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Communication and Response-ability: Levinas and Kierkegaard in Conversation

Beth A. Walter

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COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSE-ABILITY:

LEVINAS AND KIERKEGAARD IN CONVERSATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Beth A. Walter

May 2014

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Approved March 21, 2014

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSE-ABILITY:

LEVINAS AND KIERKEGAARD IN CONVERSATION

By

Beth A. Walter

May 2014

Dissertation supervised by Ronald C. Arnett

This project contends that hope for ethical communication in a postmodern age lies in the ability to rethink ethics in terms of "existential pathos." To that end, this study locates communicative responsibility in the responsive element of the self-other relation by relying primarily on the work of the twentieth-century Lithuanian-born French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. I maintain that Levinas's disruption of the philosophical tradition informs a communication ethic comprised of dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical modes of interpersonal interaction that are fundamentally rooted in an existential understanding of human striving. Further, I assert that these dialectical, dialogical and rhetorical components are best appreciated when Levinas is placed in dialogue with Kierkegaard, whose influence on existential phenomenology is undeniable, and whose recognition that pathos marks the essence of the human condition is indispensable to this project. Dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric are viewed here as praxis-oriented concepts that emerge in the context of a Levinas-Kierkegaard interplay that works to frame communicative responsibility as "response-ability." By looking at the ways

that Levinas radically re-positions philosophical discourse about ethics, and placing those

challenges in conversation with Kierkegaardian themes, this study seeks temporal answers to

historically situated questions about the promise of ethical interpersonal interaction in a time of

uncertainty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Ronald L. Kolling, my godfather, for reminding me to look on the bright side when things get rough, and for giving unconditional love to all of his nieces and nephews.

To Ronald C. Arnett, my advisor, for teaching me to appreciate the art of sculpting and aiding my understanding of what it means to live an academic life of grace.

To Ronald J. Walter, my father, who has given me so many things, one of the best of which is an author's voice. It is my greatest hope that I have represented it well here.

The following pages are dedicated to my mother, Kathleen, who is a living example of the truth that the greatest things in life do in fact come in the smallest packages. Thank you for consistently and un-begrudgingly going above and beyond -- never doubting, never holding back, never failing to provide. Your resolve and your perseverance is and always will be unmatched. No words could ever be sufficient to express my love and gratitude.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Soren Kierkegaard

CA   *The Concept of Anxiety.* Trans. Reider Thomte. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

CUP   *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments.* Vol. 1. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

FT   *Fear and Trembling.* Trans. Alastair Hannay. New York: Penguin. 1985.

PF   *Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985.

Woks by Emmanuel Levinas

AT   *Alterity and Transcendence.* Trans. Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

EI   *Ethics and Infinity.* Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

OTB   *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981.

OS   *Outside the Subject.* Trans. Michael B. Smith. Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1993.

TI   *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Introduction

Upbuilding an Edifying Discourse

"Philo in His Confusion"
Philo in his *Confusion of Tongues*
broods on things that are often blurred
We're not quite sons, he cautions, of God –
but might be children of the Word[1].
---Peter Cole (2013)

The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the other, his expression…To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it.
--Emmanuel Levinas (1961)

Does or does not my personal life express what is being communicated? As long as my life expresses what is communicated, I am a teacher.
--Soren Kierkegaard (1859)

The most obvious question for a project of this nature is: "Why Levinas and Kierkegaard?" and, "what relevance do these two thinkers have for communication and rhetorical studies and specifically for communication ethics?" Finally, "how does one go about placing these two philosophers of communication in conversation? What is the methodology that most appropriately considers these thinkers in this context?" This introduction will respond to these straightforward but pressing questions in a series of short "upbuilding discourses[2]" which will explain why I am fundamentally interested in this project, how I understand its significance, and in what terms I envision it to be accomplished.

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[1] "Philo in His Confusion" by Peter Cole; *The American Scholar* (82.2), Spring 2013.
[2] Kierkegaard published *Two Edifying Discourses* shortly after his publication of *Either/Or* in 1843. Kierkegaard's *Discourses* were first translated as "Edifying" by David F. Swenson in 1946, and later appeared as "Upbuilding" in Howard V. Hong's 1990 translation.

Two Edifying Thinkers

I am interested in this project first and foremost because Levinas and Kierkegaard speak to me in earnest, constructive, and ultimately compelling ways. As a scholar who came to communication and rhetorical studies by way of philosophy, I have had the opportunity to encounter Levinas and Kierkegaard first as philosophers, and subsequently as communication theorists. What this has allowed me to realize first is that both thinkers' work represents a radical challenging and re-thinking of standard religious, philosophical, and ethical discourses, and second, that both view philosophy in terms of the individual's existential struggle, a struggle that is dominated for both thinkers by pathos -- by the multitude of ways that we are moved to response, or in other words, by the way that we are communicatively situated in the world.

The catalyst for my interest in this project is a desire to explore the extent to which Kierkegaard may augment a reading of Levinas for communication ethics scholars. This study will privilege the work of Levinas and will bring Kierkegaard into the conversation as a means of uncovering the relevance of Levinas's project for postmodern (and perhaps post-postmodern) communication ethics. In short, this project engages Kierkegaard in order to "upbuild" Levinas. This is not, of course, to suggest that Levinas's work fails to stand on its own, but rather to acknowledge the great influence that Kierkegaard had on later existential-phenomenological thinkers, including Levinas.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) both lived and wrote during times of crises and both sought to upbuild their readers by re-conceptualizing religious, ethical, and philosophical discourse. Both philosophers expressed suspicion of the present age, Kierkegaard writing about the nineteenth-century decline of Christianity in Europe and Levinas concerned with the crisis of twentieth-century anti-Semitism. Levinas, the

Lithuanian born French thinker of ethics, and Kierkegaard, the Danish father of existentialism, speak in significant and edifying ways because they view ethical transcendence as fundamentally tied to human passion and existential toil. Kierkegaard and Levinas were both "thinkers of affectivity," that is, they concerned themselves with pre-discursive knowledge as connected with human passion (Bergo, *Ethical Selfhood* 117-118). In addition, both Levinas and Kierkegaard were interested in showing that "ethics" consists not simply in propositional truths, but rather involves a way of existing that places alterity at its very center. For Kierkegaard, the individual is defined by her pathos. Kierkegaard understands *pathos* not simply as emotional response, but in broader terms as the effort that one makes at existence (i.e. the struggle "to become"). For Levinas, the individual is defined by her ethical subjectivity, by the fact that he or she is first and foremost a being-for-the-other. In Levinas's view, it is the ethical demand of the other that provides the source, origin, and *rasion d'etre* of the self. Levinas insists that the self is called to responsibility by the other and that "responsibility is what is incumbent upon me exclusively, and what *humanly*, I cannot refuse" (*Ethics and Infinity* 101). "Pathos*"* conceived of as "suffering" points to the sense in which the self *endures* the demand of the other. For both Levinas and Kierkegaard this suffering lies at the root of our humanity and is not a burden to be alleviated, but rather to be welcomed and embraced.

In short, both Levinas and Kierkegaard work to rethink the ethical relation in terms of human struggle and the affective component of interpersonal interaction. It is because I am convinced that a philosophical shifting of ground towards affectivity is a necessary step in responding to the challenges that postmodernity poses to communicative responsibility that I am interested in bringing Levinas into conversation with Kierkegaard. This study will examine the consequences for communication ethics when responsibility is located in the affective

(responsive) element of alterity. I will show that Levinas's disruption of the philosophical tradition informs a communication ethic of response-ability that is rooted in dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical modes of interpersonal interaction. Further, I will maintain that these particular modes of interaction, though paradoxical and inimical on the surface, appear more convincingly and with greater clarity when considered in dialogue with Kierkegaard. For Levinas and for Kierkegaard, "ethics" represents a way of living where the central mode of existence consists in one's engagement with and response to other human beings.

In terms of the scope and the goals of this study, the most critical aspect of Levinas and Kierkegaard's compatibility lies in their mutual recognition of the necessity of ethical demands that are not rationally self-imposed, but are rather part of the existential engagement with and response to one's encounter with another human being. Levinas and Kierkegaard share an important connection with regard to the role of pathos in constituting the ethical relation, and this correlation provides the rationale for engaging two philosophers of communication who might otherwise appear to diverge.

Communication Ethics and the Levinas-Kierkegaard Response

The body of literature that considers Levinas and Kierkegaard together has emerged primarily from within the fields of philosophy and philosophy of communication, and while Levinas's current status as one of the most important thinkers of ethics has prompted increased focus on his work among philosophers of communication, the Levinas-Kierkegaard dialogue is still relatively young, having originated in the early 1990's. While my primary goal is to consider how Kierkegaard may assist in appreciating Levinas's contribution to communication ethics in a postmodern age, it is also my hope that this project will contribute to ongoing interest in a Levinas-Kierkegaard dialogue within communication and rhetorical studies and beyond.

Additionally, I hope that this study will have something to offer in terms of the recent interest in post-metaphysical thought. To my mind, post-metaphysical thinking coincides with a movement away from speculative philosophy (of which Hegel represents the prime exemplar), and this makes Kierkegaard a critical voice not only for sociological understandings of human interaction, but also for aspects of communication theory that speak specifically to questions concerning the way that human interaction works to shape self, other, and society. With emphasis on "truth as subjectivity," Kierkegaard makes an important move in aligning the subject with her narrative ground, as opposed to abstracting her in terms of the rational order. This, as I will show, is a critical step in articulating communicative responsibility in terms of the ability to respond.

Further, Levinas's re-scripting of ethics as first philosophy is not only one of his most audible and intellectually far-reaching contributions, but is also representative of a key element in post-metaphysical thinking which seeks to avoid the totality of the self-positing ego. By declaring ethics as first philosophy, Levinas radically challenged a tradition that held the science of objectivity at the highest level of authority, and rejected an entire way of thinking about ethical responsibility that culminated in obedience to the "moral law." Levinas's insistence that consciousness is derivative not only opens the question of ethical responsibility to the social complexities in which it originates, but it also takes seriously the co-constitutive nature of the human activity of meaning bestowal and discovery. Since the post-secular turn, understanding the ethical in phenomenological terms has become an absolute necessity for describing and understanding human experience. It is my hope that this project will not only respond to the current historical moment by working to transverse traditional boundaries between ethical, religious and philosophical discourses, but that it will also acknowledge the profound

significance of the ethical in accomplishing the goals of phenomenology – which, in my mind, are best achieved through the realization that human interaction results in the co-creation of meaning.

Upbuilding a Discourse

For Kierkegaard, the distinction between "discourses," which "build up," and "deliberations," which "weigh up," is significant. Kierkegaard considered his discourses to be a means of augmenting the faith of the Christian reader. In contrast, deliberation implied that the reader stood outside the subject matter being considered and thus in a position where temporal and eternal significance could be weighed against one another (Hong and Hong xiv).   For Kierkegaard then, the deliberation is polemical while the discourse is edifying. While it is my hope that this project will prompt deliberation about theory and practice of communicative responsibility, my primary motivation for engaging Levinas and Kierkegaard together is less polemical than it is edifying. While several major recent studies, including Merold Westphal's *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood's edited anthology *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics and Religion* and Michael R. Paradiso-Michau's forthcoming *The Ethical in Kierkegaard and Levinas* have offered sustained comparative analysis of Levinas and Kierkegaard and have included some consideration of whether Levinas can be rightfully characterized as a Kierkegaardian, or if it might be appropriate to think of Kierkegaard as a Levinasian, these reflections will not be the focal point here.

This study looks for temporal answers to historically situated questions about ethical interpersonal interaction in an effort to keep the conversation going regarding the possibilities for communication ethics in a postmodern age. To this end, this investigation is situated within constructive philosophical hermeneutics, and emphasizes a dialogical approach in its

consideration of communicative responsibility as "response-ability." The story it tells concerns the drama of human life, and its narration aims to exemplify the defining characteristics of a pragmatic philosophy of communication: first, its result is not owned by Levinas, Kierkegaard, or me; second, it is not method-centered but rather seeks to listen for partial and temporal answers to the questions that it brings; and third, its goal is understanding, not certainty (Arnett, "Defining Philosophy of Communication: Difference and Identity" 59-61). In reference to the question, "What are the consequences for communication when we rethink the ethical in terms of an existential understanding of pathos?," this study aims to listen to Levinas's response with a Kierkegaardian ear in order to increase understanding of the dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical aspects of communicative responsibility framed as "response-ability."

A final caveat -- like most scholars who seek to address and to listen to Levinas's work, I feel it necessary to take note of the particular challenges that he presents for the interpreter. For one, Levinas does not adhere to traditional forms of philosophical argumentation, writing in a more aphoristic style that relies heavily on metaphor and intuition. Further, Levinas does not seek reasoned argument or detailed exposition of his views, but rather works to evoke images akin to the poetic in his readers' minds. Because the body of his work is guided by the idea that Western philosophy has consistently and methodically worked to suppress and to totalize the voice of the Other, most attempts to explicate, analyze, and even to simply talk about Levinas's primary themes will inevitably fall short. As the past three or four decades of scholarship has shown, it is tremendously challenging to identify his work with any particular school of thought, and the difficulty in locating him within the literature is magnified by the incredible complexity of his prose. At every turn, Levinas's readers are confronted with linguistic complexity, profundity of thought, and the use of imagery and metaphor that appear incompatible and

contradictory. By its very nature, Levinas's work resists the imposition of interpretation, and this is a significant part of what makes it so valuable. While his style certainly belies any form of systematic exposition, it is this quality that has and will undoubtedly continue to allow his work to stand the test of time.

It is my hope that listening to Levinas with a Kierkegaardian ear will bring to life an intellectually rich and promisingly pragmatic narrative of human subjectivity as grounded in one's response to the encounter with the Other. As Michael Hyde has noted, Levinas's "face" represents "the rhetorical interruption *par excellence*" (111). One's response to this rhetorical ethical disruption is ultimately that which ordains and molds one's existence by calling the self into question and making an appeal for ethical responsibility. Human subjectivity initiates in this response, prompting us not only to recognize that "in the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), but also as poet Peter Cole has suggested, that we may in fact be "children of the Word."

Preview of Chapters

This inquiry will offer a description of the dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical aspects of communicative responsibility framed as "response-ability.[3]" After providing background and context for the project in Chapter 1, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will each adhere to a format which will first offer explanation and analysis of a specific challenge that Levinas poses to the philosophical study of ethics (Chapter 2 will address the notion of philosophical dialectic, Chapter 3 will consider the concept of dialogue, and Chapter 4 will investigate the role and purpose of rhetoric). After listening to the way that Levinas radically re-positions philosophical discourse about

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[3] In *By Way of Interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication* (2005), Amit Pinchevski argues that responsibility in Levinas signifies an exceeding of rather than a following of social norms, and that the way one responds is that which distinguishes one from another; in this way, responsibility is linked to response-ability (pp. 74-75.

ethics, each chapter will bring Kierkegaard into the conversation in an effort to augment the understanding of the challenge that Levinas poses. Each chapter will conclude with a consideration of the implications of Levinas's work for the study and practice of communication ethics in a postmodern age.

Chapter 1: Levinas, Kierkegaard, and the Ethical Demand offers a foundation for engaging Levinas with Kierkegaard in the context of questions about the challenges associated with postmodern communication ethics. This chapter initiates conversation between the two authors by looking specifically at Kierkegaard's attentiveness to the relation between pathos and the ethical. In addition, this chapter situates the work of both philosophers within the context of postmodernity and compares their respective critiques of traditional Western philosophical discourse and method. Finally, the chapter reviews recent literature that has considered the role of listening and response in Levinas's work, as well scholarship that has acknowledged the importance of a Levinas-Kierkegaard interplay.

Chapter 2, "Forgetting Recollection: The Dialectic of Response-ability" examines the dialectical component of communicative responsibility with particular attention to the challenges that Levinas poses to traditional philosophy, especially as regards epistemology. This chapter addresses the question, "How does Levinas re-envision the task of philosophy and how does his re-positioning alter the conventional understanding of philosophical dialectic?" The chapter works to explicate the significance of ethics as first philosophy by describing Levinas's relationship to German phenomenology via Husserl and Heidegger. The chapter utilizes Kierkegaard's criticism of speculative philosophy and his famous assertion that "truth is subjectivity" to extend understanding of Levinas's claim that ethics is first philosophy. Finally, the chapter considers how Levinas's thinking works to formulate an alternate dialectic, signified

by the metaphor of "forgetting recollection" – a paradoxical image that characterizes the possibility of ethics in the form of "thinking as response."

Chapter 3, "Communicating Capability: The Dialogue of Response-ability" will address the following question: "How does Levinas's understanding of alterity inform an unconventional view of dialogue?" Chapter 3 attends to the dialogical element of communicative responsibility by looking specifically at alterity and dialogue in Levinas. The points of focus here include the relationship of alterity and dialogue, the Kierkegaardian understanding of dialogue as revealed in the communication of capability, and the paradoxical notion of "indirect communication" as a critical concept residing at the heart of the dialogic origin of communicative responsibility.

Chapter 4, "Attuning to the Face: The Rhetoric of Demand," investigates the rhetorical aspect of communicative responsibility in the context of Levinas's metaphor of the face and focuses on the question, "How does Levinas's use of 'the face' as a major metaphor counter standard interpretations of rhetoric, and is the face rhetorical?" After examining the face, this chapter brings Kierkegaard into the conversation in order to consider Levinas's understanding of the role of rhetorical discourse in communicative responsibility. Acknowledging Levinas's vehement disdain for rhetoric, this chapter maintains that Levinas's work evokes an entirely different rhetoric.

Chapter 5, "An Ethic of Response-ability: Levinas's Ethical-Existential Voice," summarizes the dialectical tensions that underlie the interplay between thinking, listening, and speaking in Levinas. The project culminates with the assertion that Levinas's disruption of the philosophical tradition informs a communication ethic of response-ability that is rooted in dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical modes of interpersonal interaction. These modes of

interpersonal interaction do not create a linear topography or systematic formula for ethics, nor

do they ascribe to traditional philosophical understandings of dialectic, dialogue, and rhetoric.

Rather, they form the basis of an ethic of response-ability that offers direction and hope in an age

of uncertainty. To conclude, the chapter offers a narrative exemplification of communicative

"response-ability" via Victor Hugo's classic tale, *Les Misérables*. Jean Valjean's story is

presented as an exemplar of an ethic of response-ability, illustrating a dialectic that forgets to

recollect, a dialogic encounter that resides in the communication of capability, and a rhetoric that

issues from the universal particularity of the face.

Chapter One

Levinas, Kierkegaard, and the Ethical Demand

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to lay the foundation for engaging Levinas with Kierkegaard in the context of questions about the challenges associated with postmodern communication ethics. Both philosophers' attentiveness to affectivity and their similar passion for meeting and responding to existence on its own terms[4] provide hermeneutic entry into a complex and nuanced dialogue between them. The first section, "Prompting Conversation between Levinas and Kierkegaard," looks at Kierkegaard's view of the self-other relation and specifically at his understanding of the important connection between pathos and the ethical. "Communication Ethics in a Postmodern Age" provides additional context by defining postmodernity in terms of its significant challenges, characterizing the current moment as one of unprecedented opportunity for communication ethicists. "Responding to Levinas" reviews the recent treatment of Levinas's work and suggests ways in which current scholarship points towards the importance of acknowledging an interplay between Levinas and Kierkegaard. "Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue" looks at the challenges that scholars have faced when reading them alongside one

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[4] In *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning* (2012) Ronald C. Arnett and Annette M. Holba characterize philosophy of communication as "a form of story-centered meaning that contours understanding, framing the public domain and propelling us into human communities of communicative engagement" (16). Arnett and Holba utilize narrative exemplification of *Zorba the Greek* to illustrate the importance of meeting the historical moment of existence. According to Arnett and Holba, *Zorba* is a story that exemplifies philosophy of communication in action by delineating an important distinction between meeting life on its own terms and living with ideas in abstraction (21)

another, including Levinas's own criticisms of Kierkegaard's work. Finally, "Levinas, Kierkegaard, and Postmodernity" engages a comparison of the two philosophers' critiques of Western philosophy.

