Tischner. Solidarity ultimately has something to do with being human, whether or not a particular human believes in God or has any form of relationship with a God.\textsuperscript{83}  

Juan Hernandez Pico, fellow proponent of Liberation Theology, makes this point quite clear:

\begin{quote}
At this point it is important to emphasize that liberative projects undertaken in behalf of the poor… are what Christian solidarity supports simply because they are what human solidarity supports. Any obligation of solidarity on the part of Christians does not arise because the project is defined as a Christian venture or a project of Christians. Obligation arises because the project is understood as human and humanizing; it does not need any supplemental religious legitimation above and beyond its inherent legitimacy.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 10-11.

\textsuperscript{84} Juan Hernandez Pico, "Solidarity with the Poor and the Unity of the Church," in \textit{Theology of Christian Solidarity}, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 62-63, emphasis original. See also Sobrino, “Bearing with One Another in Faith”, 40, emphasis mine, where he comments on Archbishop Romero’s understanding of Christian solidarity as “of necessity rooted in the primary human solidarity – that with the poor".
While faith in the Christian God is not a constitutive aspect of solidarity per se, what it adds is a specifically religious meaning and “sacramental character” to the act of solidarity.\textsuperscript{85} This point seems strikingly similar to the clarification offered by Gutiérrez on how the preferential option for the poor is not made “for the love of God” but for the poor themselves.\textsuperscript{86} Entering into solidarity with the poor is both a human and humanizing act and this is on both the giving and the receiving end of the equation. The person who enters into solidarity with the poor both enacts their humanity and becomes even more human by doing so. But the poor too, through such acts of solidarity, are recognized as human, albeit in a wretched state, and recover even more of their human dignity through acts made to amend the unjust situation in which they have been kept. In this way, Sobrino notes a certain co-responsibility in solidarity. “The root of solidarity is accordingly to be found in what generates human co-responsibility, makes co-responsibility an imperious ethical demand, and makes the exercises of co-responsibility something good, fulfilling, and salvific.”\textsuperscript{87} This insistence on co-responsibility is important for Sobrino distinguishes solidarity from mere acts of offering humanitarian aid.\textsuperscript{88} While such aid is important, necessary, and often very generous, typically it is also merely a “one-way street” from the giver to the receiver, whereas in acts of solidarity the positions of giver and receiver are shared by both sides. Thus “it is not a matter of a one-

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 63. While not constitutive per se, solidarity within the Christian context does of course root itself in faith in the God of the Scriptures and Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{86} See Gutiérrez, \textit{A Theology of Liberation}, 116.

\textsuperscript{87} Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith", 11.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 3.
way flow of aid but of mutual giving and receiving”. This is crucial for one aspect of the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, as presented by the theology of liberation, is their empowerment. Very often in liberation writings this is referred to as the conscientization of the poor and oppressed. What this refers to is the fact that the poor “have gradually become active agents of their own destiny”. That is, as opposed to remaining as “non-persons” even in the reception of aid, rather “the poor begin to see themselves as subjects of their own history, as being able to take their destiny in their own hands”. Although still poor and wretched, the oppressed ones of history no longer passively accept the hand-outs of charity. Their own consciences have been awakened to the injustice that encompasses their lives and they realize that such a state of misery cannot be the will of God. They work for their own liberation. Thus to be in solidarity with them is to join them where they are and how they are. It is truly a de-centering of the self – a turn to the other that relinquishes the totalizing hold of the self-absorbed ego. In this way, “the poor evangelize us”. And so while I may give aid and support to the poor, in many ways, I receive far more than I can ever give. This is another aspect of the

89 Ibid.


91 Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor", 236.


93 Oliveros, 20.

94 Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith", 18-19.
“epistemological break” found in Liberation Theology, of doing theology and living out one’s faith “from below, from the viewpoint of the poor”. But to reach the perspective of the poor means going there – going to where they are, their own Sitz im Leben no matter how wretched or challenging. This calls to mind Tischner’s insistence that to be in solidarity with the suffering one means to join them where they are. It is crossing through the gates into the shipyard of Gdansk so to join the protesting workers where they are and in doing so receiving a new identity and purpose by being among and with them. It is going into the poor barrios and shanty towns to help the poor by being among them, bearing their burden with them. It is an act that is made possible only by empathetically encountering these oppressed others. It is only through the de-centering act of empathy that I can enter into the barrio with respect for what it is and the people who live there and without imposing my own interpretation and image upon it or them. That is, without empathy, solidarity has the potential to be merely the one-way flow of helpful but ultimately non-transforming aid. As rooted in empathy, solidarity can be enacted “on the basis of being’s other”.  

Work towards transforming the injustice and oppression under which the poor suffer is key to any act of solidarity. One does not enter into solidarity with the poor so to idealize their poverty. We recall how, above, Gutiérrez insists that the poor are not necessarily “good” or “better than” you or I. This acknowledgement helps to prevent the temptation to idealize poverty. One does not witness to the wretched state of the poor so

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96 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 16, emphasis original.
to turn it into “a Christian ideal” – blessed are the poor, hungry, and persecuted (Luke 6:20-22). If the poor, hungry, and oppressed are truly blessed why change their lot? We should instead join them and stay down there in the dirt and the misery until we die and receive our eternal reward in heaven. But no! This is the reasoning that Liberation Theology rejects. This is the conclusion that Liberation Theology wants to avoid at all costs. We recall that the situation of poverty and oppression under which so many suffer “is a fact utterly in defiance of God’s will”. One enters into solidarity with the poor only ever to reject such poverty. Gutiérrez’s comments on this point are worth and extended look:

Poverty is an act of love and liberation. It has a redemptive value. If the ultimate cause of human exploitation and alienation is selfishness, the deepest reason for voluntary poverty is love of neighbor. Christian poverty has meaning only as a commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice. The commitment is to witness to the evil which has resulted from sin and is a breach of communion. *It is not a question of idealizing poverty, but rather of taking it on as it is – an evil – to protest against it and to struggle to abolish it.* As Ricoeur says, you cannot really be with the poor unless you are struggling against poverty. Because of this solidarity – which must manifest itself in specific action, a style of life, a break with one’s social class – one can also help the poor and exploited to become aware of their exploitation and seek liberation from it. Christian poverty, an expression of love, is solidarity with the poor and is a protest against poverty. This is the concrete, contemporary meaning of the witness of poverty. It is a poverty lived not for its own sake, but rather as an authentic imitation of Christ; it is a poverty which means taking on the sinful human condition to liberate humankind from sin and all its consequences.

The poor do not want us with them if all we are going to do is sit with them in their misery. Lives are at stake. There is no time for sitting idly about. Now is the time for

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98 Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith", 9.