In the postmodern historical moment, the issue of promoting and protecting one's privileged sense of the good is less a matter of autonomous imposition of will and more a matter of the responses that one makes in the course of living within (and from) the truth to which one is committed. In the wake of Reason's demise, individualistic, rational, and disembodied ethics can no longer be relied on to solve political, moral and social issues. If Alasdair MacIntyre is correct in his assertion that we only possess "the fragments of a conceptual scheme" and that we have "lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical," then we are indeed confronted with a serious dilemma, namely, how to uncover an ethical demand in the postmodern (*After Virtue* 2). Communication ethicist Sharon Bracci has suggested that in responding to the postmodern challenge, we can either work to resurrect the modernist project by reconstructing traditional, universalist theories, in the belief that they continue to retain some level of relevance, or we can accept the challenge to rationality and autonomy, and work to shift the ground of our efforts (Arneson 29). By placing Levinas and Kierkegaard in conversation, the present study directs itself to this second option, and to the affirmation of a communication ethic that incorporates the engagement of difference through a meeting of the Other in dialogue.

Prompting Conversation Between Levinas and Kierkegaard

In *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, Kierkegaard argues that faith is the most essential task of life. As such, faith is not to be discovered in dogmatic adherence, but rather in the passion that Kierkegaard believes is characteristic of human experience. While this is a theme

that persistently dominates much of his work, Kierkegaard's understanding that *pathos* is directly connected to the ethical becomes evident in a parable concerning the relationship between speaker and listener in the context of devotional address. Here, Kierkegaard engages a familiar performer-audience analogy, eventually turning the metaphor on its head:

> It is so, on the stage, as you know well enough, that someone sits and prompts by whispers; he is the inconspicuous one; he is, and wishes to be overlooked. But then there is another, he strides out prominently, he draws every eye to himself. For that reason he has been given his name, that is: actor.

> …the foolishness of many is this: in the secular sense they look upon the speaker as an actor, and the listeners as theatergoers who are to pass judgment upon the artist. But the speaker is not the actor – not in the remotest sense. No, the speaker is the prompter…The speaker whispers the word to the listeners. But the main concern is earnestness: that the listeners by themselves, with themselves, and to themselves, in the silence before God, may speak with the help of this address.

> The address is not given for the speaker's sake, in order that men may praise or blame him. The listener's repetition of it is what is aimed at. If the speaker has the responsibility for what he whispers, then the listener has an equally great responsibility not to fall short in his task… (180-181).

Kierkegaard's parable is significant because it emphasizes that the relationship between the ethical self ("the actor") and the other ("the prompter") is not primarily cognitive, but rather affective. Additionally, the parable defies conventional wisdom by portraying the behind-the-scenes other-prompter (as opposed to the onstage self-actor) as the character who initiates and retains creative control. In Kierkegaard's story, it is not the actor who plays the role of speaker; rather, the communicative event that lies at the heart of the ethical demand is in fact initiated by the prompter -- the one who is offstage, inconspicuous, and who wishes to be overlooked, but who is nevertheless the true source of the address. The actor's responsibility to speak when prompted is unequivocally as great as the prompter's responsibility to provide the lines, and we

can be certain that Kierkegaard's "prompter" makes a clear metaphorical reference to the divine voice or teacher. However in addition to this comparison, and contrary to traditional models of the ethical relation, where "the self" is presumed to be both the initiator and the agent of communicative action, Kierkegaard asserts that the self's speech is not originative, but is derived from that of the other. For Kierkegaard, the roles of addressor and addressee are ultimately reversed, and the existential weight of the self lies in the Other's address.

While Kierkegaard and Levinas work from within contrasting religious narratives with ultimately divergent interpretations of the relationship between Self, Other, and God, Kierkegaard's parable reveals an important similarity between them. What Kierkegaard does that ultimately becomes significant in Levinas's work is that he puts into question the traditional communicative model of the ethical relation, which operates essentially on a privileged view of self that assumes the centrality of a rational, autonomous agent. Kierkegaard argues that the self-actor is not really the speaker at all, but rather the addressee, the one who is called by the other-prompter to response. Kierkegaard is careful to note that the prompter speaks not so that the actor will be praised, but rather so that the actor may respond to the prompting, that is, to the ever-present demand to answer the question, "What ought I do?" (*Purity of Heart* 175). His message is clear: ethical obligation emerges in the context of this demand, that is, in the actor's response to the prompter's offstage whisper. Further, the "prompting" represents the event in which the actor is moved to action; he is affected by the prompter and his response initiates as the direct result of the demand that the prompter makes. This requires the immediate and yet inconspicuous presence of the (Levinasian) Other (Kierkegaard's "prompter") who serves first and foremost to initiate a response in which existence itself may be justified.

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Kierkegaard's attentiveness to the responsive element of the self-other relation reflects an understanding that communication itself is philosophically problematic, a position that is later taken up by Levinas. Geoffrey Hale notes that for Kierkegaard, all communication is necessarily "indirect" since the "subjective thinker" must always exist "in his thinking" (21). In other words, Kierkegaard recognizes from the start that communication involves far more than the exchange of information since meaning is never a matter of correspondence between the world "as it really is" and the knower's perceptions of it (Hale 21). Additionally, Kierkegaard asserts that because every message always communicates more than its content, successful communication cannot be measured according to whether or not a message was accurately understood (Hale 23-24). In short, communication becomes a philosophical problem precisely because it can never be reduced to mere cognition, but always includes an element of affectivity.

Kierkegaard's attentiveness to pre-cognitive modes of knowing may be a primary reason why he is, as John Durham Peters claims, "the first to make communication per se a philosophical problem" (128). Peters maintains that while German idealists (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) established a solid framework for the problem of communication in terms of the incommunicable, Kierkegaard was one of the first thinkers to view communication as "a mode of revealing and concealing" as opposed to mere information exchange (127, 129). According to Peters, Kierkegaard's perspective owes much to his certainty that "the world and the subject are forever out of kilter" (127). For Kierkegaard, "subjectivity" indicates not just that the self is justified in his existence by the other's address, but also that both speaker and listener are always uniquely situated on a particular narrative ground, which ultimately separates them.

Kierkegaard's philosophical problematization of communication demonstrates his awareness of both the significance of pre-cognitive modes of knowing and the complexities of

the self-other dialectic. Levinas similarly recognizes the role that affectivity plays in understanding the origins of the ethical relation. To begin, Levinas's interest is not in how we arrive at the normative principles that guide our communicative actions ("my task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning," *Ethics and Infinity*, 90) but rather in the way that the responsible self comes into being in the first place.   According to Bettina Bergo, much of Levinas's significance (and also his ambiguity) derives from the fact that for him, "the function of philosophy is to embrace the paradox of affectivity as communication and as ethical investiture" ("Ethical Selfhood" 116). Bergo notes that while examination of *"individual* passions" as prediscursive modes of knowing is a rarity among philosophers of communication, its origins can be traced back to Kierkegaard.   As Bergo notes, Levinas's strategy (while similar to Kierkegaard's) is radically different in that it works to expose the meaning of human emotion by drawing our attention to the constitutive nature of the relationship between self and other ("Ethical Selfhood" 116-118). Levinas acknowledges that the ethical relation (self-other) is rooted in affectivity, that is, in that moment prior to discourse where the Other's gaze affects, summoning the self to make an existential account.

For Levinas, it is in this moment of breaking through the ego that the self can be abandoned as the source and arbiter of meaning and the birth of the ethical relation can occur: "the *saying* is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it" (*Ethics and Infinity* 88). This idea that the other moves the self to action is reflected in Kierkegaard's actor-prompter metaphor, and demonstrates the sense in which the ethical relation is affective. "The actor's" (the self's) absolute dependency on "the prompter" (the other) dispels traditional notions of ethical agency by displacing the privileged view of the self. As noted by Ronald C. Arnett, Levinas understands the self as derivative rather than

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originative, and this is significant because it "moves concern for the Other and the historical situation into privileged territory" where the self takes shape as a "responsive derivative construction" ("The Responsive 'I'" 39).   In short, Levinas sought to turn attention away from the self as the basis for understanding communicative interaction, issuing a serious challenge to traditional means of conceptualizing and thinking about ethics. The present work maintains that utilizing Kierkegaard to interpret Levinas's project is a viable means of situating his relevance for postmodern communication ethics. The role reversal of addressor and addressee that Kierkegaard enacts in the actor-prompter metaphor provides a basis for initiating a Levinas-Kierkegaard dialogue that offers opportunity and promise for the study of communication ethics in a postmodern age.

Communication Ethics in a Postmodern Age

Like most references to postmodernity, "postmodern ethics" elicits varied reactions from scholars across the disciplines. In fact, many would question the very legitimacy of the phrase. While acknowledging the numerous challenges that are characteristic of the postmodern age, this study views the contemporary historical moment as one of opportunity for communication ethicists who are committed to addressing questions of identity (self and other), agency (autonomy and community), and discourse (public and private spheres) in a climate of rapid globalization.   Postmodernity signifies a time of hope[5]: a time where communication ethicists

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[5] As indicated by Christopher Lasch in *The True and Only Heaven* (1991), hope does not demand a belief in progress, but it does demand a belief in justice (80-81). Lasch's distinction between hope and optimism indicates that for postmodern communication ethicists to have hope, they must view the opportunities of the age not in terms of potential for progress, but rather with the assurance that, despite the inevitability of difficulty and disappointment, there is still the possibility for ethical responsibility. According to Lasch, "Hope implies a deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it" (81).

might engage in genuine learning that confronts moral ambiguity while meeting the demand for ethical responsibility.

Generally speaking, the term "postmodernity" announces the failure of the modern project. Specifically, it declares untenable the pursuit of absolute knowledge and unshakable clarity in all matters of life, including the ethical. Since Plato's time, Western philosophy has heralded Reason as the solid foundation of knowledge, claiming it as the defining characteristic of humanity and the source of first principles. Postmodern thinking is characterized by the rejection of Reason as the ultimate authority and the assertion that knowledge is contingent. Postmodernity questions the very notion of "Truth," and recognizes multiplicity in both the individual self and society at large. With these assertions comes a shift of attention away from purely theoretical issues to concerns of practical philosophy (human praxis) (Madison and Fairbairn 1). Once modernity reaches the stage of self-criticism, the assumptions that reality is ultimately knowable, that truth exists independently from language, and that objectivity leads to progress are irrevocably shaken.

Postmodernity is generally thought to signal both the death of philosophy and the demise of ethics. In general, the degree to which a perspective is postmodern can be measured by its level of anti-foundationalism (or the degree to which it is anti-essentialist), and this element alone has significant consequences for ethics (Madison and Fairbairn 231). As the dominant paradigm in Western moral philosophy, ethical rationalism had assumed that, given the right method or calculus, the correct answer to any ethical dilemma could always be determined (Madison and Fairbairn 3). With the denial of any systematic procedure for reasoning about ethical issues and the accompanying assertion that all theory is culture-laden, the paths offered by traditional theories of ethics look like nothing more than dead-ends. As Zygmunt Bauman

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summarizes, "the moral thought and practice of modernity was animated by the belief in the possibility of a non-ambivalent, non-aporetic ethical code…It is the *disbelief* in such a possibility that is *post*modern" (9). The affirmation of perspectivism, coupled with the onslaught of metanarrative disintegration, created a climate in which all claims to universality in ethical matters appeared intellectually bankrupt (Madison and Fairbairn 3). Postmodernity signals the arrival of that moment in which the naivety of the belief in moral certainty is once and for all destroyed. This does not however, necessitate a total annihilation of the moral, and according to Gary B. Madison and Marty Fairbairn, the death of traditional philosophical ethics (that is, the demise of moral epistemology) means simply that the "phenomenon of the moral-ethical needs to be re-conceptualized, and in a thoroughgoing post-metaphysical manner" (2). In place of traditional philosophical ethics, postmodernity acknowledges the reality that we cannot escape the messiness and the confusion that characterizes life, and especially ethical life.   Madison and Fairbairn explain that a post-metaphysical reconceptualization of morality must affirm the moral concerns of the modern age (human rights, social justice, etc.) but also seek to shift the ground away from normative regulation and towards the engagement of difference (Madison and Fairbairn 2-3). It is in this context that praxis takes precedence over theory, and the possibility for ethics to move beyond the boundaries of applied metaphysics begins to take shape.

Recognizing the implications of the historical shift to postmodernity is essential for today's communication ethicists. From a postmodern perspective, ethical communication cannot be predicated on the application of systems or rules, and this carries with it important implications for the issues of identity, agency and community. Richard Johannesen summarizes the challenges that postmodernity poses when he asks what the result is for communication ethics when "truth" is constructed in discourse rather than discovered in the absolute, when there

is no autonomous rational agent, when there are no master narratives, and when there are no "personal speakers," but only "role players" who follow the discourse rules of the "dominant culture" (127). For Johannesen these challenges culminate in the question of whether, in the postmodern historical moment, a viable concept of self as ethical agent is possible.

The question of whether or not postmodernity leaves us with an utterly decimated concept of self is a pressing concern, and as Christopher Lyle Johnstone notes, it is this issue that lies at the core of the postmodern challenge, forcing us to confront "difference, disparity, particularity, fragmentation, the instability of the self, the problem of identity…" (Arneson 15). Further, as Ronald C. Arnett, Janie M. Harden Fritz and Leeanne M. Bell explain, "postmodernity is a juncture in human history that challenges the assumption that there is only one form of reasoning and one understanding of the right and good" (13). Arnett, Fritz, and Bell recognize that postmodernity does not entirely dismiss rationalistic or scientific conclusions about the world, but is rather characterized by "a lack of agreement" and the awareness that "there are other understandings" (13-14). The stripping away of the modern illusions of certainty and faith in progress present serious challenges for the comprehension of the moral condition. Specifically, postmodernity indicates that moral conduct is not necessarily guaranteed, that moral phenomena are inherently non-rational, and that morality is fundamentally ambiguous (Bauman 10-13). Given the nature of these obstacles, it is clear that the success or failure of a postmodern communication ethic ultimately depends on our ability to embrace moral ambiguity while initiating communicative practices that meet the demand for responsibility.

Postmodernity challenges communication ethicists working within a constructive philosophical hermeneutic to focus on the unique opportunities that the contemporary historical moment offers. Acknowledgment of hidden potential yields promising results and provides

critical orientation for a praxis-oriented approach. It is precisely when the myths of the modern

machine are laid bare that it becomes possible to envision a communication ethic that, in freeing

itself from the system-bound confines of ethical rationalism, can answer the call to

responsibility by living fully (and joyfully) within the uncertainties of human life.

To begin, the realization that truth is constructed in dialogue humbly invites us to engage

an enlarged understanding[6], that is, to abandon the familiar in favor of encounter with difference.

While metanarrative disintegration has resulted in a pervasive sense of uncertainty, it is this very

ambiguity that provides the context in which the modern obsession with knowledge can be

overcome, and learning (via the encounter with difference) can become a real possibility. As

Arnett explains, "Postmodernity is first a questioning of modernist bravado and then a call to

conversation and learning…Postmodernity is the era of welcome – a welcome to learning and

difference. We cannot fall prey to the temptation to return to modern familiar assumptions of

progress, efficiency, and the autonomous agent. Postmodernity opens the conversation by

offering an invitation to enter the conversation. If one is to engage communication ethics in this

era, the first principle is learning" (Arneson 62-63). While postmodernity denies the possibility

of the rational agent, it uncovers the existence of an embedded agent, that is, a moral self that

acts within the context of discourse and community. Bauman explains that modernity's failure

to substantiate the rational autonomous agent allows us to understand the moral self as first and

foremost a product of his relation with the Other: "Given the ambiguous impact of the societal

efforts at ethical legislation, one must assume that moral responsibility – being *for* the Other

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[6] Hannah Arendt has repeatedly emphasized Immanuel Kant's (1892) conceptualization of "enlarged mentality."
Arendt maintains that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* initiates a different way of thinking: "one for which it would not
be enough to be in agreement with one's own self, but which consisted of being able to 'think in the place of
everybody else'" (*Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 1968, p. 220).

before one can be *with* the Other – is the first reality of the self, a starting point rather than a product of society. It precedes all engagement with the Other, be it through knowledge, evaluation, suffering, or doing" (13). In this way, moral responsibility issues directly from the self-other relation, acknowledging the complexity and ambiguity of the moral condition, but also meeting the demand for an engagement with difference. Postmodernity offers an element of hope via the recognition that moral responsibility issues directly from the self-other relation and relies upon an embedded agent who seeks enlarged understanding through the meeting of the Other in dialogue.

In addition to the unique possibilities that these conditions create, postmodernity allows us to accept decisional uncertainty, no longer relegating moral responsibility to the realm of an impersonal legislator. Moral responsibility is rather placed in the hands of the individual, who, despite ethical aporia, chooses to act. As Baumann explains, modern morality acts on the assumption that there is one choice in any given situation that can and should be decreed as "good," and in this way ethics is simply a matter of "rationality" (11). Further, Baumann explains that this perspective explicitly overlooks what is properly moral in morality, namely the element of choice. At the end of the "modern road" stands an individual, confronted by conflicting moral demands and options as she carries the burden of responsibility on her own shoulders (Baumann 31). As Arnett, Fritz and Bell explain: "Postmodernity does not tell us what is ethical. It requires that we know what our ethical position is, learn that of the Other, and figure out how to communicate our own position and negotiate the difference that we encounter" (16). What is particularly hopeful in this situation is that postmodern ethics is tied to the possibility of choice -- a choice which requires learning about the Other rather than knowing which principle to apply in a given situation.

Responding to Levinas

In contrast to Kierkegaard, Levinas has appeared consistently in the communication literature of the past decade. The following section offers an overview of the ways that recent communication scholars have engaged Levinas's work in the context of postmodernity. Recent literature demonstrates consistent attentiveness to the concepts of "listening" and "response" as key elements in interpreting and understanding the implications of Levinas's work.

It was not until 2001 that the first full-length study concerning Levinas appeared in the field of communication and rhetorical studies. Michael Hyde's *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Levinas, Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate* (2001) emphasizes the importance of understanding Levinas within a Heideggerian context, arguing that for both thinkers, the concept of conscience can be understood only through careful attention to its unique voice, or in other words, "the way in which it calls" (8). According to Hyde, "The act of listening is as important to the truth of conscience as is its own evocative voice; the call of conscience is consummated only in the hearing of what it has to say" (8). Hyde notes that while Heidegger's ontological view understands the call as rooted in our attentiveness to the uncovering of Being, Levinas interprets the call in terms of its origin in the "face-to-face encounter between the self and the other, whose fundamental ethical nature extends beyond the reaches of ontology such that it forever holds a 'trace' of what is 'otherwise than Being'" (8). While Hyde maintains that Levinas's position presupposes certain aspects of Heidegger's, he identifies a significant difference between the two when he indicates that Heidegger's view "continually fails to clarify how the call can make its way to our ears via the pain and suffering of others" (9). It is at this point, says Hyde, that we must consider the role of rhetoric in relation to the ethical call. According to Hyde, hearing and responding to the Other's suffering requires the cultivation of a

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rhetorical competence that is a necessary step in moving toward the good. Hyde responds to the historically contentious relationship between philosophy and rhetoric by maintaining that there is a rhetorical element at the very heart of existence. For Hyde, Levinas's articulation of the primordial call ("the call of conscience") is a rhetorical interruption in its purest form: "Levinas's phenomenology of the face allows for an assessment of rhetoric, that although ambiguous, is nevertheless, favorable…Levinas speaks of the saying of the face as being itself a rhetoric – albeit one that comes to us without eloquence" (109). According to Hyde, "the other's face, in all its nudity, vulnerability, and alterity is a most revealing and fitting work of art – a rhetorical interruption *par excellence*" (111). In this sense, says Hyde, the saying of the face invites moral deliberation by virtue of the fact that in coming to us from something other than ourselves, it is wholly unfamiliar (111). Hyde engages these ideas with several case studies that illustrate response to suffering through the speaking of "a rhetoric for the other." Hyde demonstrates the importance of rhetorical competence by highlighting situations involving terminal illness and end-of-life decisions – contexts in which the speaker must observe (listen) and then give an account (respond). Ultimately, Hyde's assessment underscores the significance of Levinas's insistence that philosophy be re-conceived on the grounds of exteriority.

The significance of listening in Levinas's work has been treated at length in the work of Lisbeth Lipari, who has perhaps made the largest contribution to this particular topic. Lipari observes that dialogic ethics has traditionally placed greater emphasis on speaking than on listening. This, argues Lipari, can be seen in Buber's differentiation between "I-It" and "I-Thou," and even in Levinas's distinction between "the saying" and "the said" ("Listening for the Other" 123). Lipari suggests that we place listening, rather than speaking, at the "conceptual center of communication," noting that listening is phenomenologically prior. On this basis, she

concludes that the answer to the ethical call of conscience lies not simply in listening, but in "listening otherwise" ("Listening, Thinking, Being," 348, "Listening Otherwise," 45). For Lipari, "listening otherwise" represents a process that is committed to receiving otherness: "The ethics that emerges from this kind of listening arises from intentionally engaging what is unfamiliar, strange, and not already understood" ("Listening Otherwise," 45). Like Hyde, Lipari works under the assumption that the ethical call is primarily concerned with "alleviating the suffering of others" ("Listening Otherwise," 45). Based in religious tradition and in the philosophical perspective of care ethics (Gilligan, Noddings), the presupposition that ethics is primarily tied to the alleviation of suffering substantiates the claim that listening is foundational to ethics as constitutive of communicative moral action ("Listening Otherwise," 45). Furthermore, Lipari suggests that "listening otherwise" is fundamentally characterized by the activity of witnessing: "Bearing witness gives rise to a listening without resorting to what is easy, what I already know, or what we have in common. It means that I listen for and make space for the difficult, the different, and the radically strange" ("Listening Otherwise," 57). Lipari's most recent work develops this idea into the concept of "listening being," which signifies not a principle or a state, but rather a "horizon to which we might travel" ("Listening, Thinking, Being," 348). "Listening being" signifies the possibilities that arise when listening begins not in speaking, but rather from an "emptiness of awareness itself." Beginning here, listening can be identified as a dwelling place from which we offer our ethical response, where we do more than just comprehend and interpret: "As an ethical stance, *listening being* requires a willingness to suspend already familiar conceptions, beliefs, and understandings" ("Listening, Thinking, Being" 354). Like Hyde's notion of "a rhetoric for the other," Lipari's understanding

of listening suggests that learning can and does extend beyond maieutics and the conceptual limitations of language.

Engaging the relationship between speaking and listening is especially appropriate for any investigation that seeks to ground itself in hermeneutic phenomenology. Rather than viewing listening as part of the overall communicative process of transforming, sending and receiving information, such an approach aims to consider the phenomenological experience of listening as it occurs beyond the boundaries of logic. Lipari's understanding of the interplay between thinking, listening and speaking relies on a constitutive view of communication where language is considered to be a form of "worlding" in which interlocutors work co-constitutively to create meaning.[7] Working within this framework, Lipari suggests that we understand listening as an openness to receiving that which is other, that which is completely foreign, and that which exists outside the self ("Listening Otherwise," 53). When listening involves an engagement with alterity, it presents itself not just as a process of reciprocating dialogue in conversation, but also as constitutive of the speaker's own experience of self (one receives the unfamiliar rather than placing oneself in conformity with it). Paradoxically, self and other are in proximity, but also distant. This is Levinas's alternative to the traditional rational self; a self that is constituted in exteriority, and is always already addressed by the purely transcendent Other. As Ronald C. Arnett explains, "Levinas reframes the self from a willful agent to a responsive creation, moving from a traditional focus on autonomy and independent agency to interhuman responsive action responsible for the Other" ("The Responsive I," 39). Approached from a position where the self is viewed as derivative, listening has little to do with hearing or with the way that the structures

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[7] See Stewart, John. *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication,* 1995. p. 111.

of memory and cognition work to influence perception.[8] Rather, listening is a phenomenological

experience of disruption, where our habitual ways of seeing the world are shaken. In a

postmodern context, this suggests that learning about the Other is not merely an option; rather, it

is an ethical demand: "The task of interpersonal communication is one of 'face education' in a

postmodern age. We are required to learn about the Other. The face of the Other then reminds

us of responsibility to live a life beyond self-occupation" (Arnett, "The Responsive I," 49). In

other words, when the self is the guiding metaphor, listening amounts to nothing more than an

attempt at comprehension. The dangers of beginning with the self or with agency as the

foundation for understanding communication between persons are serious, and ultimately result

in forms of communication which serve to separate and polarize. As Arnett explains,

"Possession of meaning inside the self focuses attention on the self, not on what emerges from

the relationship. Such possessive listening can encourage using the other, looking for a hidden

motive by which to manipulate the other, and seeking comments to reinforce one's view of

oneself" (*Communication and Community* 60). As Hyde, Lipari, and Arnett point out, Levinas's

postulation of a derivative rather than an originative self offers valuable conceptual alternatives

for embracing difference as an integral part of the ethical relation.

The awareness that ethical communication is grounded in the complexities of response to

difference prompts Amit Pinchevski to consider, in his full-length study on Levinas, whether or

not interpretations of communication based on the transmission model actually preclude the

possibility of ethical communication. Pinchevski looks specifically to Levinas in order to argue

that "the ethical possibilities in communication do not ultimately lie in its successful completion,

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[8] For more on the distinction between listening and hearing see Lisbeth Lipari, "Listening for the Other: Ethical
Implications of the Buber-Levinas Encounter." *Communication Theory* 14.2 (2004) p. 137.

but rather in its interruption" (6-7). For Pinchevski, the ethical stakes are much higher when there is possibility of misunderstanding, lack, or refusal of communication. Communication as transmission represents an "assault against the integrity of another" (7). Pinchevski locates the possibility of communication in interruption, which he defines as its intrinsic and positive condition. For Pinchevski, ethical possibilities reside in interruptions: "Communication reveals itself as an ethical involvement precisely when it transcends beyond the reciprocity of exchange" (243). Like the previously mentioned authors, Pinchevski is attentive to the primacy of listening in Levinas. He maintains that the interruption of the face situates ethical communication not in effective transmission of information or in the union of separate minds, but rather in the opening to the unknown. Additionally, Pinchevski notes an important paradox of communication, observing that the condition of its possibility is its impossibility (241). Again, the decentering of the cognitive self and the break with epistemic autonomy loom large as Pinchevski claims that "responding to the Other means surpassing readily available means and modes of interaction. It involves, indeed depends upon, venturing beyond the familiar, where responsibility is predicated by the uncertainty as to how to respond" (245). For Pinchevski, the act of witnessing provides the conceptual link between the ethical and the communicative. Using the example of Holocaust survivor Primo Levi to illustrate the ethical commitment of the witness, Pinchevski notes that the witness is not a mere spectator, but is one who serves to provide access to events or experiences that are otherwise inaccessible, and whose specific charge is to express the inexpressible (251). Pinchevski explains that the witness is not motivated by the will to comprehend, but rather by the desire to respond (i.e. to "testify.") The witness testifies to the impossibility of re-presenting the experience: "The witness gives expression to something that passed but still affects" (251). Ultimately, witnessing transcends the Said, and is both implicated by and gives expression to the

demand for justice (Pinchevski 254). Pinchevski concludes, "The Saying thus establishes a discourse in which one is exposed to the Other's silence, in which one is silently called into listening. Through the silent and yielding setting of the Saying, communication becomes an ethical event of proximity" (216).   The image of a silent witness and an Other whose proximity is characterized by distance figure significantly in Pinchevski's description of Levinas's work. Furthermore, Pinchevski's study reflects a current trend in the scholarship that recognizes the significance of the challenge that Levinas's work poses to traditional agent-centered models of communication.

The primacy of listening and response in Levinas is also noted by Wes Avram, who suggests that the face is in fact more than just a visage. Avram indicates that Levinas orients human experience in terms of affectivity, or what might accurately be termed "an epistemological sensuality" (263). Avram observes that for Levinas, the face contains an alterity that announces its presence, but is at the same time inexpressible. In this sense, the face "witnesses" to its alterity as it is simultaneously engaged in addressing the other. Avram suggests that Levinas's epistemological orientation asserts the radical possibility of thinking aurally rather than optically:

> Levinas hears the witness of the Other, for example, in the ordinary experience of face-to face encounters in which the claim of one person on another becomes more urgent than the predictable adventures of interpersonal encounter would suggest to either…We are called to attentiveness by a word from the other that rushes ahead of that other's appearance. We know, first, because we have heard…When I hear another speak, I turn to this other from more than a need to know who speaks or what is said… I turn to this

other from a pure responsiveness, turning toward genuine transcendence, toward the word of witness that is already turning towards me (Avram 268).

Avram affirms that in Levinas, the ethical relation is rooted in the call of the Other. In other words, communication is conceived of as more than the processing and exchange of information and it is in this way that Levinas calls for a thinking that is more than thinking, and which cannot be understood primarily on the basis of knowing, but rather as "a thinking in response, an attentiveness to the hortatory word (of the Other) to which each interpretable word (of the other) gives witness" (Avram 272). Levinas acknowledges that in being ethically bound to the other we are called to obedience, but not in the sense of subjection or submission. Rather, our obedience to the Other takes the shape of a readiness to listen. Avram illustrates with the assistance of Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich:

Obedience in the Biblical sense means unobstructed listening, unconditional readiness to hear, untrammeled disposition to be surprised…When I listen unconditionally, respectfully, courageously, with the readiness to take in the other as a radical surprise, I do something else [than submit]. I bow, bend over towards the total otherness of someone. But I renounce searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing that a gulf separates us (Ivan Illich, "The Educational Enterprise in Light of the Gospel" qtd. in Avram 280).

Illich's words are significant for Avram because they emphasize Levinas's assertion that ethical obligation is based not in reciprocity but in asymmetry; ethical communication originates in a readiness to listen, which, in turn begins with the courage to welcome the unknown. In other words, I listen not so that I will be listened to, but so that I may respond.

In summary, the ability to consider the primacy of response and the intricacies of the relationship between thinking, listening, and speaking in reference to Levinas's understanding of alterity has proven significant for recent communication ethics scholars. In response to the challenges posed by postmodernity, and with a sense of promise for the possibility of genuine ethical interaction, communication ethics scholars continue to find inspiration in Levinas's attentiveness to the phenomenological experience of alterity.

Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue

Undoubtedly, it is their similar stance with regard to Western ontology that substantiates the importance of reading Kierkegaard and Levinas together. Since the turn of the millennium, increased interest in the relation between them has moved the discussion from book chapters and journal articles to full-length studies and edited volumes. This is not to suggest, however, that the juxtaposition of these two figures has been made with relative ease. Claudia Welz and Karl Verstrynge note that in addition to the numerous disparities between them, Levinas's often critical remarks about Kierkegaard makes placing them together "a risky and complicated business" (1). The divide appears an even greater obstacle when one considers that any conversation between them must necessarily involve a confrontation between what are typically considered to be two opposing spheres of philosophical discourse: dialogic philosophy (which emphasizes rejection of all egological thinking) and existentialism (generally thought to broaden the concept of subjectivity) (Welz and Verstrynge 1-2)[9].

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[9] For a discussion of Kierkegaard's relation to dialogic philosophy see Herrmann, Andrew F. "Kierkegaard and Dialogue: The Communication of Capability." *Communication Theory* 18.1 (2008): 71-92, and Perkins, Robert L. "The Politics of Existence: Buber and Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaard and Post/Modernity*, Martin J. Matustik and Meorld Westphal, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Among the most significant disparities are their views on the relationship between religion and ethics, and on the positioning of self and other in relation to the divine. Notwithstanding their distinct theological origins, it is generally thought that the Christian Kierkegaard gives priority to religion over ethics, while the Jewish Levinas does the opposite (Simmons and Wood 1). This is based on the understanding that in declaring "ethics as first philosophy," Levinas gives priority to ethics and to the Other, while in contrast, Kierkegaard "suspends" ethics in the name of the religious. Additionally, Levinas has insisted that his philosophical and theological writings be kept separate, and has repeatedly refused to provide a theological foundation for ethics, while Kierkegaard is widely regarded as a Christian author who is largely concerned with the human relation to the divine. Ultimately, this issue plays itself out in terms of key differences in the ways that Levinas and Kierkegaard conceive of the divine relation. Merold Westphal explains that for Levinas, the other is always the intermediary between self and God, whereas for Kierkegaard it is God who is always situated between self and other (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 5). Westphal suggests that we read this fundamental disagreement not merely as an element of the differences between their respective theologies, but rather with the understanding that for Levinas, keeping the other as a middle term between God and the self is the only way to protect against religion becoming an ideology (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 37, 41). While the religious clearly occupies a privileged position over the ethical in Kierkegaard[10], it may not be so obvious that what each of them means by the terms "religious" and "ethical" are really that different. Patrick Sheil suggests that the difference in the way that the two thinkers prioritize ethics and religion is in fact a product of their common understanding: "Levinas and Kierkegaard write on ethics. They differ in terms of

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[10] In *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), Kierkegaard outlines three progressive stages of life experience: the aesthetic, the ethical, and finally, the religious.

how they prize it, but this could be a difference of reaction to a *shared* vision of the infinite

character of ethics, with Levinas being inspired and the Dane being overawed by it" (14). Both

Wesphal's and Sheil's interpretations are affirmed by the fact that Levinas does not equate ethics

with classical inquiry. As J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood explain, questions such as "What

is the good life?" or "What ought I do?" are not properly ethical questions for Levinas, but rather

fall within the domain of the political (4). Additionally, according to Westphal, we need

consider only the degree to which Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical"

represents a rejection of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* (the social order of ethics) in order to realize that

the perceived disagreement regarding the priority of ethics and religion appears to be nothing

more than a matter of difference in the usage of terms. In Westphal's estimation, it is quite

possible that what Levinas means by "the religious" is closer to what Kierkegaard means by "the

ethical" since "the primary relation between philosophy, conceived by Levinas as the

metaphysics of transcendence, and religion is best expressed in Kierkegaardian language" (47).

Westphal posits that Levinas may very well transform Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of

the ethical into a teleological suspension of the religious, and in the course of that

transformation, that which is being suspended may retain a certain amount of similarity (*Levinas

and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 47).   Despite the differences in the ways that Levinas and

Kierkegaard conceive of the divine in relation to issues of intersubjectivity, the interpretations

offered by Westphal, Sheil and Simmons and Wood suggest that the disparities between Levinas

and Kierkegaard are not as clear-cut as they may first appear.

Nevertheless, any attempt to place Levinas and Kierkegaard in dialogue must not only

confront these interpretive complexities, but also the difficulties raised by Levinas's own reading

of Kierkegaard's work. Levinas's direct references to Kierkegaard are minimal at best, but his

most specific and extended discussion of the Danish philosopher's work occurs in "Existence and Ethics," and "A Propos of Kierkegaard Vivant," published in *Proper Names,* 1996 (*Noms Propres,* 1976)*.* Levinas maintains that Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity goes too far; that it is a separation that is too radical in that it folds back over onto itself:

> The manner of the strong and the violent, who fear neither scandal nor destruction, has
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> become, since Kierkegaard and before Nietzsche, a manner of philosophy. One
>
> philosophizes with a hammer…That harshness in Kierkegaard emerges in the exact
>
> moment when he 'transcends ethics.' Kierkegaard's entire polemics against speculative
>
> philosophy supposes subjectivity tensed on itself, existence as the care that a being takes
>
> for its own existence, and a kind of torment over oneself (76).

It is clear that Levinas worries whether Kierkegaard's philosophy is capable of acknowledging exteriority or if it in fact destroys the Other. He goes on in both essays to characterize Kierkegaard's work as nothing more than a logic of the Same, arguing that in it, subjectivity fails to acknowledge the metaphysical opening of the face. For these reasons, Levinas suggests that Kierkegaardian subjectivity is ultimately egoistic, and as such, represents a form of totality.

While Levinas's criticisms ought not to be dismissed, it is important to note that his treatment of Kierkegaard's work is extremely limited, focusing only two of his texts, *Fear and Trembling* and *Either/Or.* Both Welz/Verstrynge and Westphal note the restricted quality of Levinas's reading and its failure to represent a comprehensive treatment of Kierkegaard's ethics. Additionally, M. Jamie Ferreira argues that Levinas's narrow reading of Kierkegaard "obscures the commonality between them on the character of the ethical relation to the other" (163). Finally, both Ferreira and Westphal recognize that while ethics is clearly secondary to the divine

command in *Fear and Trembling,* failure to acknowledge Kierkegaard's discussion of love and interpersonal relations in *Works of Love* is a major oversight on Levinas's part (Westphal "The Many Faces" 1143, Ferriera 161). Noting the often varied and ambiguous references that Levinas makes to Kierkegaard, Westphal identifies "four faces" of Levinas's reading of Kierkegaard: 1) misunderstanding him, 2) understanding him enough to see their differences, 3) appreciating him in spite of their differences, 4) calling for a response from Kierkegaard (Westphal, "The Many Faces," 1154-1155). Westphal concludes from this that while Levinas's reading is certainly limited, and often plagued with misunderstandings, there are also moments of genuine engagement, where Levinas and Kierkegaard rely on each other to articulate an ethics concerned with justice and love.

While it is clear that Levinas's own reading of Kierkegaard is fraught with ambiguities, several scholars have suggested that Levinas's work converges with Kierkegaard even more than Levinas would himself admit. Welz and Verstrynge point to Levinas's description of his own philosophy in *Totality and Infinity* as "a defense of subjectivity" (qtd. in Welz and Verstrynge 6). They further argue that both Levinas and Kierkegaard frame subjectivity in paradoxical terms: "[For Levinas and Kierkegaard subjectivity is] a blind spot that is at the same time constitutive and threatening…that at the same time bears and undermines the subject" (2). In Westphal's estimation, it is often in Kierkegaardian language that Levinas's most significant and complex ideas are expressed. In "Existence and Ethics," the very place in which we find his harshest criticisms of Kierkegaard, Levinas's own description of subjectivity carries echoes of the Kierkegaardian understanding of truth:

> The subject has a secret, forever inexpressible, which determines his or her very
> subjectivity. A secret that is not simply knowledge about which one refrains from

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speaking, but one that, identified especially with the burn of sin, remains of itself inexpressible. No truth triumphant, i.e. rational or universal, no expression could express or assuage it ("Existence and Ethics" 67).