99 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 172, first two emphases mine, last two emphases original.
action against such misery and death. It is using our freedom in the service of others. Gutiérrez is quite clear: “To be with the oppressed is to be against the oppressor.”

*With. Against.* We examined the use of such prepositions in our previous chapter. Tischner of course insisted that one is never against anyone. That is, the community of solidarity is open to all people. However, being in solidarity with those who suffer is certainly a form of protest, as Gutiérrez points out. We recall too that John Paul II wrote of opposition against injustice as a manifestation of solidarity. And so, while the poor and oppressed would (one hopes) gladly accept a former oppressor into the community of solidarity – someone who has had a change of heart or conversion towards those he or she once oppressed – one still stands firmly against the situation of oppression. One must be against the oppressor, not to flip the tables and turn him or her into the oppressed, but always in hope that the oppressor will see the evil of his or her ways, turn away from that way of life, and enter into solidarity with the poor so to end their poverty

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100 Ibid., 173, emphasis mine.

101 See chapter five of this dissertation for the discussion on this issue.

102 Ibid.

103 Again the movie *The Mission* comes to mind. The character played by Robert DeNiro experiences such a profound conversion from being a ruthless oppressor of the indigenous people (by way of being a bounty-hunter of human flesh - capturing the natives so to sell them into slavery) to living among them and sharing in their way of life, even to the point of dying among them in a mortal fight against their oppressors. While one of the issues in the movie is the debate over the appropriate form of resistance to oppression (violence and guns – DeNiro’s character’s choice, or the way of peace – chosen by Jeremy Iron’s character), that is beyond the scope of this study. The point here is simply that one is against the oppressor only insofar as he or she is an “oppressor”. The hope is always that this person will convert from being an oppressor to joining in the cause of the oppressed. Thus one is not against the person per se, but against the state of oppression and those who allow it to flourish – that is, “the oppressor”. Solidarity with the poor and oppressed is always open to everyone.
and oppression. To merely state that poverty and injustice are terrible and against God’s will does nothing to transform the situation. As we saw in our last chapter, we are acting persons – to be in solidarity with those who suffer is to act with them to end their suffering. Anything less is irresponsible and inhuman. It is a rejection of the God of life.

To make a preferential option for the poor is to be in solidarity with the poor. This ethic was declared a constitutive aspect of the church in 1968 at the Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín. The bishops rooted this claim in the person of Jesus Christ, “who lived in poverty”, and his mission which “centered on advising the poor of their liberation” thus “He founded His Church as the sign of that poverty among men” (7). In this way “the poverty of the Church and of its members in Latin America ought to be a sign and a commitment – a sign of the inestimable value of the poor in the eyes of God, an obligation of solidarity with those who suffer” (7). It was then given official status and recognition eleven years later in 1979 at the conference in Puebla:

> With renewed hope in the vivifying power of the Spirit, we are going to take up once again the position of the Second General Conference of the Latin American episcopate in Medellín, which adopted a clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor…. We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation (1134).

In making a preferential option for the poor the church truly becomes a community of solidarity, of the we – for the other. Ultimately, “to make a preferential option for the poor means to choose to give the poor practical priority and to shape one’s practice by

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104 Latin American Bishops, "Medellín Documents: Poverty of the Church", 473, emphasis mine. The numbers above in parentheses (7) refer to the paragraph numbering in the document itself.

105 "The Final Document," in Puebla and Beyond, 264. The number above in parentheses (1134) refers to the paragraph numbering in the document itself.
looking at the world through the eyes of the outcasts”. In this way, this preference is not only practical but also epistemological for it shapes how one approaches and understands reality. It is an epistemology made possible through the empathetic encounter with the poor for how else can one see “through the eyes of the outcasts” than by way of empathy?

**Spirituality: Solidarity as Enacted Spirituality**

A spirituality is a concrete manner, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a definite way of living “before the Lord”, in solidarity with all human beings, “with the Lord”, and before human beings.107

With our reflection on the preferential option for the poor above, we have already entered into the realm of spirituality for this preference is “the core of a new spirituality” offered by the liberationist tradition.108 In many ways, spirituality is the driving force behind the theology of liberation which is, as we know, “a reflection on practice in the light of faith”.109 One’s spirituality is a way of life, is this practice. Quite simply, in this Christian context spirituality is the following of Jesus Christ. The question is how precisely to do this in today’s context for according to liberation theologians, the followers of Christ are not meant to merely imitate the picture painted of him in the Gospel tradition, that is, “mechanically reproducing this or that aspect of his historical


109 Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology", 27.
life”. Rather “Jesus should be followed, continued, updated in history”. 110 This means reading the proverbial signs of the times and being open to God’s manifestations in this day and age. According to the liberation tradition, the writing (that is, God’s writing) is on the wall – the option for the poor is “the fundamental act of the Spirit today”. 111 Reading the choice between life and death of Deuteronomy 30:15 anew, to follow the God of life is to choose life. Choosing life today means “to announce resurrection from the context of solidarity with the poor”. 112

Perhaps the most thorough analysis of this new liberationist spirituality of lived solidarity with the poor is found in Gutiérrez’s text, We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People. 113 We will consider this work here as paradigmatic of the spirituality of liberation. As the title of his text reveals, Gutiérrez uses the metaphor of “drinking from one’s own well” to represent his view of spirituality. His title is however, actually a quote from Bernard of Clairvaux’s De consideratione. Bernard believed that “the place from which our spiritual nourishment must come is the place where we ourselves think, pray, and work”. 114 For Gutiérrez, the place where he thinks, works, and prays is among the poor and oppressed of his own country of Peru. His prayer is


111 Ibid.


113 See note 25 for the bibliographic information on this text. For ease of reading, the following citations in this section from We Drink from Our Own Wells will appear in parentheticals within the body of the text.

intimately linked to his dual relationship with Christ and the Body of Christ, the church. The work which provides the nourishing well for his spirituality is the work of liberation. So too, for the poor of Latin America themselves (specifically here, in Peru), it is the well of inhuman poverty, deep faith, and the daily progress toward liberation that also fuels their spirituality. As we will see, Gutiérrez continually returns to this well of poverty, faith, and liberation throughout his text.