 In summary, the recent literature offers solid justification for acknowledging that Levinas's criticisms, while significant, arise out of an incomplete and narrow reading of Kierkegaard's work. By breaking the academic silence on Kierkegaard's philosophy of communication and seeking to extend the boundaries of Levinas's own reading of Kierkegaard's work, this project will attend to the meaningful spaces in which bringing Kierkegaard into conversation with Levinas may provide useful insight into the complexities of his work.

 Levinas, Kierkegaard, and Postmodernity

In pursuit of these ends, an appreciation of the extent to which both thinkers are implicated in the postmodern is warranted. Levinas and Kierkegaard take a similar stance towards the Western philosophical tradition. This is evidenced primarily in Levinas's sustained critique of Heideggerian ontology and in Kierkegaard's vehement protestation against Hegelian speculative philosophy.   Levinas's criticism of Heidegger takes shape in his first major work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961). Here, Levinas maintains that Heidegger's account of the nature of Being fails to make reference to actual existing beings. As Levinas works to explicate the concept of infinity, he takes issue with Heidegger's formulation of *Dasein,* arguing that it results in a totalizing philosophy that objectifies the Other.   Further, Levinas objects to Heidegger's portrayal of the self-other relation:

In Heidegger coexistence is, to be sure, taken as a relationship with the Other irreducible to objective cognition; but in the final analysis it also rests on the relationship with *being*

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in general, on comprehension, on ontology. Heidegger posits in advance this ground of

being as the horizon on which every existent arises…for Heidegger, intersubjectivity is a

coexistence, a *we* prior to the I and the other…" (TI 68).

Heidegger's "neutral intersubjectivity" is problematic for Levinas primarily because it fails to

maintain the separation (exteriority) of the I and the Other. As Levinas explains, for Heidegger,

"Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being" (TI 45). Additionally, Levinas notes

that Heidegger follows Plato' s footsteps by subordinating the particular to the universal, which

ultimately reduces the other to the same: "The primacy of the same was Socrates's teaching: to

receive nothing of the other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of

what comes to me from the outside…" (TI 43). In this way, "ontology as first philosophy" is a

totalizing "philosophy of power," amounting to nothing more than an "egology" (TI 44, 46).

Levinas's objections to a philosophical tradition that is dominated by the concepts of totality,

systematicity and thematization are reflected in these criticisms of Heidegger's philosophy.

Furthermore, they set the stage for a reconceptualization of philosophical wisdom that begins not

with the idea of "first principles," but rather with the birth of the ethical relation.

Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel exhibits a similar rejection of foundational metaphysics.

His objections surface primarily in the context of a reaction to Hegelian speculative philosophy,

and as he declares in the Preface to *Fear and Trembling,* his own work "hasn't the slightest thing

to do with the [Hegelian] System" (43). Kierkegaard is critical of Hegel's failure to account for

the singularity of the individual, indicating in *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) that "truth"

begins and ends with subjectivity: "If one can see God in history, one can see him also in the life

of the individual; to think that one can do the former and not the latter is to delude oneself…If

every single human being is not an individual…then everything is lost and it is not worth the

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trouble to hear about the great world-historical events or the absolute method" (*Philosophical Fragments* 201-202). Kierkegaard, like Levinas, objects to the epistemological tradition of self-reflection on the Absolute. Additionally, Kierkegaard takes issue with the subordination of the particular to the universal, and like Levinas, is critical of the tradition that began with Plato, and was later continued by both Hegel and Heidegger.

Both Levinas's and Kierkegaard's criticisms reflect resistance to modes of philosophical discourse that work to reduce the Other to the Same. Underlying this critique is the rejection of an epistemology based in recollection. Michael Weston explains that both Levinas and Kierkegaard are critical of a mode of reflection that "has the form of a discovery within the thinker of the resources for the resolution of the question of Being, so that I as thinker receive nothing but what was in me" (157). In other words, both Levinas and Kierkegaard object to a metaphysics that is rooted in the self-reflective subject. The absolute knowing (totality) that is sought by Western metaphysics is achieved through the subordination of the self-other relation to an impersonal rational structure. This is the case in Heidegger's ontology, where the subject mediates his own existence through *Dasein*. Gaining much of its impetus from the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, absolute knowing seeks "the apprehension of the intellectual structure of the reality we unreflectively inhabit" or in other words, the comprehension of the relation between what is in time and that which is purely intelligible (Weston 9). Kierkegaard argues that the presumption that knowledge of the latter mediates our knowledge of the former renders the entire project useless. Levinas's position is similar in that it maintains that any method that makes the individual existent subservient to universal conceptions of being amounts to a totalitarian philosophy.

It is clear that opposition to the pursuit of "metaphysical truths" comprises a significant component of both philosophers' work. Both Levinas and Kierkegaard recognize that when autonomy is idealized and the Other is reduced to the Same, it becomes impossible to account for the singularity of the individual. This is especially problematic for Levinas because he sees that alterity lies at the heart of the ethical relation. As he explains in *Totality and Infinity*, the particular character of philosophy as self-reflection (engaged in recollection) precludes the possibility of experiencing genuine alterity, prompting Levinas to conclude that "*Alterity occurs as a divergency and a past* which no memory could resurrect as a present…" ("Phenomenon and Enigma" 68, 71-72). Similarly, in *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard proposes to work from a position that focuses on the immediacy of experience rather than memory of the past: "Whereas the Greek pathos focuses on recollection, the pathos of our project focuses on the moment, and no wonder, for is it not an exceedingly pathos-filled matter to come into existence from the state of 'not to be'?" (*Philosophical Fragments* 21). Kierkegaard's rejection of traditional epistemological frameworks is resonant here, as is his assertion that the problem of justification is fundamentally existential (and not a question of metaphysics). It is a similar viewpoint that prompts Levinas to describe infinity as that which reaches beyond categorization of Being to the primordial experience of what it means "to be." The concern with immediacy in both authors is clear, and the fact that both authors reject representational modes of knowing not only reinforces their position in the postmodern conversation, but also provides compelling rationale for bringing Kierkegaard into conversation with Levinas.

While reading Levinas and Kierkegaard together does not come without its significant challenges, situating the dialogue constructively is an important step in moving it forward. According to Simmons and Wood, engagement between them is critical if we are to be able to

think ethics in the wake of the Holocaust, and in the face of religious pluralism and exclusivity (4-5). Furthermore, Simmons and Wood maintain that even though the differences are numerous, common ground is visible with the recognition that both authors speak directly to the most pressing issues of contemporary society, including questions of justice, hospitality, and human rights:

> [Levinas and Kierkegaard] call us to a constant project of envisaging and re-envisaging how to think about justification without the arrogance of classical foundationalism, about normativity while being suspicious of universality and objective claims to legitimacy, and about communication while recognizing the social embeddedness of all language…The rough ground on which Levinas and Kierkegaard both stand is the space in which ethics may be thought without guarantees, faith may be appropriated without rigid apologetics, truth may be embraced without certainty, justice may be championed along with humility, and objectivity reconceived in the light of subjectivity (5).

Not only does this depiction of the "rough ground" upon which Levinas and Kierkegaard stand affirm their relevance for the postmodern conversation, it is also suggests that listening to Levinas with a Kierkegaardian ear is a worthy pursuit for communication ethics scholars looking to respond to the challenges of postmodernity. Simmons and Wood suggest that dialogue between Levinas and Kierkegaard may be a key element in the effort to come to terms with the reality of postmodernity, a reality that is largely characterized by contradictions and uncertainties.

Simmons and Wood's attentiveness to the ways that a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian dialogue resounds against the postmodern backdrop may explain why they also perceive the

conversation as largely deconstructive. They suggest, in fact, that Levinas and Kierkegaard

provide "profound resources" for the application of deconstruction to epistemology (5).

However, the present study maintains that a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian dialogue has the

potential to do more than simply elucidate the postmodern challenge. Levinas's and

Kierkegaard's ability to meet that challenge head-on is revealed in the comfort with which they

position themselves at the edge of rough terrain. Westphal asserts, for example, that together,

Kierkegaard and Levinas form a radical challenge to the Western philosophical tradition, but one

that is different from the critiques of prominent deconstructionists such as Nietzsche, Husserl or

Heidegger (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 1). Westphal agrees that Levinas's critique of

Western philosophy places him on common ground with postmodern philosophers, but he also

maintains that Levinas shares an important likeness with German thinkers like Gadamer and

Habermas, who tend to "emphasize what we can have and not to linger on what we cannot"

(*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 12-13). Among the important elements that Westphal

takes note of are the Germans' concern with historicity and their emphasis on the concept of

Verstandigung (coming to an understanding with others). Overall, these characteristics amount to

an expressed recognition that "philosophical thought can be constructive as well as

deconstructive" (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 12). These constructive themes emerge

even more fully, according to Westphal, when we consider the way that Levinas responds to the

question of the possibility of ethics in the face of Reason's death. Westphal explains that because

Levinas challenges the assumption that what calls itself Reason actually is reason, his

perspective views its demise in a positive, rather than a negative, light. For Levinas, the

wounding of Reason may be that which keeps ethics from degenerating into politics or from

becoming an ideology of violence. Westphal explains that for Levinas, "[the wounding of

Reason] is a necessary moment in making the modern world safe for the moral life. Only when the totalizing assault of Reason on the Other has been withstood is the way open for a genuinely reasonable ethics" (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 14). What surfaces as a constructive theme in Levinas is the idea that ethical obligation is directly (and non-cognitively) experienced. In opposition to Lyotard's claim that "the 'you must' is something that exceeds all experience," Levinas insists that we have a direct experience of the ethical ought which occurs in the moment of the face-to face-encounter (Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 14-15). Westphal concludes that the claim for the immediacy of the ethical ought provides a solid foundation for reading the two philosophers alongside one another against the backdrop of postmodernity:

> What is important is the striking structural agreement between the immediacy claimed in Levinas's contrast between revelation and recollection and that to which Kierkegaard makes appeal. In neither case is there a denial that normally meaning and truth are mediated by the "already said," by metaphysical, transcendental, or historical criteria that are the conditions of possible experience in that by being always already within us they enable us to recognize whatever claims to be meaningful or true as such. The claim is rather that there is an exception to the sovereignty of these *a priori's*, an immediacy that cuts through them, traumatically calling us (along with these defenses, for that is how both Levinas and Kierkegaard view them) into question and taking us hostage. This exception is the immediacy called revelation (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 21).

Westphal not only affirms both Levinas's and Kierkegaard's place in the postmodern conversation, but he also recognizes that their respective projects are essentially constructive in nature. Rather than dismiss the *a priori* altogether, both philosophers are committed to

questioning its priority, that is, to acknowledging the place of the *a priori* within lived experience.

Ultimately, this perspective affirms the view that both authors contribute significantly to a constructive reformulation of philosophy. Stephen Minister acknowledges a redemptive element at the heart of both philosophers' work, arguing that through a "teleological suspension of philosophy" Levinas and Kierkegaard place the speculative and the ontological in their "appropriate context," that is, a context that is dominated by "ethical subjectivity" (115). Minister explains that by offering a critique of Western metaphysics, Levinas and Kierkegaard turn to ethical subjectivity as "indicative of a larger framework in which philosophy is not independent, but must take its place" (119). Minister suggests that both authors understand subjectivity in terms of a self who is always already addressed by the Other. In other words, it is from the position of a decentered ethical subject that Kierkegaard and Levinas re-articulate philosophy's role.   Samuel Moyn agrees that both philosophers' projects are best understood as constructive rather than deconstructive, noting that Kierkegaard's description of the infinite qualitative difference between God and man set a significant precedent for Levinasian alterity. Moyn explains, "Whatever his reputation, Levinas never rejected philosophy. He would attempt to reform it, with Kierkegaard's help, turning the suspension of the ethical into the ground of ethics" (33). By reorienting philosophical inquiry away from self-reflection, Levinas and Kierkegaard construct a basis for understanding our experience of the world that begins in the immediacy of human interaction.

In summary, both Levinas and Kierkegaard recognize the existential necessity of demands that are not self-imposed, but are rather put on us by the Other. This calling out of the "I" points towards the phenomenological sense in which the "Other" makes the "I" possible.

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Levinas and Kierkegaard rely on a revelatory understanding of truth that affirms an intimate connection between subjectivity and exteriority. Levinas argues that philosophy must be able to account for singularity if it is to truly engage a "reasonable" ethics. What we have as a result is not the end of philosophy but rather a shifting of its ground wherein the possibility of ethics lies not in knowing the Good, in order that we may act in conformity with it, but rather in the commitment to and subsequent carrying of a privileged sense of the good into everyday life.

<center>**Chapter Two**</center>

<center>**Forgetting Recollection: The Dialectic of Response-ability**</center>

The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me in fact to be elsewhere: not in synthesis, but in the face to face of humans, in sociality, in its moral signification. But it must be understood that morality comes not as a secondary layer, above an abstract reflection on the totality and its dangers; morality has an independent and preliminary range. First philosophy is an ethics.
--Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (1982)

Introduction

      This chapter examines the dialectical component of communicative responsibility with

particular attention to the challenges that Levinas poses to traditional modes and methods for

thinking about epistemology. Specifically, this chapter addresses the question, "How does

Levinas re-envision the task of philosophy and how does his view alter the conventional

understanding of philosophical dialectic?" Dialectic is understood here in a relatively broad

sense, signifying philosophical understanding, or, for lack of better terms, the process by which

we come to know. Beginning with Levinas's opposition to the idea that philosophy consists in

self-reflection, this chapter seeks to uncover an alternate understanding of dialectic that works to

frame communicative responsibility as "response-ability."

      The first section of the chapter, "Levinas and the Task of Philosophy," looks at Levinas's

relationship to Husserl and Heidegger, paying special attention to Levinas's reliance on the

German phenomenologists and the role it plays in re-scripting the role and purpose of

philosophy. The second section, "Truth as Subjectivity and Ethics as First Philosophy," brings

Kierkegaard into the conversation to deepen understanding of Levinas's claim that ethics is first

philosophy. It does this by highlighting Kierkegaard's criticism of speculative, systematic

philosophy and his famous assertion that "truth is subjectivity." The final section, "An Unresolved Dialectic," maintains that a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian understanding of the philosophical task points towards an alternate understanding of dialectic – one that represents the first movement towards a communication ethic guided by "response-ability."

Postmodernity's recognition that the powers of Reason inevitably fall short directs attention to the way that we are affected by the world, prior to any attempts at reasoning or comprehension. As Merold Westphal has noted, both Levinas and Kierkegaard deny that truth is found within, and oppose the Socratic belief that teaching is primarily maieutic ("Levinas, Kierkegaard and the Theological Task" 242). Utilizing a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian understanding of "philosophical wisdom," this chapter describes an unresolved dialectic that is characterized by "forgetting of recollection." The metaphor of forgetting to recollect signifies that the philosopher's pursuit of wisdom requires a turning outward as opposed to inward and marks a significant break with the Platonic epistemological tradition. This chapter will argue that the hope of a responsive communication ethic begins with a dialectic that rejects the self as the steadfast and ultimate source of knowledge by consciously and consistently turning outward towards the Other. "Forgetting recollection" affirms the presence of a rational framework in Levinas's work and recognizes its reliance on the nuances and complexities of the Western philosophical tradition. Specifically, it speaks to the fact that Levinas's intention is not to deny the existence of the *a priori,* but to enact a philosophical shifting of ground by questioning its sovereignty. As such, a Levinasian dialectic that "forgets to recollect" represents a critical move of humility, paving the way for a dialogic encounter with the Other and marking a critical first step towards the possibility of engaging difference.

Levinas and the Task of Philosophy

The idea that ethics is prior to ontology is perhaps the most frequently referenced of Levinas's ideas. While the notion of the priority of ethics is often associated with Levinas's critique of Heidegger, it represents a key component in his philosophical project as a whole. Levinas's insistence that ethics is not a branch of philosophy, but is philosophy itself, carries implications that go beyond the critique of Heideggerian ontology to establish solid foundation for a responsive communication ethic.

In order to appreciate both the complexity and the distinctiveness of Levinas's philosophical project, it is necessary to situate his work within the context of the phenomenological tradition from which it arose. Levinas's early career is marked by his significant contribution to the explication of German phenomenology in France (Davis 1). The bulk of Levinas's early published work (prior to 1935) dealt directly with Husserl and/or Heidegger, including his 1930 dissertation thesis *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Manning 18). While Levinas's philosophy is largely characterized by its opposition to both Husserl and Heidegger, the relationship of his philosophical project to the work of the two German phenomenologists is undoubtedly more complex. Levinas was rather forthright about the debt that he owed to the phenomenological approach designed by Husserl and sustained by Heidegger, claiming in fact that it was in Husserl that he discovered "the concrete meaning of the very possibility of 'working in philosophy'" (*Ethics and Infinity* 28). Affirming Levinas's reliance on phenomenology, and also acknowledging the important ways in which he sought to situate himself outside the tradition, is an important component of understanding and appreciating the significance of his work as a whole.

Robert John Sheffler Manning, in his full length study of Levinas's relationship to Heidegger, explains that *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1930) was written

in a climate characterized by emerging tensions between Husserl's and Heidegger's work. Manning explains that in this work, Levinas demonstrates a keen awareness of the tension between Husserl and Heidegger regarding the direction of phenomenology's future. Aiming in large part to clarify the distinctions between Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenologies, Levinas also worked to demonstrate that Husserl's phenomenology provided substantial grounding for Heidegger's phenomenological ontology (Manning 19). Understanding why Levinas characterizes Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as foundational to Heidegger's ontological project is a necessary step in comprehending the way that Levinas re-orients the task of philosophy.

In *The Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), Husserl suggested that modern philosophy had departed from its true goal. The aim of philosophy, according to Husserl, was to provide the best answers possible, and to rigorously address the search for human values (Stumpf 448). Husserl's primary goal was to give a secure foundation to the natural sciences, and in doing so, to consider the role of consciousness in the constitution of the perceived world. Husserl began by denying the presumption that the world as we experience it exists outside and independently from consciousness (otherwise known as "the natural attitude") (Stumpf 448-449). Instead, Husserl maintained that all consciousness is consciousness of something, thereby developing the Cartesian *cogito* ("I think") into the defining concept of his phenomenological method (intentionality, or, "I think something") (Stumpf 450). Husserl proposed the transcendental ego as the first principle from which apodictic certainty may be derived.

Husserl's phenomenological method is characterized by its use of reduction (*epoché*), in which everything that can be doubted is provisionally bracketed off (e.g. I can doubt the house that I see across the street, but I cannot doubt my consciousness of the house across the street).

When this is done, what is left, according to Husserl, is consciousness itself, that is, the *epoché* uncovers a transcendental ego that is not part of the objective natural world, but that constitutes the world through its intentional acts (Davis 11). Manning explains, "The eidetic reduction, for example, reduces consciousness of something to that aspect of perception of which we can be certain by defining as the essence of something not what it is in itself, but rather our mental construction of it" (22). So, for Husserl then, getting back "to the things themselves" requires a rejection of the scientific ontology which presumes the existence of a stable essence that lies behind the perceived phenomenon. In Husserl's view, the significance of the phenomenological method was that it allowed us to study phenomena, not as distinct from essences, but as the available mode of presentation of essences (Davis 12). In other words, Husserlian phenomenological method called for a radical re-thinking of the relationship between the subject and the object, one that rejected the notion that we must go beyond the phenomenon to reach absolute knowledge. Husserl's central insight was that consciousness is the condition of all experience. As such, consciousness is that which constitutes the world (Moran 61). Husserl described a new way of thinking where the existence of the external world could be conceived of as revealed to perception, rather than as residing in an atemporal domain that was essentially distinct from the experience of phenomena. What Husserl did that was different than Descartes, and which ultimately worked to create the phenomenological method, was to affirm objectivity with a consciousness that constitutes, that is, a consciousness that finds itself participating in its own "knowing" of the world, as it unfolds in human experience. In developing the concept of intentionality, Husserl moved us from the Cartesian "I think" to "I think something." As we shall see, for Levinas, Husserlian intentionality does not go quite far enough. Levinas sees that there is an element of the human experience that comes before intentionality, and this element is

not only pre-cognitive and primordially constitutive, but it resides within the domain of communication itself.

Equally important in understanding Levinas's response to Husserl is his often critical, yet complex relationship to the work of Heidegger. Heidegger's arrival onto the phenomenological stage effected what has come to be known as the ontological turn in phenomenology. As reflected in the title, in *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger emphasized the temporal aspect of existence, insisting that Being *(Dasein)* and beings are constituted by the fact that they are always already engaged in time and history. Heidegger described *Dasein's* situatedness in time and space as "thrownness," signifying that understanding belongs to historical existence (Moran 197). Heidegger argued that it is this situatedness that makes it possible for the truth of Being to be revealed. Heidegger was critical of traditional metaphysics for purporting to describe things as they are, without regard to the fact that "reality" is always constructed on the basis of a certain attitude towards the world (Moran 196-197). In other words, Heidegger sought to give ontology its proper emphasis by articulating the sense in which human existence is not merely an entity which is simply there, but that it has the character of specificity (a specific person's existence). In short, Heidegger's fundamental ontology acknowledged that humans are individual existing beings whose being is an issue for them. As Dermot Moran explains, "Heidegger's central insight is that traditional metaphysical understanding is actually a sedimentation of a kind of everyday set of assumptions about reality, and this set of assumptions needs to be shown to be just that, through a deeper exploration of all of the ways in which humans relate to the world" (197). By shifting the question of the foundations of apodictic knowledge to the question of the meaning of Being, Heidegger affirmed that understanding belongs to historical existence and that *Dasein* can only understand Being as historical.

While Husserl's approach may have appeared radical in his time, it was, as was Heidegger's, largely motivated by the search for and attainment of apodictic knowledge. Phenomenology provided a new method for addressing an age old question, namely, what is the foundation of knowledge, and how can we be certain that what we perceive corresponds to reality? For Levinas, Husserlian intentionality accounted for the fact that objects are constituted by consciousness, but it did not necessarily guarantee their independent existence. Levinas recognized that Husserl's transcendental ego did not eliminate the possibility of a solipsistic universe where genuine encounter with a world that exists outside the subject is rendered impossible. Levinas is especially critical of Husserl's intellectualism and the abstraction of the transcendental ego from temporality. It is clear that Levinas reads Husserl through a Heideggerean lens, and he acknowledges as much in the opening pages of *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Davis 14-15). Levinas sees Husserlian phenomenology as being aligned with the Western philosophical tradition and therefore essentially problematic:

> The theory and critique of knowledge, in the Husserlian sense of the term, asks, as does the whole philosophical tradition: How can thought reach an object that is transcendent to it? But for Husserl the problem consists not in the fact that thought transcends itself, *for thought is synonymous with thought that transcends itself,* but in the clarification of the necessary structure of each act of thought that transcends itself and reaches its object. The existence and transcendence of the object are not metaphysically presupposed, as in the traditional position of the problem, but, prior to all metaphysics, the very meaning of this existence and transcendence becomes the object of study (*Discovering Existence with Husserl* 21).

Levinas views pure phenomenology as problematic, and as indicated by his emphasis on the fact that in Husserl's framework, thought is automatically viewed as transcendent, Levinas intended to re-ground philosophical inquiry itself, presenting a challenge to Western metaphysics and setting the philosopher on a new course towards genuine discovery of that which is Other.

Undoubtedly both Husserl and Heidegger were important for Levinas -- Husserl because he freed philosophy from the stranglehold of naturalist epistemology, and Heidegger because he acknowledged that understanding is fundamentally historical. Husserlian intentionality represented a significant move for Levinas because it opened consciousness to that which exists outside of it. Additionally, Heidegger provided a means of understanding Being (and beings) as always already situated in time and in history. Nevertheless, Levinas suspected that there was something even more fundamental than this, namely, a relationship that could not be accounted for by the ontic-ontological distinction between beings and Being. Levinas was critical of both Husserl and Heidegger for according privilege to representation and presence. If, as Husserl indicated, meaning is entirely given by the subject rather than found in the world, then consciousness cannot experience, perceive, or learn anything that is not already contained within it. While providing a radically new method of investigation, Husserlian phenomenology remained faithful to an ancient project that was focused on determining the foundations of the objective world. And since the transcendental ego is by nature incapable of encountering anything exterior to it, Husserlian phenomenology is ultimately unsatisfying for Levinas since it has the primary the effect of subsuming the other into the same (Moran 328). And while Heidegger was helpful in acknowledging that consciousness is not outside of the world, but part of it, Levinas detects in his ontology a familiar attachment to the philosophical tradition whereby transcendence and the infinite are inadequately represented.

Whereas consciousness emerges as the totalizing force in Husserl, it is Being that becomes the culprit in Heidegger. Both Husserl and Heidegger retain a mediating element through which all knowledge must pass before it is "known" by the knower. Levinas sees in both Husserl and Heidegger an adherence to the ontological imperialism of Western thought, a sovereignty that has its origins in the Platonic theory of knowledge as *anamnesis* (recollection).[11] According to the Platonic view, all knowledge is already contained within the self, hence, the infamous image of Socrates as midwife[12], and the understanding that all learning is essentially maieutic, that is, a recollection of that which is latent in the mind of every human being. What Levinas is careful to note is that in Husserl, the transcendental ego is established as the source of knowledge, and in Heidegger, the fundamental encounter is with Being, not with other beings. Levinas explains:

> Even though it opposes the technological passion issued forth from the forgetting of Being hidden by existents, Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny…*Being* before the e*xistent*, ontology before metaphysics, is freedom (be it the freedom of theory) before justice. It is a movement within the same before obligation to the other (*Totality and Infinity* 46-47).

In Heideggerian ontology, the Other is once again subsumed under the authority of the Same, as the drama of Dasein's comprehension of Being is played out. Levinas goes on to explain that a reversal of terms is needed whereby the primordial conflict between self and other is not resolved by a theory which reduces the other to the same (*Totality and Infinity* 47). What

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[11] In the *Meno* (81A) Socrates states, "For seeking and learning is all remembrance."
[12] See *Theaetetus* 148e-149c and *Symposium* 204D-207A

Levinas proposes instead is a philosophy that acknowledges the relevance of the unity of contraries[13], that is, that self and other exist in their own dwelling, not to be categorized as an intentional object subsumed by Being. Levinas makes his desire to re-orient the philosophical subject towards a position of exteriority is clear in the early pages of *Totality and Infinity*:

> The effort of this book is directed towards apperceiving in discourse a non-allergic relation with alterity, toward apperceiving Desire – where power, by essence murderous of the other, becomes, faced with the other and "against all good sense," the impossibility of murder, the consideration of the other, or justice. Concretely, our effort consists with the Other – language and Goodness…The ethical relation, opposed to first philosophy which identifies freedom and power, is not contrary to truth; it goes unto being in its absolute exteriority, and accomplishes the very intention that animates the movement unto truth (TI 47).

Levinas's point is that while philosophical tradition has consistently sought a comprehension of the other that involves not only a grasping of, but also a possession of the other (as object of knowledge), the ethical relation is ultimately irreducible to a representation (i.e. a recollection) of a truth that is always already there. It is, rather, an infinite exteriority, an encounter with that which is completely, and utterly, foreign. Heidegger's answer to the question, "What is Being?" cannot account for this exteriority, since, as Levinas explains, "I cannot disentangle myself from society with the Other, even when I consider the Being of the existent he is. Already the comprehension of Being is said to the existent, who again arises behind the theme in which he is presented" (TI 47-48). Furthermore, Levinas indicates that ontology, as Heidegger described it,

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[13] In *The Way of Response* (1966), Martin Buber proposed the "unity of contraries" as a contrast to logical determinism: "According to the logical conception of truth only one of two contraries can be true, but in truth reality of life as one lives life they are inseparable…" (111).

is literally impossible because the comprehension of Being in general can never supersede the relationship with the Other. In fact, says Levinas, the authority of the Other is "already invoked in every question we could raise concerning the meaning of its Being" (TI 47). In short, Levinas is critical of Western metaphysics because he sees it as fundamentally driven by totality and by the desire to eliminate the distinction between being and thought. If not to pursue apodictic knowledge through accurate representation of the objective world, what then is the goal of philosophy? In a script where self and other emerge as separate and distinct characters, and where the ultimate freedom and authority of the "knowing subject" are called into question, what does the task of philosophy look like?

Having questioned both the self-presence of the transcendental ego and its ability to experience the external world, Levinas proposes a vision of a subjectivity that is radically turned outwards. In describing subjectivity as essentially open to the other (one who is not subsumed under the categories of representation or knowledge), Levinas proposes a radical re-orientation of "philosophical wisdom." His perspective is largely tied to his desire to subvert traditional philosophical rationality, and also to "present subjectivity as welcoming the Other" (TI 27).   For Levinas, a first step in achieving these goals is a thorough re-conceptualization of phenomenological intentionality. While consciousness as consciousness *of* something had appeared to provide assurance of contact with the outside world, Levinas points out that consciousness, as defined by his predecessors, can never meet anything genuinely other than itself, since the external world is always a product of its own activity. In *Totality and Infinity* for example, Levinas likens Husserlian consciousness to the journey of Ulysses, always on a course for home (27). In contrast, Levinas denies that consciousness reflects our recollection of the familiar, insisting instead that it marks a journey into the unknown:

Consciousness then does not consist in equaling being with representation, in tending to the full light in which this adequation is to be sought, but rather in overflowing this play of lights – this phenomenology – and in accomplishing *events* whose ultimate signification (contrary to the Heideggerian conception) does not lie in *disclosing*. Philosophy does indeed dis-cover the signification of these events, but they are produced without discovery (or truth) being their destiny (TI 27-28).

Levinas is troubled by the fact that phenomenology has understood intentional consciousness as a grasping and possession of its object. As Moran explains, for Levinas, "consciousness should be understood not primarily as a disclosing power which seeks to represent the object adequately, but as an overflowing, which can never be fully expressed" (329). For Levinas, intentionality is not merely consciousness of something (i.e. something represented for consciousness), but is rather enacted in the process of relating with others, as an interruption of consciousness:

Phenomenology is itself this reversal in which human behavior is interpreted as original experience and not as the fruit of experience. It leads us outside the subject-object categories and topples the sovereignty of representation…The phenomenological reduction has never seemed to me to justify itself by the apodicticity of the imminent sphere, but by the opening of this play of intentionality…Intentionality means that all consciousness is consciousness of something, but 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* (*Discovering Existence with Husserl* 119).

In essence, Levinas sought to expand the concept of intentionality beyond mere "consciousness of something" to incorporate the element of transcendence, that is, of getting beyond self-

representation to genuine alterity. This reflects Levinas's concern with the philosophical

problem of the existence of other egos, and his desire to affirm the possibility of the encounter

with that which lies outside of Being. What is especially important about this particular passage

is Levinas's suggestion that intentionality expressly indicates the "calling forth" of the object,

and that this is ultimately an act of addressing that gives rise to the very consciousness through

which it appears. Levinas's view of intentionality demonstrates his commitment to affirming

the possibility of encounter with the Other as the very basis of metaphysical truth. This is evident

throughout his critique of Husserl and Heidegger and is the only ground from which genuine

learning (and therefore any "pursuit of knowledge") can take place.

Levinas's reconceptualization of intentionality is especially significant for

communication ethicists since it clearly denies the traditional privileged positioning of the "I" in

Western culture. In Levinas's view the "I" is derivative and ethics does not begin with a set of

theoretical principles which are then enacted by an autonomous rational agent (Arnett "The

Responsive I" 40). Levinas emphasizes the phenomenological reality of the ethical relation

where transcendence signifies that the "I" is always already subjected to the Other, and in fact

reliant upon the Other's summons for his very identity. Arnett explains, "The Other is radical

alterity that makes transcendence and discovery possible. It is encounter with the unknown that

permits constant reshaping of the 'I' through meeting of the Other" ("The Responsive I" 40).

Intentionality then, for Levinas, is not merely the presentation of the world, or a replication of

what the subject already knows, but rather always involves a movement towards the Other that

signifies an addressing, and furthermore, a questioning.

Levinas's understanding of the task of philosophy as fundamentally rooted in the ethical

is reflected in the often referenced line from *Totality and Infinity*, "Morality is not a branch of

philosophy, but first philosophy" (304). With the assertion that ethics is not merely a component

of philosophy but philosophy itself, Levinas indicates not only that there is something that is

more fundamental than ontology but also that philosophy is irrevocably tied to the ethical

relation. Levinas's re-orientation of philosophy onto ethical ground emerges fully in the context

of the questions and primary arguments that he uses to initiate his investigation in *Totality and*

Infinity. Within the first few lines of the text, the reader is told in no uncertain terms that the

primary motivation of the study is to consider whether or not we can rightly speak of "ethics," or

whether or not we are in fact "duped by morality" (TI 21). Acknowledging that "the state of

war suspends morality," Levinas embarks on an inquiry that seeks to go "beyond totality and

objective experience" (TI 23). Within the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas

indicates that "exteriority" comprises a key component in the project, explaining that since

philosophy is "defined as an endeavor to live a life beginning in evidence, opposing the opinion

of one's fellow men, the illusions and caprice of one's own subjectivity," we ought to begin the

inquiry from "the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation

that conditions the totality itself" (TI 24). That situation is, says Levinas, "the gleam of

exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other" (TI 24). Transcendence in the face of

the Other is a "relation with what always overflows thought" and is "expressed by the term

infinity" (TI 24-25). Having indicated that philosophy begins in a moment that is prior to

intentional consciousness, Levinas goes on to pose a central question: "Do particular beings yield

their truth in a Whole in which their exteriority vanishes? Or, on the contrary, is the ultimate

event of being enacted in the outburst of this exteriority?" (TI 26). Levinas explains that in order

to address these questions adequately, the inquiry must take the form of a defense of subjectivity.

But, rather than explicate subjectivity in terms of its assumed dialectic with totality (as might be

the more traditional approach), Levinas proposes to investigate the concept on an entirely

different ground -- from the assumption that subjectivity is founded in the idea of infinity:

> [This book] will proceed to distinguish between the idea of totality and the idea of
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> infinity, and affirm the philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity. It will recount how
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> infinity is produced in the relationship of the same with the other, and how the particular
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> and the personal, which are unsurpassable, as it were, magnetize the very field in which
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> the production is enacted…This book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other,
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> as hospitality: in it the idea of infinity is consummated (TI 26-27).

As Levinas articulates his purpose in these opening pages of *Totality and Infinity,* he reveals both

the sense in which his method is phenomenological[14] and the way in which his project re-

envisions the Husserlian understanding of consciousness as a non-adequation, as an overflowing

of being that cannot be reduced to the representation of an object for possession by a knowing

subject. He explains further, contra Heidegger, that "the welcoming of the face and the work of

justice – which condition the birth of truth itself – are not interpretable in terms of disclosure.

Phenomenology is a method for philosophy, but phenomenology – the comprehension effected

through a bringing to light – does not constitute the ultimate event of being itself" (TI 28). For

Levinas, it is not our comprehension of Being that represents the ultimate event, but rather it is

the encounter with a particular other that initiates a journey towards a metaphysical truth that is

marked by respect for Being. Levinas affirms the need for philosophy to rely on phenomenology

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[14] Levinas indicates that while his opposition to the idea of totality owes its influence to Franz Rosenzweig, "the presentation and the development of the notions employed owe everything to the phenomenological method" (TI 28). Dermot Moran (2000) explains that for Levinas, "the phenomenological approach analyses the modes of givenness of things and events, but remains open to the surprises of recognizing meanings not deliberately or centrally thematized" (327).

in order to begin from a place that does not assume the pre-existence of the natural world, and yet, he remains unsatisfied because phenomenology fails to avoid totalization of the Other.

The early pages of *Totality and Infinity* are indicative of many of the important steps that Levinas takes to shift the philosophical project to what he deems to be the appropriate starting point, namely the origins of the ethical relation.   Levinas brings this full circle in the conclusion of *Totality and Infinity* where he asserts that "the exteriority of being is morality itself" (277). In other words, philosophy (or "metaphysics" as Levinas commonly refers to it) does not and cannot begin with the individual philosopher's pursuit of verifiable knowledge about the outside world. The philosopher's "grasp" of knowledge has traditionally been viewed as a manifestation of both his freedom, and largely also his self-reliance. As Plato (and others) have taught, it is also the result of a dialectical process whereby the knower assimilates that which he encounters with that which he already knows, thereby eradicating difference and comprehending, through rationality, the totality of being. As Levinas sees it, exteriority defines metaphysics in a completely different light:

> Whether in scientific thought or in the object of science, or in history understood as a manifestation of reason, where violence reveals itself to be reason, philosophy presents itself as a realization of being, that is, as its liberation by the suppression of multiplicity. Knowledge would be the suppression of the other by the grasp, by the hold, or by the vision that grasps before the grasp. In this work, metaphysics has an entirely different meaning. If its movement leads to the transcendent as such, transcendence means not appropriation of *what is*, but its respect. Truth as a respect for being is the meaning of metaphysical truth (TI 302).

Perhaps the most important idea expressed here is that truth as respect for being is truth as respect for what *is* – for existence itself. Contra Heidegger, existence cannot be reduced to Being, but always involves the encounter with a particular other who calls the self to answer for her own existence.

Traditionally, the philosopher has been understood as one who seeks certitude in the comfort of the assurance that truth is verifiable because it resides within and is made visible by an affirmation of freedom, the self-sufficient exercise of rationality, and the philosopher's ultimate status as a being that participates in Being. Levinas's alternate interpretation of metaphysical truth as an ethical relation between self and other does not mark the end of philosophy, but rather represents a shifting of its ground whereby Reason loses its sovereignty in the face of a more fundamental component, namely the exteriority of the self-other encounter (the ethical relation). Levinas explains:

> …we take leave neither of rationalism, nor of the ideal of freedom. One is not an
> irrationalist, nor a pragmatist for questioning the identification of power and *logos*. One
> is not against freedom if one seeks for it a justification. Reason and freedom seem to us
> to be founded on prior structures of being whose first articulations are delineated by the
> metaphysical movement, or respect, or justice – identical to truth. The terms of the
> conception making truth rest on freedom must be inverted. What justification there is in
> truth does not rest on freedom posited as independence in regard to all exteriority (TI
> 302-303).