By way of introduction to the text, Henri Nouwen, who provides the foreword to the 20th anniversary edition of *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, sites three characteristics for Gutiérrez’s spirituality of liberation as presented in his text: (1) it is all-inclusive, touching every aspect of human life, (2) it is Christ-centered, and (3) it has an inductive character (ix-xiii). Nouwen points out that Gutiérrez’s spirituality “is a truly biblical spirituality that allows God’s saving act in history to penetrate all levels of human existence” (ix, emphasis mine). This spirituality of liberation is holistic for, as we will discuss in more detail below, it integrates the three understandings of poverty with the three types of liberation that encompass the entirety of the human person. As we will also see, Gutiérrez’s understanding of spirituality is intimately linked with the notion of being a disciple of Christ. And, taking his cue from Bernard of Clairvaux, his spirituality is “drawn from the concrete daily experiences of the Christian communities in Latin America” (xiii). Let us now turn to the text itself.

To set the stage for what will come, Gutiérrez takes a moment to make the very important statement that “our methodology is our spirituality” (xviii). As we discussed towards the beginning of this chapter, Gutiérrez believes that the theology of liberation
and indeed all theology must flow from spirituality. Thus the very methodology of theology is spirituality, that is, the daily, lived experience of following Christ. Without the lived experience of being a follower of Christ, there would be no theology. For theology is a reflection on the praxis of spirituality. Gutiérrez offers a brief, generic, definition of (Christian) spirituality before elucidating the specific aspects of a spirituality of liberation. For Gutiérrez, as for many of his fellow liberationist theologians, spirituality is simply “the following of Jesus” (1). In this minimalist statement we can yet find the seeds of Nouwen’s three characteristics: it is Christ-centered, takes place in the actual lived experience of the person – for how and where else can one follow Christ save through the lived reality of his or her own life? – which necessarily implies the whole of the person’s life. As we will see below, this spirituality, this following of Christ, is manifested in an active and dynamic solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

*We Drink from Our Own Wells* is divided into three main sections. Part One contextualizes Gutiérrez’s spirituality in the reality of the life of the poor and oppressed of Latin America. In Part Two Gutiérrez lays out what he sees as the main features of spirituality in general. Part Three attempts to reveal the key aspects of the emerging spirituality of the Latin American poor in light of the characteristics presented in Part Two.

**Part One – How Shall We Sing to the Lord in a Foreign Land?**

The first section of Gutiérrez’s book is split into two chapters, each commenting on the two aspects of the lives of the poor and oppressed in Latin America – their poverty and

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their faith manifested in a spirituality of liberation. When we speak of spirituality we are necessarily speaking of the relationship of human persons to God. As humans are historically situated in the world, so too is their spirituality. Thus to understand a spirituality one must look at the concrete historical reality of the people who live out that spirituality. For the majority of Latin Americans, this historical reality is one of severe poverty and oppression. Ultimately it is a reality of death for “poverty means death” (9). Gutiérrez refers to this reality of oppression, poverty, and death as being in a “foreign land”:

Age-old oppression, intensified by the repressive measures with which the powerful seek to hinder all social change, creates a situation in which the vast Latin American majorities are dispossessed and therefore compelled to live as strangers in their own land. (11, emphasis mine).

This rather bleak situation does however offer a ray of hope found in the growing awareness of the poor themselves that this situation is not only unjust but one contrary to the very will of God.

The exploited and marginalized are today becoming increasingly conscious of living in a foreign land that is hostile to them, a land of death, a land that has no concern for their most legitimate interests and serves only as a tool for their oppressors, a land that is alien to their hopes and is owned by those who seek to terrorize them (11).

Therefore, with awakened consciences, they are now coming to actively seek their own liberation from this situation of oppression and exploitation (11). However, this experience of living in a “foreign land” is not only experienced by the poor and oppressed but also by those who choose to become involved in the lives of the poor and oppressed and struggle with them to achieve liberation (11). It is this experience of living in a foreign land, of unjust oppression and exploitation that puts into question any form of spirituality that
either supports the status quo or through which one seeks to flee from the reality of the world.

In chapter two Gutiérrez focuses on the “song” of the poor which is manifested in their active pursuit of justice and liberation. “We are living in a special period of God’s saving action, a time when a new route is being carved out for the following of Jesus” (20). This new route in which the poor and oppressed are following Jesus is the spirituality of liberation. Using an “old” yet dynamic word from Christianity’s tradition, Gutiérrez claims this time in which a new spirituality of liberation is coming into being is a kairos, a “favorable time” in which the Lord comes to us and invites us to follow him on this new path (20). It is a time of solidarity, prayer, and martyrdom which ultimately points to a time of salvation (21-25).

Returning to the issue of the historical context, Gutiérrez states that “the concrete forms of the following of Jesus are connected with the great historical movements of an age,” such as the mendicant spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi or the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola (26-27). The great historical movement of today is the “irruption of the poor” into history who are not only claiming their right to life but are actively pursuing it through the process of liberation (27). What is more, this active pursuit of their right to life is founded in their experience of God. “God wants them to live” (28). God is, as we have seen, a God of life. Gutiérrez, as always remaining deeply situated in the Christian tradition, upholds this understanding and experience of God through the paschal mystery. The resurrection of Christ witnesses to the “death of death” and reveals that life does indeed follow death and that God wills for all people to live (30). However, this spirituality of the poor and oppressed is not only theirs for, Gutiérrez claims, all
people are called to “[make] our own the world of the poor and their manner of living out their relationship with the Lord and taking over the historical practice of Jesus” (31). As we will see below, Gutiérrez ultimately believes that the face of God is revealed in the faces of the poor, thus the “breakthrough of the poor” is “the breakthrough of God in our lives” (28). In other words, the only way to God is through the human other. Thus he can claim that all people who chose to follow Christ have the same vocation: “to rise to life with the people [of the poor and oppressed] in its spirituality” (32).

**Part Two – Here There Is No Longer Any Way**

In Part Two Gutiérrez presents the main aspects of Christian spirituality in general. In three chapters he speaks of, in an obviously Trinitarian schema, the encounter with Christ, the guidance of the Spirit, and the communal quest for God.

Spirituality, as we have discussed above, can be boiled down to a “following of Christ”. Thus “a spiritual experience… stands at the beginning of a spiritual journey” (35). This is the experience of an encounter with Christ to which Gutiérrez dedicates the third chapter of his book. To follow Christ requires that one first meet Christ for how else can one follow another if they do not know them? For Gutiérrez, one meets Christ specifically in the faces of the poor and oppressed. Thus “[t]o be followers of Jesus requires that they walk with and be committed to the poor; when they do, they experience an encounter with the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor” (38). As we have noted from Levinas: “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the
relationship with men." However, what is truly unique in this encounter with Jesus is that one does not necessarily encounter him but rather is *encountered by* Christ. The initiative and the invitation to follow *come from* Christ. There is a passivity on the human side of this encounter with the divine that seems akin to Levinas’ insistence on the passivity in the encounter with the Infinite. Gutiérrez elucidates this point by an in-depth treatment of the passage from John’s gospel in which the first disciples are *invited by* Christ to “Come and see” where he lives and thus, who he is (see John 1:35-42). What is important in this story is not only Christ’s invitation but also the *communal* response that it invokes. “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). This points to the fact that although God encounters each one of us in the faces of the poor and suffering, it is “an encounter in community” (42). In other words, “the faith of others is important for one’s own faith”. My faith is an *intersubjective* phenomenon. This aspect will be quite important in Part Three when Gutiérrez presents the features of the spirituality of liberation as it is developing in Latin America.