Since, for Levinas, truth is not the comprehension of Being, but is rather bound up in the affect that the Other has on the Self, ethics (and so, too, morality and justice) are not subordinate to philosophy (truth) but are philosophy itself (the highest truth): "Morality thus presides over the

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work of truth" (TI 304). As Manning explains, "the just relation with the Other is not only the essence of ethics, or morality, or justice, but is the essence of truth as well" (116). What is critical here that for Levinas, the philosopher's wisdom is not and can never be a meaning that already exists, which I must then "let be" and "comprehend." Furthermore, the relation with the other exists prior to the philosopher's wisdom. Manning explains that, "for Levinas, ethics as first philosophy means that the social relation is an event in being that is not only irreducible to knowledge of being, but is something other than, more than, and better than comprehension of being…Ethics has nothing to do with epistemological power or weakness, but refers to the responsibility that is prior to the condition of knowing" (118).   For Levinas, philosophical inquiry begins not with self-reflective questioning, but rather with exteriority, that is, with the Other's gaze that calls into question the very existence of the self. In short, "ethics as first philosophy" redefines the philosopher's task as both inherently communicative and fundamentally ethical. Perhaps Manning summarizes it best when he writes that in Levinas it is "ethics which interrupts and conditions the adventure of knowledge, and not the adventure of knowledge itself, which is first philosophy" (118). What Levinas aims to emphasize is that philosophy cannot be accurately characterized as the search for epistemological certitude; it is rather the veritable encounter with uncertainty, and the perpetual call to respond to that which is utterly foreign. As one of the first thinkers to significantly re-position "truth" outside of speculative philosophy, Kierkegaard offers valuable insight into the implications of Levinas's assertion that ethics is and must come first.

Truth as Subjectivity and Ethics as First Philosophy

According to Michael Weston, author of *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy,* of all modern European thinkers, Levinas is perhaps closest to Kierkegaard. Weston's discernment of their "closeness" is based primarily on perceived similarities in their critiques of Western philosophy: "They share a critique of philosophy which argues that the latter, in the name of autonomy, subordinates the individual to the impersonal. In this way, philosophy forgets the first-person position from which the philosopher her/himself speaks. This position can only be understood in *ethical* terms, so that ethics refuses the imperialism of philosophy" (156). Weston's description reflects the sense in which "ethics as first philosophy" relies on the notion that "thinking" is not essentially a grasping and possessing of an object through representation, but is rather a response that is made to the Other, who does not serve to mediate my knowledge of the world, but calls it into question, asking me to justify my existence. In this way, philosophy originates and is grounded in questioning, but not in the sense of Socratic elenchus. Rather, it is a conversation that must take place in response to an existential demand. I am summoned by the Other, and in this way, philosophy is the conversation between the other (speaker) and the ethical self (addressee). It is this element, that is, the elimination of addressee and speaker that Kierkegaard objects to in his critique of Western philosophy. Levinas echoes Kierkegaard's concern in his characterization of the philosophical tradition as totalitarian and egological.

One of the most important similarities between Kierkegaard's and Levinas's thinking is an emphasis on particularity. Levinas stresses the interplay between particular and universal that reveals itself in the expression of the face, a primary metaphor in his work that will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters to follow. Further, he understands that in order to get to the universal one must begin with the particular (*Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* 136). We

can appreciate the significance of this movement by looking at Kierkegaard's understanding of "the first-person position" in philosophy. For Kierkegaard, philosophical wisdom is not a self-relation mediated by representation, but rather refers to a self that is always already underway in its striving towards existence. Kierkegaard sees passionate spontaneity as lying at the heart of existence, and for him, this spontaneity does not look outside itself for significance, but rather represents love of life itself (Weston 158). This is, for Kierkegaard, at the core of what it means to be an "existing individual." By eliminating the critical element of the addressee, and essentially eradicating subjectivity, philosophy (understood as the pursuit of objective knowledge) had, in Kierkegaard's view, become increasingly impersonal, and unbearably systematic. This is a constant theme in his work and is expressed most vividly in *The Present Age*, when he writes:

> People's remarks are so objective, so all-inclusive, that it is a matter of complete indifference who expresses them, and where human speech is concerned that is the same as acting 'on principle.' And so our talk becomes like the public, pure abstraction. There is no longer anyone who knows how to talk, and instead, objective thought produces an atmosphere, an abstract sound, which makes human speech superfluous…Thus our own age is essentially one of understanding, and on the average, perhaps more knowledgeable than any former generation, but it is without passion (77).

Kierkegaard indicates that ground matters. In other words, who is speaking, when they are speaking, and where they are speaking is important. We cannot attain, as modern philosophy would have us believe, an eternal vantage point from which we can claim to stand above our own particularity and proclaim absolute, universal truth.

Against the abstraction of the Hegelian dialectic and the depersonalization of the

Cartesian *cogito*, Kierkegaard emphasized that subjectivity was a foundational component of

philosophical activity. As he explains in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: "*A Hegelian can

say with all solemnity: I do not know whether I am a human being – but I have understood the

system. I prefer to say: I know that I am a human being, and I know that I have not understood

the system" (311). Abstract thinking is problematic for Kierkegaard because it effectively

eliminates the particularities of the speaker and addressee. For Kierkegaard existence is

fundamentally tied to pathos: "Existing, if this is not to be understood as just any sort of existing,

cannot be done without passion…Here one again is reminded of my thesis that subjectivity is

truth because the objective truth for an existing person is like the eternity of abstraction.

Abstraction is disinterested, but to exist is the highest interest for an existing person" (CUP 312-

313). Similarly, in *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard maintains that philosophy has rendered

meaning itself unattainable, and he expresses his concern about the consequences for

"knowledge," predicting that there will be "handbooks for everything" and that education will be

reduced to the memorization of facts (77).   The type of disinterested scientific methodology that

Kierkegaard observed led him to conclude that Western philosophy had lost touch with the

meaning of existence. For Kierkegaard, mediate knowledge (such as forms the backbone of

Hegel's speculative philosophy) was a primary offender in rendering human experience

inessential.

Kierkegaard's disgust with "disinterested knowledge" is reflected in his famous account

of faith, described in a re-telling of the biblical Abraham narrative in *Fear and Trembling.* In

this work, the goal is to give an account (to the degree that it is possible to give such an account)

of the *human experience* of faith. Kierkegaard's re-telling of Abraham's story is just one

example of the way that he re-defines philosophy along the lines of ethical subjectivity. In Kierkegaard's view, "ethical subjectivity" describes the individual's choice to act, apart from any rational account or systematic application of normative ethical theory. He writes, "Today nobody will stop with faith; they all go further…Even if one were able to render the whole of the content of faith into conceptual form, it would not follow that one had grasped faith, grasped how one came to it, or how it came to one" (*Fear and Trembling* 43). It is presumably due to the fact that "a philosopher" uses concepts (Reason) to grasp and mediate objective knowledge that Kierkegaard, speaking in the voice of pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, is also careful to note here that "The present author is no philosopher, he is *poetice et eleganter* [to put it in poetic and well-chosen terms], a freelancer who neither writes the System nor makes any promises about it, who pledges neither anything about the System nor himself to it" (*Fear and Trembling* 43). Reflected here is Kierkegaard's rejection of any philosophy whose goal is the profession of an absolute Truth that exists apart from the speaker and the unique ground from which he speaks. The crux of Kierkegaard's critique is that speculative activity (a lá Hegel) is directed primarily at the formation of the System, the articulation of Truth, and the ultimate finality that that implies. Kierkegaard explains "System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality" (CUP 109). Whereas Hegel is primarily concerned with the process of thought thinking itself, Kierkegaard wants to ask about the relation of the individual thinker to thought. Furthermore, for Kierkegaard, existence signifies a perpetual process of becoming, and it is in this process that the narrative of "truth" is played out.

Kierkegaard acknowledges that above all else ethical action requires commitment in the form of an actor who is passionately involved in making a choice to carry a particular sense of the good into in his everyday interactions with others. Additionally, Kierkegaard recognizes that

abstract thought (i.e. the System) does us no service when it comes to ethical action. He

illustrates this point in *Fear and Trembling* when he argues that either there is "a teleological

suspension of the ethical"[15] or Abraham is nothing but a murderer (95). Kierkegaard explains:

"Abraham cannot be mediated, which can also be put by saying he cannot speak. The moment I

speak I express the universal, and when I do not no one can understand me" (*Fear and*

Trembling 89). Kierkegaard indicated that in order for Abraham to be understood, he cannot

converse in the language of the System. Therefore, there must be a momentary suspension of the

universal where Abraham's first-person position (i.e. the ground upon which he stands) can be

heard and acknowledged.

It is important to recognize that Kierkegaard's claim that truth is subjectivity does not

lead in the direction of relativism, but rather points out that truth can only be understood in terms

of the existing individual, who is "constantly in a process of becoming," and who speaks from a

particular place and time (CUP 79). In *Philosophical Fragments*, pseudonym Johannes

Climacus is concerned with the question of how truth (and primarily religious truth) can be

learned. In the "thought project" that comprises the first section of the text, Climacus proposes

two possible answers to the question. He begins by referencing Plato's *Meno,* in which the

puzzle of how one can seek truth is considered, since it appears equally impossible to seek what

one already knows and to seek that which one does not know (PF 9). Socrates' answer to the

apparent conundrum is to assert that learning is a matter of the subject's becoming aware of what

is already present within. Kierkegaard (Climacus) rejects this first perspective that "the truth is

not introduced into him but was in him," because it represents what he considers to be a

pervasive rationalism that is characteristic of speculative philosophy. He writes, "The ultimate

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[15] Kierkegaard uses "the ethical" here to refer to ethics understood as theoretical dictum, as in Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*

idea in all [Socratic] questioning is that the person asked must himself possess the truth and acquire it by himself" (PF 13). The supposed interiority of truth is as troublesome for Kierkegaard as it is for Levinas because "the temporal point of departure is a nothing" since it is "in the very same moment that I both discover the truth and that it is forever hidden in the eternal" (PF 13). An epistemology of recollection ignores the significance of temporality and the critical importance of ground, since in it "I cannot find [the truth] even if I were to look for it, because there is no Here and no There, but only an *ubique et nusquam* (everywhere and nowhere)" (PF 13). In contrast to the Platonic standpoint, where truth is a product of philosophical midwifery, Kierkegaard views truth as being externally related to something which transcends the subject, and which is fundamentally Other: "This passion of thought is fundamentally present everywhere in thought, also in the single individual's thought insofar as he, thinking, is not merely himself" (PI 37). By focusing on the actual thinking of a particular individual (whose thought must be conceived only as emerging from the ground upon which he stands and only by virtue of his encounter with the Other), Kierkegaard denies philosophy any jurisdiction over the ethical.

Levinas's assertion that the "I" ultimately finds its identity in its encounter with the Other (i.e. in social interaction) carries a Kierkegaardian element in that it acknowledges that the philosopher does not work from a privileged position (i.e. an eternal vantage point that claims to transcend temporal existence and see things "as they are"), but rather speaks from a first-person position, that is, from the ground upon which he, as a unique individual, stands. For both Levinas and Kierkegaard the "I" resists subsumption under any generality. Weston concludes, "What is primary for Kierkegaard is the passionate involvement of the I which is therefore the subject of ethical critique, of the degree of passion with which life is lived, or for Levinas, the

ethical relation of the I and the Other" (171). For Kierkegaard, the ethical is prior in the sense

that it originates in the individual's commitment to embrace life.

When we view Levinas's claim for the priority of ethics over ontology in the context of

Kierkegaard's assertion that truth is subjectivity, we are in a better position to understand how

Levinas's work challenges conventional understandings of philosophical dialectic. For both

authors, attentiveness to the immediacy of human experience and acknowledgement of the *a*

priori character of the existential demand precludes an epistemology of recollection.

According to Merold Westphal one of the most Kierkegaardian features of Levinas's thought is

"the sustained polemic against knowledge as recollection" ("The Transparent Shadow" 280). As

an example, Westphal points to Levinas's 1965 essay "Phenomenon and Enigma" wherein he

develops the notion of "the trace." Levinas introduces this concept as part of his criticism of the

traditional linguistic concept of the sign. For Levinas, the problem with the sign is its

representational character, that is, that it assumes that the signified has already been present, and

then serves to call that presence to mind (Westphal 270). On the other hand, the trace is

temporal and refers to "an irreversible, immemorial, unrepresentable past" ("Phenomenon and

Enigma 69). The trace refers to a past "which no memory could resurrect as a present" since "the

past of the Other must never have been present" (Phenomenon and Enigma 72). As Westphal

notes, the idea of a past that has never been present precludes the idea that knowledge is

recollection ("The Transparent Shadow" 270). Westphal notes further that, "In his semantics of

the trace Levinas is on the side of Climacus as he seeks an alternative both to the recollection

theory and to its existential correlate, the notion that one can back out of temporal existence into

eternity by means of such knowledge[16]" ("The Transparent Shadow" 270-271). In other words,

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[16] See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 207-210, 217, 226

the problem with the epistemology of recollection is that it is essentially presumptive. Throughout the history of Western philosophy Reason has claimed for itself exclusive access to truth, without legitimate authority for doing so. Recollection presupposes an essential relationship between subject and object, making the possession of "pure knowledge" the ultimate goal of philosophical activity. As Westphal explains, "Knowledge as representation (the classical theory of the sign) is possible and deserving to be called knowledge, if not Knowledge, because its Alpha is a past presence and its Omega a future presence…It is this immanence and totality that Kierkegaard and Levinas seek to deconstruct with their notions of divine transcendence and infinity" ("The Transparent Shadow" 271). Both Levinas and Kierkegaard insist upon the understanding that learning really isn't learning at all if it relies on recollection of latent concepts that already reside in the knower. While "knowing" clearly involves "learning," for both Levinas and Kierkegaard it requires discovery of what is essentially foreign, and quite literally unknown. Learning occurs not in a drawing out or a bringing to light of knowledge that was always already possessed by the knower. True learning includes acknowledgement of the fact that before the philosopher can ask his first question, he is always already addressed by an Other, called to answer an ethical demand that is the very condition of subjectivity.

An Unresolved Dialectic

The preclusion of the epistemology of recollection inevitably results in a re-scripting of the role and purpose of philosophical inquiry and hence an alternate understanding of the meaning of "philosophical dialectic." Furthermore, it is in the other's summons and the self's potential for response that the beginnings of an alternate dialectic emerge -- one that most certainly yields knowledge, but is tied much more to learning than it is to knowing. To be sure, Levinas recognizes pursuit of truth as the fundamental purpose behind philosophical inquiry, but

his understanding of what this undertaking entails challenges traditional perceptions of dialectic which view it primarily as a tool that yields knowledge that the philosopher can then possess. In the Other's summons and the self's potential for response we witness the emergence of a philosophical dialectic of an entirely different order. For Levinas, as for Kierkegaard, "philosophical dialectic" is an ongoing tension between autonomy (freedom and self-sufficiency) and heteronomy (the need to interact with the Other) that is never resolved. In Levinas's view, Plato's theory of anamnesis, Descartes' *cogito*, and Heidegger's *Dasein* are all examples of the way that traditional Western metaphysics has worked to resolve a fundamentally unresolvable dialectic by subordinating heteronomy to autonomy ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" 93). When heteronomy (the philosopher's receptivity to that which is other) is subordinated to autonomy the results are threefold: rationality is deemed self-justifying, particularity is subsumed within "the System," and revelatory knowledge becomes impossible. In Levinas's eyes, these consequences render the ethical encounter with the Other insignificant, and ultimately, untenable.

Although Levinas saw that the *cogito* represented yet one more example of Western philosophy's totalization and suppression of the Other, Descartes was, in Levinas's eyes, correct in stating that the idea of the Infinite is never sufficient to its ideatum, that is, there is no correspondence between thought and being when attempting to "think" the Infinite, since the Infinite overflows every attempt to cognize it. For Levinas, this recognition had the potential to re-ground the philosopher's task by loosening the grip of autonomy. In order to make an attempt at undermining autonomy, Levinas therefore began with the Cartesian understanding of the Infinite, which successfully maintains a moment of authentic heteronomous experience, when despite our inability to grasp the Infinite cognitively, we still maintain a relationship with it – in

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other words, cognitively speaking, in thinking the Infinite, we do not reduce the Other to the Same (Minister 117-118). The fact that despite failing to grasp the Infinite cognitively we yet maintain a relationship with it opens the door to the possibility of genuine encounter with absolute alterity.

For Levinas, as for Kierkegaard, philosophical dialectic is an approach to the Other that acknowledges that existence is an incessant striving to justify itself. From within a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian framework, dialectic is not a tool to be utilized in the recollection of latent concepts, nor is it a solitary enactment of methodical self-doubt, or the process of Being coming to know itself. For Hegel, the philosopher's task was to achieve an eternal vantage point from which absolute knowledge could be viewed, and ultimately claimed as a possession. For Plato, once the ascent from the cave was complete and knowledge of the Good attained, the philosopher's role was to enact the governance of a just state. Like Plato, Levinas is interested in using philosophy for the purpose of achieving social justice, but justice is for Levinas in no way tied to propositional knowledge. Furthermore, contra Hegel, Levinas suggests that philosophy must take place within the larger framework of ethical subjectivity, since the ethical relation with the Other is fundamental to the constitution of being. In other words, the philosopher cannot be credited with an implicit possession of absolute knowledge that is brought to light by turning inwards to discover what lies within. The alternate dialectic underlying Levinas's view affirms that the philosopher is externally related to something that transcends him and to which he is Other. Levinas's rescripting of the task of philosophy relies on an understanding of dialectic that affirms that the process of pursuing truth is not a means to a further end. In other words, dialectic does not produce truth as an object that can then be possessed by the philosopher. Rather, dialectic is what characterizes existence as a continual process of striving.

Kierkegaard's sustained critique of the metaphysics of presence has provided some insight into the alternate understanding of dialectic that emerges in Levinas's work by emphasizing the degree to which philosophy is best understood as an ongoing pathos-filled enterprise that never reaches an endpoint. Kierkegaard compared the nature of existence to the continual striving of Eros that Plato described in the *Symposium*: "Existence itself, existing, is a striving, and is just as pathos-filled as it is comic…According to Plato, Poverty and Plenty begot Eros, whose nature is made up of both…It is that child who is begotten by the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore continually striving" (CUP 92.)   Further, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and throughout his extensive corpus, Kierkegaard emphasizes that existence always signifies a process of becoming. He indicates that the proposed goal of reaching an eternal vantage point (i.e. knowledge of The Good in Plato or resolution of the dialectic in Hegel) is pure illusion:

> The thinker who in all his thinking can forget to think conjointly that he is existing does not explain existence; he makes an attempt to cease to be a human being, to become a book or an objective something…That objective thinking has its reality is not denied, but in relation to all thinking in which precisely subjectivity must be accentuated it is a misunderstanding…The speculative result is an illusion insofar as the existing subject wants to abstract from his existing and wants to be *sub species aeterni* [under the aspect of eternity] *(* (CUP 81, 93).

As previously noted, Kierkegaard's position is far from that of a relativist, and while he does acknowledge the reality of objectivity, he maintains that it too only exists in relation to subjectivity.   For Kierkegaard, to speak of absolute knowledge apart from existence is to maintain a false illusion about the nature of human existence, namely that it can transcend

temporality. As evidenced in the above passage, Kierkegaard maintains that the individual is externally related to something beyond himself that can never be assimilated and to which he is always Other. This shift in perspective of what constitutes "truth" leads directly to alternative standpoints regarding what philosophical activity is and how it may be carried out.

The alternate understanding of dialectic that emerges in Levinas's re-conceptualization of the role and purpose of philosophy is grounded in the concept of exteriority and guided by the metaphor of learning rather than knowing. Kierkegaard was one of the first major philosophers to focus on the human individual as conscious subject, and his focus set the stage for Levinas to become one of the first major thinkers to acknowledge a foundation for philosophy even more fundamental than metaphysical inquiry. This results in a significant alteration to the role that the philosopher has and can continue to play in the drama of human existence. In Levinas's script, the philosopher appears in the role of *recipient* rather than *possessor*:

> The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the other, his expression, which every lie already presupposes. But the first content of expression is the expression itself. To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is…an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain (TI 51).

For Levinas, then, philosopher as recipient rather than as possessor signifies that philosophical inquiry resides primarily in the joyful acceptance of that which is Other, and which remains

forever transcendent. This is, for Levinas, the affirmation of a dialectic whose essence is to

remain unresolved. Rather than seek resolution of the tension between the certain and the

uncertain, between the known and the unknown, between the same and the other, Levinas

proposes that the process of knowing involves an ongoing dialectic characterized by the Said and

the Saying.

Levinas first introduced the distinction between the Said and the Saying in the 1965 essay

"Phenomenon and Enigma" and it became a primary thematic element in *Otherwise than Being*

(1974). Notwithstanding its many intricacies, the Said and the Saying represent a tension

between the already and the not-yet that is, in Levinas's eyes, fundamental to the human

experience: "The otherwise than being is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order to

extract that otherwise than being already comes to signify only a being otherwise" (OTB 7).

While not easily translatable, this passage points towards a continuous and unresolvable dialectic

at the heart of Levinas's insistence that it is the ethical relation with the Other that is the

foundation of all meaning. Throughout his work, Levinas suggests that philosophy has

traditionally been preoccupied with the Said, that is, with statements and propositions about

Being and the world that can be verified. While these "truths" are prioritized, another distinct

and ultimately constitutive dimension is overlooked – the Saying, the interaction with the Other

that underlies every communicative event. For Levinas, the Saying is pre-original and

constitutes the very possibility of the Said:

> To say is to approach a neighbor, 'dealing him signifyingness.' This is not exhausted in
>
> 'ascriptions of meaning,' which are inscribed, as tales, in the said. Saying taken strictly is
>
> a 'signifyingness dealt the other,' prior to all objectification; it does not consist in giving
>
> signs…Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as

exposure. Communication is not reducible to the phenomenon of truth and the

manifestation of truth conceived as a combination of psychological elements: thought in

an ego – will or intention to make this thought pass into another ego – message by a sign

designating this thought – perception of the sign by another ego – deciphering of the

sign…The plot of proximity and communication is not a modality of cognition…It is a

risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon

of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability (OTB 48).

A couple of points are of significance here: first, not only does language play a central role in

ethical relations (since the encounter with the Other always already involves address and

response) but it is the Saying that makes communication possible in the first place. Second, the

philosopher (i.e. "the knowing subject") is not the self-author of meaning since prior to all

commitment to understanding, the subject undergoes an exposure to the Other in which he finds

himself absolutely and unconditionally responsible for the Other. It is ultimately in the

distinction between the Said and the Saying that Levinas's significance for communication ethics

is revealed: Levinas teaches that exposure to the Other (the ethical relation) is the condition for

the possibility of communication. This means that not only are we fundamentally reliant on the

Other for self-identity and understanding of the world around us, but also that the

phenomenological reality of the face-to-face encounter is that which lies at the very heart of

human existence – an experience which Kierkegaard has shown to be characterized by an

essentially unresolvable dialectical tension between self and other, an incessant striving to

become, that is, to reach something beyond our everyday existence -- a something which always

lies just outside of our grasp.

In summary, ethical response rests upon the ability to first hear and listen to the Other's call to responsibility, and prior to any listening and subsequent response, a forgetting of recollection must take place. In other words, the action of turning inwards to discover meaning that presumably already resides within us must be abandoned in favor of turning attention outwards towards that which is utterly foreign (the voice of the Other). The alternate understanding of dialectic that emerges as a result of Levinas's re-orientation of philosophy is significant for appreciating communicative responsibility as "response-ability" in that it represents a critical move towards allowing the Other's voice to resound amidst the noise of postmodernity. Forgetting to recollect marks the first step in checking our confidence, that critical movement whereby we recognize not only that we do not have all of the answers, but also that the promise of philosophy resides in knowing that we will never have them. By re-orienting the philosopher towards exteriority and the ethical relation, Levinas provides an antidote for philosophy's hubris. The critique of the metaphysics of presence that Kierkegaard sustained throughout his work gives us the ability to envision the philosopher's task as a welcoming of uncertainty that moves freely within an unresolved dialectical tension between the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite. And in this, Kierkegaard helps us to appreciate Levinas's work by teaching us a most important lesson: "Most people are subjective towards themselves and objective towards all others – frightfully objective sometimes, but the task is to be objective towards oneself and subjective towards all others" (*Works of Love* 83). Levinas seems to echo Kierkegaard's assertion when he writes that "Truth can *be* only if a subjectivity is called upon to tell it…The accomplishing of the I *qua* I and morality constitute one sole and same process in being: morality comes to birth not in equality, but in the fact that infinite exigencies, that of serving the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, converge at

one point…Thus through morality alone are I and the others produced in the universe" (TI 245).

For Levinas the task of philosophy is a calling into question of the self's attempt to reduce everything to the rational order, that is, the Other interrupts and puts a stop to the activity of reducing pre-rational experience to reason. Philosophical dialectic in the Levinasian sense is an action whereby, "forgetting to recollect" we humbly place our philosophical hubris in check. The ability to respond to the Other's address is only possible when philosophical inquiry encourages us to look outside rather than in. It is only from this vantage point that we can be poised to make a dialogic move towards genuine encounter with difference.

Chapter Three

Communicating Capability: The Dialogue of Response-ability

To stop a man on the street and to stand still in order to speak with him is not as difficult as having to say something to a passerby in passing, without standing still oneself or delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way – and such is the relation between an existing person and an existing person when the communication pertains to the truth as existence.
--Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846)

Introduction

Chapter Three investigates the dialogical element of communicative responsibility by focusing on the issue of alterity in Levinas's work. Specifically, this chapter addresses the question, "How does Levinas's understanding of alterity inform an unconventional view of dialogue?" "Dialogue" is understood here with reference to Cissna and Anderson's description of dialogue as, "an issue concerning the quality of relationship between or among two or more people and of the communicative acts that create and sustain that relationship"[17] (12). Beginning with the understanding that ethics as first philosophy works to decenter the communicative agent, this chapter considers how a Levinasian understanding of dialogue can work to frame communicative responsibility as "response-ability." This chapter utilizes the Kierekgaardian metaphors of "communicating capability" and "indirect communication" to better appreciate the implications of Levinas's phenomenology of alterity

The first section of this chapter, "Alterity and Dialogue," examines the significance of alterity in Levinas's work, paying special attention to the unique interplay between alterity and dialogue. In "The Communication of Capability," the discussion moves to a consideration of

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[17] Cissna and Anderson identify four schools of dialogue, which include interpersonal meeting (Buber), human conversation, a cultural form of human knowing (Bakhtin), and a philosophy of textual understanding (Gadamer). See *The Reach of Dialogue: Confirmation, Voice, and Community*, pp. 11-13.

Kierkegaard's distinction between the communication of knowledge and the communication of capability as a means of articulating the sense in which Levinas's view of alterity works to privilege dialogue by moving beyond it. In "Indirect Communication," the chapter looks specifically at Kierkegaard's understanding of the indirect mode of communication as the primary expression of subjective knowledge, and beings to situate the metaphysical truth of Levinas's ethical relation there. Owing to the degree to which studies of dialogue have often privileged speaking over listening, the next section of the chapter, "Listening and Dialogue," considers the role of listening in the context of the Levinasian-Kierkegaardian interpretation of dialogue. Finally, "The Dialogue of Response-ability" maintains that the ability to respond is tied to an interpretation of dialogue that is rooted in an orientation towards learning that cannot be reduced to the seeking out and possession of knowledge. The Kierkegaardian notion of "indirect communication" as a medium of existential actuality emerges as a means of conceptualizing the dialogic element that works to form the origins of ethical responsibility from a Levinasian perspective.

Building on Levinas's re-orienting of philosophical wisdom towards exteriority, this chapter identifies the origins of ethical subjectivity in an encounter between self and other that, while clearly dialogic, extends beyond dialogue to acknowledge the uniqueness of the communicative event that constitutes ethical interpersonal interaction. Levinas's view shifts attention away from what is communicated to how it is communicated by rejecting the assertion that communicative responsibility consists in the application of rationalist principles and duties. The question of transcendence figures prominently in Levinas and Kierkegaard, and both philosophers understand ethical responsibility as fundamentally tied to this issue. As Michael Weston has indicated, for both philosophers, "transcendence is characterized by absolute

difference. [For Levinas and for Kierkegaard] the "I" cannot become truly itself through the exercise of its own capacities, but requires an intervention from an 'exteriority'" (Weston 153). This chapter will argue that communicative response-ability resides in a dialogic encounter where the ethical subject seeks understanding of the other while also remaining attentive to her own personhood.

Alterity and Dialogue

Postmodernity's creation of a decentered and reconceptualized subject has inevitably moved the problem of alterity to the forefront of philosophical inquiry, and "the Other" plays such a significant role in Levinas's work that much of the recent scholarship that addresses the question of alterity has often been referred to as "post-Levinasian." Not only is the issue of alterity a primary theme in Levinas's project, it is also a key element in understanding communicative responsibility as fundamentally tied to response. In reaction to a philosophical tradition that has proven itself consistently totalizing, Levinas attempts to provide a phenomenological account of human interaction that does not annihilate otherness. As noted in the previous chapter, Levinas is primarily interested in rethinking intersubjectivity in a way that avoids subsuming the other into the same.

In disagreement with a philosophical tradition that regularly relies on representative realism, Levinas asserts that the Other must be conceived of as transcendence. Levinas discusses the self-other relation as early as *Totality and Infinity,* where he maintains that "transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance as would happen with relations within the same; this relation does not become an implantation in the other and a confusion with him, does not affect the very identity of the same, its ipseity, does not

silence the *apology*, does not become apostasy and ecstasy" (41-42). Levinas's understanding of transcendence is unconventional in that it denies the more traditionalist view (as in Plato and Hegel, for example) where any movement beyond the self is concurrent with the idealized achievement of a perfect union. In contrast, Levinas terms the movement beyond the self "metaphysical," and insisted that it not be qualified as theological since it is prior to all of these things. As Levinas explains, the metaphysical relation is the very origin of language "where neither the no nor the yes is the first word" (TI 42). Levinas's establishment of a fundamental connection between language and the ethical sets the stage for absolute alterity by maintaining a seemingly paradoxical co-existence between self and other that affirms subjectivity but is not reductionist. Levinas describes the self as independent, insisting that it is neither different from nor opposed to the Other, but is distinct from it: "If the Same would establish its identity by simple opposition to the Other, it would already be part of a totality encompassing the same and the other…The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other" (TI 38-39). As demonstrated here, Levinas consistently avoids describing the Other from the standpoint of totality, and is careful not to refer to the other as a polarization of the self. Rather, Levinas insists that although the self is indeed separate from the other, the self cannot be conceived of as the *opposite* of the other.

If this is the case, how can "absolute" alterity be conceived, or, as Levinas himself asks in the opening section of *Totality and Infinity,* "can the same, produced as egoism, enter into a relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity?" (TI 38). While Levinas's goal is clearly not to provide a chronological sequencing of intersubjectivity as an

event, he indicates that the Other precedes the Self, and that it is the priority of the Other (which is manifested primarily in her summons, that is, her demand for justification, her plea, "do not kill me") that constitutes the very foundation of ethical responsibility. David Jopling has described this in the following terms: "The moment of the face-to-face encounter between the self and other is a dialogical moment, a moment of address and response. Philosophers of dialogue claim that the fundamental human reality is conversation, dialogue, response, and address. By this, they mean that we cannot be a person all on our own, but only in a web of interlocutors…we are, as it were, 'talked into' personhood" (423). In Levinas's view, this point is significant because any description of alterity that overlooks the priority of the other fails to account for the fact that the self is only "self" because it is addressed by an "other."

Dialogue, viewed in context with Levinas's notion of absolute alterity, contrasts with Buber's well-known portrayal of a meeting of participants in conversation. Levinas asserts that self and other are always already in the act of communication[18] and maintains that the origins of subjectivity can be traced to a specific primordial communicative act: "The 'for the other' arises within the *I*, like a command heard by him, as if obedience were already being (*l'etre*) listening for the dictate" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 101). In other words alterity does not simply refer to the distinction between "self" and "not-self"; it also indicates that "the beginning of philosophy is not the *cogito*, but the relation to the other" (Hayat xxi). The primary component of the self-other relation is not, as Buber had supposed, the element of reciprocity (the fact that the I is a you for the other and the you is discovered to be another I). Rather, Levinas insists upon an

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[18] For in-depth study of the relationship between Buber and Levinas see Ronald C. Arnett, "A Dialogic Ethic 'Between' Buber and Levinas." *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*. Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter and Kenneth N Cissna Eds. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004. pp. 75-90; Ronald C. Arnett, "Beyond Dialogue: Levinas and Otherwise Than The I-Thou." *Language and Dialogue*" 2:1 (2012): 140-155; Peter Atteron, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice Friedman Eds. *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and* Difference. Duquesne University Press, 2004. Lisbeth Lipari, "Listening for the Other: Ethical Implications of the Buber-Levinas Encounter." *Communication Theory* 14.2 (2004): 122-141.

element that ultimately precedes reciprocity. He asks, "The other whom I address – is he not initially the one with whom I stand in the relationship one has with one who is weaker?" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 100). Levinas explains that alterity does not include the component of reciprocity because, "the moment one is generous in hopes of reciprocity, that relation no longer involves generosity but the commercial relation, the exchange of good behavior" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 101). In Levinas's view, the self presupposes impact by the other, and is always already in a social relation. Self and other are in dialogue prior to initial encounter: "Directness of the face-to-face, a 'between us' [*entre-nous*], already in conversation [*entre-tien*], already dia-logue and hence *distance* and quite the opposite of the contact in which coincidence and identification occur…this is precisely the distance of proximity" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 93). Levinas perceives a radical inequality at the heart of the ethical relation, and in this he offers a decidedly unconventional viewpoint on the issue of alterity and dialogue.

As scholars have agreed, it is Levinas's view of alterity that marks the most distinctive and perhaps most radical element of his thinking. It is undoubtedly a central component of his critique of Western philosophy, and entails a non-traditional understanding of dialogue that emphasizes an asymmetrical ethical relation between self and other. In contrast to Plato's theory of recollection, Hegel's dialectic, Husserl's transcendental ego, and Heidegger's ontology, Levinas presents a phenomenology of alterity that uncovers the primordial element of the ethical relation: "Entirely opposed to knowledge which is suppression of alterity and which, in the 'absolute knowledge' of Hegel, celebrates the 'identity of the identical and the non-identical' alterity and duality do not disappear in the loving relationship" (*Ethics and Infinity* 66). It is important to note that Levinas identifies the origins of the ethical relation in the *separation* between self and other, and this is what makes his philosophical project particularly unique.

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Levinas contends that subjectivity is not a matter of the self-subject opening onto the other-object, but is rather the other's calling into question of the self, and the demand that the other makes for justification, a demand that may never be able to be fully satisfied, but to which the ethical subject is called to respond.

If the self does not represent an opening onto the other and self and other cannot be conceived of as polar opposites, nor can their relation be described as reciprocal, then how is dialogue to occur, if at all? In what sense are we to understand ethics as an unfolding of dialogic philosophy? Is it possible for dialogue to take place in the context of absolute alterity? In order to augment an understanding of the way that Levinas's work has responded to these questions, we turn to Kierkegaard, and will listen in particular to his description of indirect communication as the medium of ethical-religious truth.

The Communication of Capability

As Andrew F. Herrmann has noted in his 2008 study, "Kierkegaard and Dialogue: The Communication of Capability," it is difficult to ignore Kierkegaard's absence from the recent communication literature. Some reasons for this absence, suggested by Herrmann, are the length of time it took to translate Kierkegaard's major works, the subsequent length of time it took for Kierkegaard to become known internationally (he was nearly invisible outside Scandinavia until almost fifty years after his death), and the tendency for communication scholars to focus their attention in other areas, such as new media and American pragmatism (72). Herrmann's study is one of few works published within the past decade that directly addresses Kierkegaard from the perspective of communication studies. Herrmann works to situate Kierkegaard within the dialogic tradition, and while analysis of Kierkegaard is not the primary focus of this study,

understanding his place within this tradition proves valuable in utilizing his work to enhance an overall understanding of the place of dialogue in Levinas.

While many of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works evidence (albeit implicitly) his interest in communication, his series of lectures on communication ("The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication"), composed in 1847 and published shortly after his death as part of the seven volume *Journals and Papers* provide the most direct articulation of his philosophy of communication. Throughout these lectures, Kierkegaard repeatedly lamented the fact that modern society had reduced everything (including the arts) to science. As a result Kierkegaard declared:

> Wherever I look…I find that men are preoccupied with the WHAT which is to be communicated. What occupies me, on the other hand, is: 'What does it mean to communicate?'… The modern age has—and I regard this as its basic damage—abolished personality and made everything objective. Therefore men do not come to dwell upon the thought of what does it mean to communicate but hasten immediately to the *what* they wish to communicate. And since almost every such *what*, even at first glance, reveals itself to be something very prolix, there is in the passage of time even less of an opportunity or place for considering what it means to communicate" (*Journals and Papers* 304).

While Kierkegaard has not been a popular focus in recent communication scholarship, passages like this one from the lectures provide clear evidence of his status as a philosopher of communication, demonstrating in particular his concern with the question of how we are communicatively situated in the world. Modernity's emphasis on the objectification of knowledge marked, for Kierkegaard, not a step forward, but rather a movement backward in that

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it resulted in the abstraction of individuality. Kierkegaard considered this to be problematic because it compromised ethical responsibility: "a crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction" ("That Individual" in Kaufman 95). It is almost as if Kierkegaard acknowledged here that the crowd has the effect of drowning out the ethical demand of the other, making listening (and responding) an impossibility: "the communicator of the truth can only be a single individual. And again the communication of it can only be addressed to the individual: for truth consists precisely in that conception of life which is expressed by the individual" ("The Individual" in Kaufman 98). As we have already seen, for Kierkegaard, truth requires a participatory stance and, further, ethical truth cannot be reduced to propositions, but is *a way of existing* that acknowledges self and other as separate but fundamentally connected via the possibility of and the fulfillment of responsive communicative acts.