Gutiérrez next looks at two other encounter-stories as related in Matthew (11:2-6) and Luke (4:16-20). In Matthew we find the encounter of Jesus with two of John’s disciples. Here we find the answer to the question asked in John’s account – “Where are you [Jesus] staying?” (John 1:38). In Matthew, the disciples of John ask Jesus to identify himself. However, instead of telling them *who* he is, Jesus tells them *what he has done*:

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them (Matthew 11:4-5).

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116 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.

117 Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith", 36.
In Luke’s gospel we see that these activities are the very ones prophesied by Isaiah that would identify the Messiah. Thus “[i]t is in this messianic work that Jesus has his dwelling” (44, emphasis mine). Linked back again to John, it is to this “dwelling” of action on behalf of the poor and oppressed that Jesus invites those who wish to follow him, to be his disciples. What Jesus witnesses to with his own life is a ‘way of life’ for all. It is especially a way of life dedicated to bringing life and liberation to the poor and oppressed. If one would be a follower of Jesus one must also witness to life manifested in “action in behalf of the poor” (44 & 45). As Gutiérrez points out, a further passage in Matthew makes this connection quite clear:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

The will of God, as Gutiérrez believes based on a close reading of the Scriptures, is to follow Christ in his actions on behalf of the poor and oppressed (50). Speaking of the will of God recalls to mind Stein’s point that the will of God is discovered through the empathetic encounter with God in which, as we have discussed, our eyes are turned toward the content of God’s own gaze – the face of the suffering other. This seems to be in perfect harmony with Gutiérrez’s view that the will of God means “action in behalf of the poor”. For the Christian, empathetically discerning the will of God involves an empathetic encounter with Jesus Christ. Thus spirituality, the following of Christ, is rooted in an encounter with Jesus, this is the starting point or place of departure.

However, what happens after this initial encounter? Discipleship of the Lord – the actual living out or manifestation of this spirituality based on the encounter with Christ. How
does it take place? By “walking according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4) which is the
ccontent of Gutiérrez’s next chapter.

Chapter four, “Walking According to the Spirit”, provides an overview of the
concepts of flesh, spirit, and body as found in the Pauline texts.¹¹⁸ For Paul flesh has
various meanings.¹¹⁹ On the one hand flesh is that which all humans possess. It represents
the physicality of the concrete, historical person. It is that which ties us to all humanity.
But flesh is also weak for it is mortal and thus liable to sin. Ultimately, it is through the
flesh that one turns away from God and toward death. “The ‘works of the flesh’ are the
actions of the person taken as a unit but subject to sin and therefore in a state of enmity
toward other human beings and toward God (Romans 8:7)” (59).

Spirit also has many meanings in the Pauline literature.¹²⁰ It too represents the
person in their entirety but, as opposed to the flesh which is opposed to God, it is through
the spirit that one turns towards God and towards life. The spirit is also the Spirit of God
which is ultimately revealed as the Spirit of life for, “[l]ove is a source of dynamic
activity and life. The Power of the Spirit leads to love of God and others” (63). Gutiérrez
demonstrates how this view of love leads to both filiation from God and fellowship with
humanity, two aspects of life in the Spirit (63).

¹¹⁸ An in-depth treatment of the Pauline texts, as provided by Gutiérrez, is beyond
the scope of this dissertation, thus we will only highlight the key features as presented by
the author.

¹¹⁹ See Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, 55-61 for his treatment of flesh.

¹²⁰ Ibid., see pages 61-64 for his treatment of spirit.
As for the body, Gutiérrez speaks of the body of flesh, the spiritual body, and the body of Christ. These three notions of body come together in light of the resurrection. Through the resurrection of the body of Christ the human body of flesh is freed from sin and will also some day be resurrected itself. It is through the resurrection that the body of flesh, the physical human person, can become a spiritual body, the temple of the Spirit and the presence of Christ on earth today. It is through the resurrection that the body and the human person in their entirety are liberated from sin and death. Thus Gutiérrez at last ties the three elements of flesh, spirit, and body together as understood against the view of spirituality as a walking according to the spirit. “To walk according to the Spirit it to reject death… and choose life…. To renounce the flesh and live according to the Spirit is to be at the service of God and others” (70). This walking according to the Spirit in life and love of God and others is made possible through the resurrection which frees one in order to love God and one another. “Our own bodies, freed from the flesh with its death-dealing power, become spiritual and a means of life and solidarity” (70-71).

And so we have seen that spirituality begins in an encounter with Christ from which follows a journey of walking according to the Spirit. This brings us to Gutiérrez’s third element of spirituality – “a people in search of God” – for it is not a random walking according to the Spirit but rather a journey taken with a specific destination, union with God. However, it is not a journey taken alone, but one taken by an entire community of people. Gutiérrez roots this communal understanding of spirituality in the Exodus experience of the ancient Israelite people. On that great journey of liberation, an entire

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121 Ibid., see pages 64-69 for his treatment of body.
people journeyed out from the foreign land of oppression and death to find the land of promise and life. “On this journey of liberation – and not apart from it – the people sought God. That search was the ultimate meaning of the entire process” (73-74).

Although reaching the promised land did have its place in the journey, Gutiérrez stresses that the importance of this spiritual journey is the “mutual knowledge” that is gained – the people learn who their God is and God also learns who his people are (74-75). This knowledge is necessary, for without it the people could not have entered the promised land:

Life in the promised land should be a life lived in the presence of God and marked by fulfillment of the requirements of justice toward others. The land is the place and occasion for communion with God and communion among human beings. For his land is the manifestation of Yahweh’s fidelity…. It should also be a place where God’s commandments are observed. All this is included in the theme of the promised land (79).

With the coming of Christ, a new way of “walking in the ways of the Lord” is manifested, but again and as Acts makes clear, it is a way of an entire people (80).

Ultimately the way of following Christ is manifested in a particular “way of life” which is a life lived in the service of others.

As in the case of the Jewish people…, so here the journey is a collective undertaking in which the Spirit of God is the moving force. It is an undertaking in which a people learns to live its freedom in the service of love. That precisely is its spirituality, its “walking according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4) (83, emphasis mine).

And so we have the three elements that Gutiérrez claims are common to all forms of Christian spirituality. Spirituality begins with an encounter with the Lord that leads one to walk in the ways of the Spirit in community with all other followers of Christ. This following is manifested in acts of love and service to one another on the journey toward
God. In the following and concluding section of Gutiérrez’s text he fleshes out these three components of spirituality as found in the spirituality of liberation of the poor of Latin America.

Part Three – Free to Love

Gutiérrez proposes five key features in the spirituality of liberation that not only inform his life as a Christian but are the foundation and guiding principles of his theology of liberation. These five elements are conversion, gratuitousness, joy, spiritual childhood, and community. These five characteristics reveal that a “distinctive way of following Jesus is coming into existence in Latin America” (92). This way, or spirituality has developed particularly out of the “context of the struggle for liberation for the sake of love and justice” (92). Gutiérrez links his notion of liberation with the biblical notion of the “law of liberty” (James 2:12). This is a law of freedom, not only from poverty, oppression, and death; but even more so, it is a freedom of the Spirit which enables one to love and be of service to one another, specifically those still suffering under the yoke of poverty, oppression, and death (91-92). As we have noted, freedom is not primarily freedom from, but freedom for. This freedom to love and of service was manifested in the life of Jesus who freely gave his life “in solidarity with those who are under the

122 Gutiérrez supports this notion of freedom by quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “In the language of the Bible freedom is not something man has for himself but something he has for others…. It is not a possession, a presence, an object… but a relationship and nothing else. In truth, freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means ‘being free for the other’, because the other has bound me to him. Only in relationship with the other am I free,” see p.159, note 1 from Part Three, emphasis my own.

123 See the section on the preferential option for the poor, above.
power of death” (92). This law of liberty is also one embraced by the church, as Gutiérrez points out: “It is by losing himself in God who sets him free that man finds true freedom, renewed in the death and resurrection of the Lord.”

Let us now examine the five points of the spirituality of liberation that is developing in Latin America today, as presented by Gutiérrez.

1.) “Conversion: A Requirement for Solidarity” – In chapter three Gutiérrez made the claim that all spirituality begins with an encounter with Christ. In chapter six he further clarifies this point by claiming that “[a] conversion is the starting point of every spiritual journey” (95). Thus we find that the encounter with Christ is one so powerful and singular that it causes “a break with the life lived up to that point” (95). A break with one’s former way of life is required as one comes face to face with his or her own sinfulness and sins, both of commission and of omission. What is more, one comes to realize that ultimately sin is the root cause of all the injustice in the world:

Now we realize what sin is. We realize that offenses against God bring death to human beings. We realize that sin is truly death-dealing; not only does it bring the interior death of the one who commits it; it also produces real, objective death. We are thus reminded of a basic truth of our Christian faith. Sin caused the death of the Son of God; sin continues to cause the death of the children of God (99).

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124 Ibid., 159, note 1 from Part Three. Gutiérrez cites this quote from Octogesima Adveniens, no. 47.

125 Ibid., see pages 97-99 for Gutiérrez’s entire discussion of the issue of sin in relation to conversion.

126 Gutiérrez has always made this point about sin. It is “the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which persons live,” see A Theology of Liberation, 24. Thus for Gutiérrez the issue of poverty, injustice, and oppression has never only been a political issue, but has always been a spiritual and religious matter at its heart.
Thus sin is not just ‘something between me and God’, but affects the entire human community. Which is why, for Gutiérrez, the foundational aspect of conversion in spirituality is also a requirement for solidarity. We will look at this issue of solidarity in much greater detail in the following section. For now, suffice it to say that “[t]he new way that conversion and pardon opens up takes the form of an option in behalf of life. The option finds expression particularly in solidarity” (100). What is more, solidarity is the task of the entire church and is “proof of the fidelity of the church to its Lord” (101 & 102).

2.) “Gratuitousness: The Atmosphere for Efficacy” – Lest Gutiérrez be pegged as a Pelagian, chapter seven removes all fear of such human self-sufficiency on this very action-oriented spirituality. Gutiérrez claims that “[t]he experience of gratuitousness is the space of encounter with the Lord” (110). Thus the encounter with the Lord is an encounter with God’s love that is freely given to us, unmerited, even unasked for – for we not so much encounter the Lord, as we are encountered by the Lord. “God first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Gutiérrez upholds this view of God’s initiative in the encounter and relationship with humanity. It is God’s initiative to love others and one that, once we are encountered by God and undergo a conversion, we are called to imitate:

The gift of God’s love is the source of our being and puts its impress on our lives. We have been made by love and for love. Only by loving, then, can we fulfill ourselves as persons; that is how we respond to the initiative taken by God’s love (109-110, emphasis mine).

And so we see that the Lord offers us his gratuitous love and we (should) respond with gratitude for this precious gift. Our gratitude is manifested in loving service of others which is also freely given. As for the issue of efficacy; Gutiérrez expresses it thus:
Authentic love tries to start with the concrete needs of the other and not with the “duty” of practicing love. Love is respectful of others and therefore feels obliged to base its action on an analysis of their situation and needs. Concern for effective action is a way of expressing love for the other. Gratuitousness is [thus] an atmosphere in which the entire quest for effectiveness is bathed (108-109, emphasis mine).

In gratitude for God’s freely given love we turn to the other in loving service, but not abstractly. We turn to the other where they are, concretely and historically, responding to their specific needs. Lastly, Gutiérrez reveals how this experience of gratuitousness is a twofold movement of love: “The other is our way for reaching God, but our relationship with God is a precondition for encounter and true communion with the other” (112). We will return to this key insight in the following section.

3.) “Joy: Victory over Suffering” – Encounter with the gratuitous love of God that moves us to love others is ultimately an experience of hope and joy. The encounter with the Lord brings hope and joy not only because God loves us, but specifically in how God’s love is revealed to us – in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our encounter with God is an encounter with the risen Lord. “Joy springs therefore from the hope that death is not the final word of history” (118). This is what Christ’s paschal mystery has revealed. Death has indeed lost its sting through God’s love revealed on the cross and confirmed in the resurrection of Christ:

Hope is an essentially Christian virtue. It is grounded in our certainty that in the death of Jesus Christ God has assumed all our sufferings and failures and that in the resurrection of Jesus God has overcome all evil. In God’s hands life is mightier than death (120).

What is more, and perhaps key for Gutiérrez in his elucidation of this spirituality of liberation, this hope and joy in God’s victory over death “leads to a redoubling of effort in the struggle against what brings unjust death” (118). We are joyful because God loves
us and we are hopeful for God has conquered sin and death. The only and most obvious response to such “Paschal Joy” is to join our efforts to God’s in working toward bringing the kingdom into its full flourishing.

4.) “Spiritual Childhood: A Requirement for Commitment to the Poor” –

Throughout his writings, Gutiérrez upholds the three concepts of poverty: real or material poverty, spiritual poverty, and poverty as a commitment of solidarity with the (real/material) poor. This issue of material poverty is present in almost every page of We Drink from our Own Wells, and indeed throughout all of Gutiérrez’s works. Solidarity we discussed in point one (see above) and will return to in the next section. Here, Gutiérrez is speaking of the notion of spiritual poverty or “spiritual childhood” as he likes to call it. We also find that it is intimately linked to the other two forms of poverty. For we see that spiritual poverty is authentic only when lived as commitment to the (real) poor and manifested in solidarity. Gutiérrez cites at length from the writings of the Latin American Conference of Religious to support this view:

We believe that today more than ever before the mission of the church on this continent requires the active presence of religious communities as authentic living sacraments (signs and instruments) of the reign that God exercises in favor of the poor. To this end it is urgent that religious effectively dissociate themselves from the injustices of the prevailing system; that in whatever environment they find themselves they give a clear witness to evangelical poverty by their spirit, their manner of life, and their structures… that with evangelical prudence they seek ways of entering into solidarity with the world of the poor in order that they may devote themselves to working therein, through the witness of their life and the service provided by their toil, for the genuine liberation of our peoples in accordance with the spirit of the gospels (123, emphasis mine).

In the end, spiritual poverty can only have meaning when it is lived as solidarity with the poor. For Gutiérrez, this is the only true form of spiritual poverty. He makes this point clear with a poignant description:

Commitment to the poor means entering, and in some cases remaining in, that universe with a much clearer awareness; it means being one of its inhabitants; looking upon it as a place of residence and not simply of work. It does not mean going into that world by the hour to bear witness to the gospel, but rather emerging from within it each morning in order to proclaim the good news to every human being (125, emphasis mine).

To remain firmly planted in tradition (yet bringing to it his own unique flavor) Gutiérrez links this notion of spiritual childhood as lived in solidarity with the poor to the classical notion of spiritual poverty as openness to God (126-127). If we are to say ‘yes’ to the God who encounters us freely in love, if we are to say ‘yes’ to the witness of Christ’s paschal mystery and follow in his footsteps as disciples of the Lord, we need an attitude of humble openness to God’s will and God’s way. This is the attitude of spiritual poverty. Within the framework of a spirituality of liberation, it is a spiritual poverty manifested in solidarity with the poor. Thus the three notions of poverty are linked. Gutiérrez gives the example of Mary, Jesus’ mother, as the archetypal witness to the life of spiritual childhood, especially as expressed in the Magnificat:

The canticle of Mary combines a trusting self-surrender to God with a will to commitment and close association with God’s favorites: the lowly, the hungry (127).

5.) “Community: Out of Solitude” – This final aspect of the spirituality of liberation truly grows out of the lived experience of those committed to living in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Gutiérrez points out that when one makes the choice on behalf of the poor, although it is God’s own choice that one imitates, it is often
not a popular choice among those who are the rich and powerful of the earth, with those who are (most often) the oppressors. Therefore, this choice on behalf of the poor often results in a period of loneliness, suffering, and solitude for those who make this choice (129). However, this “dark night” of solitude (to use John of the Cross’s metaphor, as does Gutiérrez) will give way to a dawn of community:

> Christians [who make this choice of solidarity with the poor] do not fail to realize that the deep and rending solitude they feel comes on the threshold of the most tremendous and most radical communion possible: communion in the life and joy of the resurrection (131).

Gutiérrez clarifies this point by insisting on the difference between individualism and solitude. In individualism one withdraws from others into self-centered privacy whereas “it is within community that one experiences solitude” (132). When one is in a place of solitude one is not turned in on the self but rather turns out to others in hunger for community (132). According to the mystical tradition, solitude is a necessary stage on the journey to God. Yet the journey to God, as we have seen, is one taken in community. Not only is this because God calls us as a people, but it is also because “[t]he support of the community is essential for the crossing of the desert” (133). The ancient Israelites would never have survived on their 40 year journey in the wilderness without being of support to one another in community. So too for Christians today, especially when one chooses the difficult task of solidarity on behalf of the poor in their struggle for liberation from oppression and poverty, the community is essential for survival across this desert. Indeed, as we have seen, the very choice of solidarity is a choice to enter into relationship and community. Gutiérrez points out that the Christian community most especially manifests
itself and its choice of solidarity in the breaking of the bread, the celebration of the Eucharist (134-135).

Conversion, gratuitousness, joy, spiritual childhood, and community. These are the five key features of the spirituality of liberation as it is being lived among the poor of Latin America today. It is a communal spirituality of following Jesus along the path of solidarity with the poor and working towards liberation in light of the hope and joy of the resurrection. This communal aspect of spirituality leads us to our next section: the crucial place solidarity holds in the life of the church.

The Church of the Poor as an embodiment of the We – for the Other

It is vitally important to determine how God is manifesting himself here and now and what form the response of faith is taking. In my opinion, God’s manifestation, at least in Latin America, is his scandalous and partisan love for the poor and his intention that these poor should receive life and thus inaugurate his kingdom. Correspondingly, the proper way of being conformed to God is to be concerned actively with the justice of the kingdom of God and with making the poor the basis of this concern. This is the great “sign of the times”, a sign which is a fact. Reflection on the Church starts with this fact and attempts to explain it and consolidate it.128

If one of the central questions of Liberation Theology is how to speak of God in an unjust and inhuman world, that is, amidst suffering and oppression, this question is then modified when examining the nature and life of the church. The question is now: “what is and should be the church of Jesus today[;] what ought to be the manner of realization of the essence and mission of the church”?129 This is a relevant question according to the liberation tradition because, in their estimation, the “classic

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128 Sobrino, The True Church and The Poor, 2, emphasis mine.

ecclesiologies, which tended to be deductive, ahistorical, clerical, and hierarchical, [are] deemed insufficient for giving an account of faith and ecclesial life in this situation, amid the waxing, developing Christian praxis”. 130 And so, just as a new model has been proposed for doing theology and living out one’s faith life – that is from the perspective of the poor and in solidarity with them – so too Liberation Theology proposes a new model for the church – “a model shaped from the starting point of the poor, in the option for them, in the life rising up among them”. 131 This new model or way of being church is aptly called the church of the poor. As we have already noted this way of being church that is rooted in making a preferential option for the poor, of entering into solidarity with them, allows us to recognize the church as a community of solidarity: we – for the other. This model of the church of the poor is controversial and has brought about much debate over the nature and mission of the church. However, proponents of the liberation tradition are keen to point out that this form of church “is not a new church, but a new way of conceptualizing and organizing the church”. 132 This is similar to the justification offered for the preferential option for the poor. To make a preference is not to exclude. To offer a new model for the church does mean it is the only model for the church. However, for those whose reality is the unjust poverty and oppression of the masses, this seems to them to be the best model available – at least for now. 133 “The basic mission of this new model

130 Ibid., 195.

131 Ibid., 199.

132 Richard, 167.

133 See for example Sobrino, ”Communion, Conflict, and Ecclesial Solidarity,” in Mysterium Liberationis, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 615. He states of this model of the church of the poor his belief that "this way of
of church is to make God credible in this world of the poor and oppressed third-world masses."\textsuperscript{134} As we have seen in our previous sections, a key precept of Liberation

Theology is that one can speak credibly of God and live out one’s faith in this God authentically only by way of a commitment of solidarity with and for the poor. If part of the nature of the church is to manifest (make real) the people of God,\textsuperscript{135} and God has clearly made a choice in favor of the poor, then those who believe in this God are called to do likewise. “The church has made a preferential option for the poor, but God had made one long before.”\textsuperscript{136} Making this particular manifestation of the people of God who choose the poor because their God has done so before them means that “the type of communion generated by the church of the poor is that of solidarity, of ‘bearing one another’.\textsuperscript{137} Living out this solidarity with and for the poor is the way in which the church can be a sacrament of God’s presence in history, specifically, a sacrament of liberation, for they witness to the God of life and God’s salvific plan for all humanity.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{134} Richard, 167, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{135} Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, and Ecclesial Solidarity", 620.

\textsuperscript{136} Richard, 153.

\textsuperscript{137} Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, and Ecclesial Solidarity", 632, italicized in the original.

The theology of liberation truly takes to heart the 1971 proclamation of the World Synod of Bishops that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world [is] a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel”. Such action demands solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Indeed, to love God requires love of one’s neighbor, and to love one’s neighbor is to love God. If the poor truly manifest God’s presence, if the trace of the Infinite is found in their pleading and commanding faces, then the community committed to doing the will of this God must turn to these wretched others and found itself upon them, upon being’s other – their place in this world, their life, their sorrows. This identification with the poor is not of course to idealize their wretched state, but so to authentically protest against the situation of injustice and work actively, amongst them, to transform that situation. As we have already seen, to believe in the God of life and to be a follower of Jesus Christ means precisely to embrace the intersubjective dimension of that faith. It is to recognize that one can only be in relation with this God through relationship with others, that is, in community. And, as we have seen, in a community of solidarity there is no strict barrier between those who give and those who receive. Evangelization is a two-way street. What the liberation tradition emphasizes is the oft forgotten fact that the poor and wretched of

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the earth can and do manifest God’s presence. They can and do evangelize the church but only insofar as one allows the faith of the suffering other to raise up challenges and question the status quo.¹⁴¹ That is, to question my place in the sun, to challenge the abundance of bread on my table. In this way the church of the poor manifests a radical de-centering of the church that rests upon the prior de-centering of the self that the encounter with and option for the poor entails at the individual level. If the life of the church – its proclamation of the Gospel, community-building, and worship – is to be a credible sign of God’s love for the poor then the church must cease being “centered on itself” which involves a conversion towards the poor other who manifests the face of God.¹⁴² This is the lesson the theology of liberation takes from Jesus washing the feet of his own disciples (John 13).

Jesus sought to make the new community he was creating a life-giving alternative, set in the midst of the power systems that appear one after another in history. A life-giving alternative, not a power alternative – that is what the new community of Jesus Christ, the church, is called to be in history. That is why in the foot washing we can see how Jesus was building this community in such a way that, by means of service, it would be a leaven of equality, freedom, justice – in a word, of dignity – in the midst of human society in history.¹⁴³

This emphasis on solidarity and the pursuit of justice as constitutive aspects of the church of the poor has lead to some profound conclusions in the liberation tradition about the sacramental and liturgical aspects of the church. Vatican II declared the sacramental nature of the church. It stated that the Church is a “visible sacrament of [the] saving

¹⁴¹ Sobrino, “Bearing with One Another in Faith”, 36.

¹⁴² Pico, 87.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 88, emphasis original.
unity” of God and humanity. In Liberation Theology, this sacramental nature of the church is intimately linked to the option for the poor. It is stated that the church “will be a sacrament of salvation to the extent that it becomes a church of the poor and oppressed”. To be a credible witness to the God of life in today’s world requires embracing “God’s ‘today’ [as] a word of life, justice, hope, and liberation for the innumerable victims of this world”. But it is also “a word of radical denunciation against the idols that produce victims, unmasking the lie with which the idols try to hide themselves, and demanding conversion of the oppressors who worship them”. The church can only be a sacramental manifestation of God’s presence if its members do God’s will which is to reject idolatry, injustice, and oppression and bring life and liberation to the poor and marginalized. What in essence is happening here is that acts of solidarity with and for the poor have been granted a sacramental status. Action on behalf of the poor manifests God’s salvific action here on earth. It is said, where there is love, there is God. Now we can also say, where there is solidarity with the suffering victims of this world, there is God.

But there is another side to this sacramental equation. We stated at the beginning of this chapter how Liberation Theology recognizes the world and lives of the poor as the privileged locus of God’s self-revelation in today’s world. Thus the poor themselves have

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144 See *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II, 1964 which can be found on the Vatican website: [http://www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

145 Magana, 202.

a sacramental presence. It is in the faces of the poor and suffering that God’s trace passes. The church will share in this sacramental presence of the poor “insofar as it is the church of the poor”.

Solidarity as an option for the poor and the work toward justice that it necessarily embodies is so crucial for any authentic manifestation of the church that, according to the liberation tradition, it colors all aspects of the church. Apart from the general sense of sacrament that we have been using thus far (ie. that the church itself is a sacrament) – a visible sign of God’s presence – there is in the Roman Catholic tradition also the more focused use of the word as related to the “seven Sacraments”. These sacraments are not only signs and symbols of God’s presence here on earth, they are also understood as “forms of human behavior, actions stemming from faith and animated by the Spirit of God”. As inspired by faith in and manifesting the presence of the God of life who desires an end to the oppression of the poor, these seven sacraments too must witness to this God of life. They must participate in and embody the same will of God that is discerned in the empathetic encounter with this God that turns ours eyes upon the other. In this way, “the true test of the authenticity of sacramental practice is the Christian life which is engenders”. In other words and quite literally, if participation in the Eucharist does not engender true fellowship with others, that is ethical responsibility manifested in

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147 See Condina, 665: "the poor can be called sacraments of the Kingdom; they are a living prophecy of the Kingdom insofar as they denounce the anti-Kingdom".

148 Ellacuria, "The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation", 558, emphasis mine.


150 Ibid., 205.
solidarity with others, then it not done “in memory of Christ”. ¹⁵¹ Rather it risks becoming a dead ritual in honor of a God who has made it clear (through the prophets) that he hates empty words and meaningless actions that have no true bearing on life. Thus far from keeping one’s religious life separate from one’s secular life, all of life must be led in a sacramental manner of making present the God of life through one’s ethical encounters with others. Spirituality is truly a holistic phenomenon. All of life is prayer. In this way:

From what we “know” of God’s point of view through Christian revelation, there is absolutely no tension between religion and morality understood as love of neighbor if they are conceived correctly. Love of neighbor is honor and worship of God because it is God’s cause. ¹⁵²

If love of God and love of neighbor are synonymous and if love of neighbor is the will of God, then the prophets were quite correct – the worship God desires is justice and compassion towards all, but especially towards the forgotten ones of history. As we have noted before:

I hate, I spurn your feasts, I take no pleasure in your solemnities;....
But if you would offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream. (Amos 5:21 & 24)

Through the work of solidarity on behalf of the poor the God of love and life is worshipped. Such a turn to the suffering other is the prayer of the church offered up to God. This claim might seem to be quite radical and it is. However, it makes perfect sense in light of our conversation on God’s divine deflection from the Infinite to the face of the other and in light of our claims about the empathetic encounter with God. ¹⁵³ Indeed, it is

¹⁵¹ See Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 148-150.
¹⁵² Haight, An Alternate Vision, 203, emphasis mine.
¹⁵³ See the end of chapter 4 of this dissertation.
the claim of this study that the theology of liberation puts into a religious context these conclusions drawn from our dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas and Edith Stein.

Conclusion

Although not limited to Christianity, in the Christian context, love and worship of God are clearly manifested in love of one’s neighbor and action on behalf of justice for the poor and wretched of the earth. It is love of others that manifests one’s faith in the God of life and a true following of Jesus Christ.

I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

But this new commandment is really quite ancient:

You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Indeed, it is a command that bears the trace of an immemorial past wherein one encounters the face of the other who commands with an Infinite authority and yet pleads for his or her life from a state of wretched vulnerability. But who precisely is this neighbor whom I am called to love? Quite simply it is anyone and everyone, but most especially the victim on the side of the road – any victim, any road. This is the lesson that the Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us (Luke 10:29-37). My neighbor is “not the one whom I find in my path, but rather the one in whose path I place myself, the one
whom I approach and actively seek.\textsuperscript{154} This neighborly encounter is an ethical moment, a sacred space. We can even go so far as to speak of a \textit{sacrament of the neighbor}.\textsuperscript{155} In this ethical encounter between the self and other where I recognize the other as my neighbor and enact myself as his or her neighbor through my solidarity with him or her, God is made present. In the face of the other the trace of God passes. Here, specifically, the poor reveal God in their vulnerable state of oppression and suffering. But the trace of God also passes in the ethical response toward the other, a response of solidarity with his or her suffering and action to amend that situation of injustice which is clearly against God’s will. When I turn to the other in solidarity, making him or her my neighbor and being a neighbor to him or her, I manifest the will of God whose gaze is upon the poor and suffering of the earth. In the end this is precisely what it means to be a human person and to enact one’s humanity as placed in the context of faith in the God of love and life.

Solidarity is the human response to the ethical-empathetic encounter with the other. In the light of faith it can be understood as a form of prayer, a sacrament of God’s presence, enacted spirituality thus a relationship with and worship of God. It is to say: “Here I am, in the name of God; here I am – with and for you.” To be in solidarity with the other is to be in solidarity with God. \textit{We – for the other.}

\textsuperscript{154} Gutiérrez, \textit{A Theology of Liberation}, 113, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 115. Gutiérrez here speaks of Congar’s “sacrament of our neighbor”. I have replaced \textit{our} with \textit{the} for I find \textit{our} neighbor (or even \textit{my} neighbor) too one-directional whereas simply saying \textit{the} neighbor leaves the position of the neighbor open to both sides of the encounter.
Postscript

In his book *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*,\(^{156}\) Leonardo Boff proposes a new paradigm for how humans are to live together. This paradigm is actually not so new. It is an intersubjective, thus ethical, way of human life that is reflected throughout the pages of this dissertation. Boff proposes “a world in which care has been recognized as a fundamental ethos of the human being and as an indispensible compassion for all the beings in creation”.\(^{157}\) Taking a page from Heidegger, Boff declares that care is a fundamental aspect of the human person.\(^{158}\) However, he radically reinterprets Heidegger’s understanding of this “basic existential-ontological phenomenon” which is radically self-centered (*Dasein*, if it is being authentic, is always most concerned with itself).\(^{159}\) For Boff care, as an essential aspect of the human person rather “represents an *attitude* of activity, of concern, of responsibility and of an affective involvement with the other”.\(^{160}\) In this way care can be understood as a manifestation of


\(^{157}\) Ibid., xi.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 15.

\(^{159}\) Ibid. See also chapter one of this dissertation for our comments on Heidegger. It is interesting that Boff never alludes to Heidegger’s self-centered understanding of care which, as I will soon show, is completely opposite to what Boff has in mind. Without prior knowledge of Heidegger's position, simply reading Boff's text leads one to believe that the two author's are in harmony on this point, whereas Boff's view of care is more of a critique of Heidegger's view. What is more it is a critique that has a rather Levinasian tone.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 14, first emphasis original, second emphasis mine.
one’s ethical responsibility for the other. It is to turn to the other and enter into a relationship of solidarity with him or her. Care is a component of solidarity. What is more, while all people deserve our care, it is particularly the needy and the oppressed, the excluded and the forgotten who most deserve our careful attention.\textsuperscript{161} Care is, in Boff’s estimation, such a fundamental, constitutive part of our humanness that he goes so far as to claim that “we are care”.\textsuperscript{162}

Care thus means devotion, commitment, diligence, zeal, attention and good treatment. As I have said, we have here a fundamental attitude, a way of being through which a person comes out of itself and centers itself in the other with devotion and commitment.\textsuperscript{163}

Devotion is also, of course, what believers owe to their God – “thou shalt have no other gods besides me” (Exodus 20:3). This study has attempted to show how this devotion rendered up to God can be offered through our ethical devotion to the other. “\textit{Me voici} – here I am.” In the end, this is perhaps the only prayer we ever need make.

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\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., xi.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 56, emphasis original.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 58.
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