A large degree of Kierkegaard's disenchantment with the modern age was connected to his disapproval of communicative practices in both private and public life. Kierkegaard was particularly critical of "the commodification of discourse" which he felt was common in everyday talk and in the press (Herrmann 73). Kierkegaard's analysis of the status of communication in the modern age presents a number of ideas that are relevant to the present discussion of alterity and dialogue in Levinas, the most significant of which is "the communication of capability." Kierkegaard identified four parts of communication: the object, the communicator, the receiver and the communication (*Journals and Papers* 282). Kierkegaard utilized these "distinctions" as a means of articulating the difference between the communication of knowledge (*Videns Meddelelse*) and the communication of capability (*Kunnis Meddelelse*), a

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delineation that he had first referred to in the appendix of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but later discussed at length in the lectures. As I see it, Kierkegaard's identification of these elements is best interpreted as a direct response to his primary concern about what it means to communicate. Kierkegaard demonstrated that when the focus is on the object, communication of knowledge takes place, but when the focus is on the person, that is, on her "existential actuality," communication of capability occurs (*Journals and Papers* 285-287).

The difference between the communication of knowledge and the communication of capability hinges on the way that the four communicative elements (object, communicator, receiver, and communication) are apprehended and utilized in the context of the communicative act (Herrmann 76). For example, in the communication of knowledge, both the communicator and the receiver stand in a subordinate relation to the object, or the "what" of the communication (Weston 141). Here, "truth" is a matter of validity and is inattentive to individual subjectivity and the particulars of narrative ground. The communication of knowledge might be thought of as technical communication, as in the professor of Rhetoric delivering a lecture on Aristotle; any professor of Rhetoric with the same theoretical knowledge of Aristotle could deliver this lecture. Although the words and examples used would differ, the message would be the same, i.e. knowledge about Aristotle and Rhetoric would be conveyed. In contrast, what matters in the communication of capability is not that knowledge about a particular topic be disseminated, but that the receiver, as a direct result of the communication, might be able to *do* something, that is, be able to perform a specific action (as when teaching a child to write, the concern is that the child develop that ability) (Weston 141). To illustrate "communication of capability," Kierkegaard relates the example of a sergeant and his new recruit. The sergeant commands the recruit to "stand up straight" and the recruit replies, "sure enough." The sergeant responds,

"Yes, and don't talk during the drill." And the recruit answers, "All right, I won't if you'll just tell me" (*Journals and Papers,* 267, Herrmann 77). The recruit's failure to see that the proposition "don't talk" demands that he both act and respond in a specific way (in the way of a solider) demonstrates the idea of "communicating capability" (Herrmann 77). The sergeant's communication does not convey knowledge about soldiering, but communicates specifically about the way of existing as a soldier. And the distinction between these two, knowledge about (an object) and the way of existing (of a subject) is a critical one if we are to appreciate the dialogic origins of ethical response-ability. In Kierkegaard, the communication of capability resists the monologicality of modern society: "Kierkegaard's thought is pervaded with the risk and the opportunity of dialogue…[Kierkegaard] is a philosopher of the word, of dialogue, of the dynamics of communication [who] understands that one's life will and can be changed when one hears the word of the other" (Perkins 179-180). The distinction that Kierkegaard makes here affirms that the subjective thinker lives, thinks, exists with other individuals and is deliberately and consciously concerned with the complexities of the communicative situation.

In the communication of knowledge, the specificities of context and the particularities of perspective are of little consequence. Communication of capability, on the other hand, is fundamentally "indirect" and takes place in the "medium of actuality" (Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers* 251). "Communication of capability" indicates that what is conveyed is also exemplified in the communicator's action, and this creates a personal relationship between the speakers that evolves via attentiveness to the particularities of the situation and the performance of specific actions. As Weston explains, "such 'aesthetic' capability is 'indirect' in that the ability of the teacher is 'communicated' to the pupil only by her coming to be able [to do it] herself; this communication involves an essentially *personal* relation, therefore, which has the

character of training by example and by the pupil's own performance, and so in 'actuality', and thus involves an *authority* of the teacher in relation to the pupil which derives from the former's developed ability" (141). To be sure, the communication of capability represents a "drawing out of the ethical" from the individual, and as such its kinship to the Socratic maieutic has often been noted in the literature. And yet, the dialogic interaction that lies at the center of the communication of capability is first and foremost a product of the effects of absolute alterity and the impact of radical exteriority. The phenomenological experience of alterity plays itself out in terms of the ability of the speaker to prompt a response in the listener that is ultimately transformative. Weston's analysis is helpful here because it points out that in the communication of capability the relation of the interlocutors is asymmetrical. Additionally, Herrmann draws attention to the fact that the communication of knowledge, being impersonal, does not engender the personhood of either of the speakers (76). In reference to the communication of capability, ethical communication is not a matter of having objective knowledge (as in Kant's categorical imperative or even Buber's I-Thou), but is rather *a way of existing*; it is a passion -- a striving towards becoming -- and this is what the Levinas-Kierkegaard conversation reveals, namely that ethical communication involves an existential transformation and a perpetual welcoming of the burden of responsibility.

Indirect Communication

As we discovered in Chapter 2, much of Kierkegaard's disenchantment with the philosophical tradition was tied to his perception that it had lost touch with the meaning of existence. In contrast to many of his predecessors, Kierkegaard focused his attention not on "knowledge," "truth" or "ideas," but rather on the *relationship* of the individual thinker to thought. This focus on the knower's relationship to his own thinking gave rise to the thesis that

"truth is subjectivity." We have already discussed the sense in which Kierkegaard's assertion affirms a first-person position for philosophy where the relationship between speaker and addressee remains central. We have also determined that it works to recover individual particularity in a way that is crucial for Levinas's articulation of ethics as first philosophy. Since we have now begun to comprehend the critical role that alterity plays in Levinas's understanding of dialogue, and the way that Kierkegaard's rendering of the communication of capability describes the expression of existential truths concerning the essence of interpersonal interaction, we must now give some consideration to Kierkegaard's explanation of the mode of communication in which these truths are expressed.

For Kierkegaard, the distinction between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge is one concerning the relationship of knower and known. As Kierkegaard explains in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript:*

> When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused on the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true (199).

Kierkegaard's description of objective and subjective truth reflects his concern with the knower's relation to that which he thinks, and indicates that subjective truth contains within it a relation not just to what is "true" but also to the thinking itself that renders it true. This is why

Kierkegaard asserts that "objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence" and "the subjective existing thinker is aware of the dialectic of communication" (CUP 73). The subjective thinker is "essentially interested in his own thinking" and "is existing in it" (CUP 73). Kierkegaard explains that subjective thinking is essentially inward, and while this may appear to run contrary to Levinas's re-contextualization of philosophy as exteriority, it demonstrates an attentiveness to particularity that is essential to Levinas's phenomenology of alterity. The inwardness that characterizes the Kierkegaardian subjective thinker describes her mode of reflection, which is specifically one in which she claims her thinking as uniquely her own. In other words, in the process of appropriating her own thought, her identity arises in part from her ability to make this claim of possession. As Kierkegaard explains, "Whereas objective thinking invests everything in the result and assists all humankind to cheat by copying and reeling off the results and answers, subjective thinking invests everything in the process of becoming…" (CUP 73). The inwardness that Kierkegaard refers to here is not interiority (as in an epistemology of recollection where the truth is thought to reside within) but rather an acknowledgment of and taking responsibility for one's own thinking. It is only when we are attuned to this frame of mind about our own thinking that we can begin to interpret and understand the encounter with alterity.

In addition to the inwardness that characterizes the subjective thinker's responsibility for her own thought, Kierkegaard also demonstrates an awareness that subjective truths manifest themselves in a form of communication that is quite distinct from that of objective truths. In other words, the nature of the truth determines the mode of communication that is appropriate to it, and in the case of subjective truth this is decidedly an indirect mode of communication. While Kierkegaard acknowledges the pragmatic uses of direct communication, it represents the

communication of a "what" as opposed to the communication of a "how." Indirect

communication allows one to "come to terms with the subjective 'how' involved in existential

living" (Garrett 332). Further, indirect communication "empowers one through a radical

confrontation with one's own self-understanding" (Garrett 332). In Levinas's terms, the indirect

communication of the face represents a radical confrontation with alterity, and this element will

become clearer as we begin to examine Levinas's use of the face as metaphor in the next chapter.

For now, it is sufficient to make the connection here between the metaphysical truth of the

ethical relation, as Levinas sees it, and Kierkegaard's understanding of indirect communication

as the method for communicating ethical subjectivity. Kierkegaard explains that the subjective

thinker, who is essentially one who understands religious truth (recall here Abraham),

understands that direct communication is a fraud towards God, towards himself, and towards

other human beings (CUP 75). Religious truth is, according to Kierkegaard, "an objective

uncertainty held fast in the appropriate process of the most passionate inwardness…" (CUP 182).

This is why Abraham is portrayed as being unable to speak in *Fear and Trembling*: "Abraham

cannot be mediated, which can also be put by saying he cannot speak. The moment I do I

express the universal, and when I do, no one can understand me" (89). Subjective (religious)

truth must be communicated indirectly since direct communication, in relying on abstract

universals, reduces, objectifies, and ultimately totalizes. For Kierkegaard it is impossible for

religious truth to be communicated directly since it is a truth that *is* existence, and as such can

only be lived. Indirect communication, as described by Kierkegaard, is a non-totalizing form of

communication wherein the life of the individual is expressed. As and as we have begun to

determine, and hope to realize even more fully by the end of this investigation, ethical truth

cannot be communicated directly, but rather relies on the expression of the face.

Objective communication is, for Kierkegaard, inherently direct and is concerned primarily with the transmission of information about objects. In matters of objective investigation (a chemist's mathematical formula, for example), truth is the duplication of being in thought. In contrast, religious truth represents the duplication of thought in being (Taylor 83). In other words, the "truth" of an objective truth is a function of its method, which yields knowledge about the particular object under investigation, and once the observer has removed himself as far as is possible, the result is a thorough and complete grasping of the object. The results of such an objective investigation can be communicated directly from one person to another, with the particular identity and ground of the speaker being of little importance to the communication of the truth. This is the ideal of truth that has reigned supreme throughout Modernity. But for Kierkegaard, there is no "result" in subjective (religious) truth. Rather, the end goal of subjective truth is realized in the achievement of a way of being that is, in a sense, the living out of that truth. This goes beyond, I think, the simple summation of "living a Christ-like life" or "being true to oneself" in requiring deep-seated passion and commitment to those things that one has consciously, reflectively, and deliberately chosen to value in the context of a given historical moment. Perhaps Kierkegaard expressed it best when he wrote, "only then do I truly know the truth when it becomes a life in me" (*Training in Christianity* 202). In short, indirect communication places the emphasis on "becoming" – that is, the effort that one makes at existence. This important aspect of Kierkegaard's understanding of the indirect communication of capability is aptly summarized by Mark C. Taylor, who notes that the communication of capability is essentially transformative:

> The aim of the communicator of religious truth is the transformation of the life of the
>
> person to whom he addresses himself. This alteration in the personal life of the

individual can only be wrought by the recipient himself. The communicator cannot

present neat results which the listener can easily appropriate. What the communicator

can do is to present different possibilities, various alternatives, to an individual (84-85).

Kierkegaard's rendering of the distinction between objective and subjective thinking affirms that

truth is a not a compendium of information, but rather the quality of an individual's life. By

comparison, we can conclude that dialogue (as understood by Levinas) does not involve the

exchange of information, but is rather an issue concerning the quality of the relationship between

persons.

As Kierkegaard shows, when we engage in communication of capability we

communicate not a set of investigative results, but the truth about a way of existing from within a

particular set of circumstances and in the context of a specific temporal moment. In this way,

communication of capability is the Kierkegaardian exemplar of indirect communication. As

Kierkegaard explains:

The opposite of direct communication [*ligremme Meddelelse*] is indirect communication

[*indirecte Meddelelse*]…Indirect communication can be produced by the art of

reduplicating the communication. This art consists in reducing oneself, the

communicator, to nobody…and then incessantly composing qualitative opposites into

unity. This is what some of the pseudonyms are accustomed to call "double reflection"

(*Training in Christianity* 132).

The "double reflection" that Kierkegaard refers to here is a mirroring -- but not in the sense of

seeing ourselves in another person, but rather in the sense that the other person acts as co-creator

in the individual's realization of her potentialities. Kierkegaard indicates that this is the primary

component that distinguishes indirect communication from direct communication, and further,

that this double-movement is an art: "Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be in supposing that the communicator has to present the communication to a knower, so that he can judge it, or to a nonknower, so that he can acquire something to know" (CUP 277). Kierkegaard not only clarifies here the distinction between the modes of direct and indirect communication but also provides insight into why he chooses to communicate his message through the voices of various pseudonyms. For Kierkegaard, pseudonymous writing provides an outward manifestation of the indirect mode of communication – the only method that is available for the communication of the truth that is the ethical relation. As Harry S. Broudy notes, Kierkegaard explicitly discusses and implicitly demonstrates three primary ways in which indirect communication is achieved: first, in the use of irony and dialectic to incite the listener to self-examination, in the exhibition of provoking and puzzling incongruities, and in the artistic expression of anecdote, homily and narrative (231). All three of these are clearly indebted to the Socratic Method, and Broudy suggests that they are fundamentally rhetorical in that in prompting the addressee to recognize her own potentialities, they initiate within in her own "existential state" (231). This is the inwardness that is truth as subjectivity. In what may appear to be an overtly Levinasian move, Kierkegaard de-privileges the communicative agent by re-introducing him into the process of communicating truth. Both Levinas and Kierkegaard are fundamentally concerned with the "first-person position" and with retrieving particularity from the totalizing forces of Western speculative philosophy. As Erik Garrett notes, "Both Levinas and Kierkegaard are trying to puncture the anonymity that the public holds and subjectify the public in the passionate individual. Both rely on an existential communication to characterize the nature of our ethical relation to the Other from a position of a free and responsible passionate individual" (343). The retrieval of particularity in both

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philosophers' work is particularly significant since the call of the Other cannot be heard (nor potentially responded to) without the presence of a subjective thinker – a component for which Levinas is indebted to Kierkegaard.

In summary, I am suggesting, as have Simmons and Wood,[19] that the Kierkegaardian category of "the religious" equates to what Levinas would classify as "ethical." While it is well known that Kierkegaard attributes priority to the religious over the ethical, and Levinas does exactly the opposite, both point towards an essential link between heteronomy and transcendence that takes us beyond the traditional categories of transcendence and immanence to the realization that who we are is a function of a relation to an Other that we did not choose (Westphal 6-7). For both philosophers, alterity and dialogue exist in a unique interplay wherein ethical responsibility issues from the ability of the speaker to prompt a response in the listener that is ultimately transformative for both parties. Kierkegaard's summation of indirect communication and the communication of capability allows us to place dialogue within the purview of the issue of the quality of the relationship between persons, with quality being intimately related to communication of a "how" as opposed to a "what." In this sense, dialogue doesn't communicate knowledge, but rather it communicates so that the interlocutor can *do something* – so that she can embrace her humanity by engaging in response.

Listening and Dialogue

Kierkegaard's notion of the indirect communication of capability puts us in a better position to appreciate alterity as signifying a dialogue that is already underway prior to the initial encounter between self and other. Levinas's understanding of the phenomenology of alterity points towards a conceptualization of dialogue that privileges the communication of a *way* of

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[19] See *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics and Religion* (2008), pp. 4-5.

existing as opposed to a *what* of existing. While knowledge and speech are certainly active

components of the ethical relation, when we set Levinas's view of the interplay between alterity

and dialogue against the backdrop of Kierkegaard's philosophy of communication, we can see

with greater clarity a dialogical component that privileges listening over speaking.

Lisbeth Lipari's work on listening and alterity supports this perspective. Lipari argues

for a strong connection between listening and alterity that emerges in large part from the

contributions that dialogic philosophy makes to communication ethics. Lipari outlines four

major contributions: the acknowledgment of radical alterity, the decentering of the egoist

subject, the privileging of ethical obligation, and the emphasis on the constitutive over the

symbolic dimensions of communication ("Listening for the Other" 127-128). Taking these four

components together, we can characterize the implications of dialogic philosophy as a movement

towards the recognition that human interaction results in the co-creation of meaning.

Additionally, the decentering of the communicative agent coupled with increased focus on the

constitutive aspects places listening closer to the conceptual center of communication.

Throughout her work, Lipari maintains that studies of both dialogue and rhetoric have, in relying

on a Western conception of logos, consistently privileged speaking over listening ("Rhetoric's

Other" 227-228). The problem with this, says Lipari, is that when speech is privileged over

listening, the degree to which listening is itself responsible for the ethical is overlooked (228).

What I take Lipari to be saying here is that response-ability is directly and critically tied to the

act of listening. In the context of an interpretation of the disparities between Levinas and Buber,

Lipari concludes that the relation with alterity in communication ethics is carried out primarily

through the process of listening as opposed to speaking ("Listening for the Other" 137). Lipari

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suggests that it is listening, rather than speaking, that is the interruptive force in the ethical encounter.

While the tradition has historically directed its focus towards speaking as opposed to listening, it is important to recognize the degree to which both communicative actions (that is, speaking *and* listening) are fundamentally bound up with each other, and I would argue, difficult to distinguish conceptually. Once the de-privileging of the communicative agent takes place, this difficulty becomes more apparent, and our approach to dialogue can pay appropriate homage to the critical role that listening plays. While both Levinas and Kierkegaard would sustain a phenomenology of alterity that begins with speech (in the form of the Other's call) both would also likely recognize that the moment that the Other's address is uttered, the listener is called into action. We can perhaps clarify this assertion by directing our attention to description of the distinction between listening and hearing. In contrast to hearing, listening requires both activity and passivity on the part of the listener. In Lipari's estimation, "Listening, as opposed to hearing, is not to place the other in conformity with ourselves, but is instead to create space to receive the alterity of the other and let it resonate" ("Listening to the Other" 138). Additionally, Lipari notes that etymologically, listening comes from a root that emphasizes attention and obedience, while hearing has ties to the ideas of gaining and possessing ("Listening, Thinking, Being" 349). On the one hand, listening is receptivity – the passivity of receiving the other into oneself. On the other hand, listening is also enactment – the deliberate carving out of a space into which the other may enter. Lipari views what I have termed here the "active component" of listening as primarily a contraction – a stepping back that creates a void into which the other may enter. In other words, the "I" must shrink in order to make room for the other. Lipari maintains that this contraction represents what Levinas would call a "dwelling place": "The (in)vocation of

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dialogic ethics is a giving birth to speech by listening, it is a *dwelling place* from where we offer

our hospitality to the other and the world. But it is not only that the voice of the other calling

requires a listener to be complete; it is that, more radically, without a listener, the speaking

simply may not occur" (Lipari, "Rhetoric's Other" 240). Further, Lipari argues that listening is

ontological in the sense that it involves an "encounter with radical alterity that disrupts our

everyday understandings and habits of thought" ("Listening, Thinking, Being" 350). I would

argue that this "dwelling place" emerges in the context of the Levinas-Kierkegaard dialogue as

the dwelling place of human meaning. It is both a result of the passivity of receiving the other

without appropriation or assimilation, and also the activity of stepping back to make room for the

other's entrance. In stepping back, the listener expands the horizon of interpretation, and hence

of meaning. In this sense, when we are listening we are both empty and full, both unity and

plurality (Lipari, "Listening, Thinking, Being" 350). And, in this way, listening is an important

component of Kierkegaardian pathos – that is, the striving towards existence and the struggle to

become. The retraction and expansion that occurs in listening is distinct from hearing in that

hearing does not include this double movement, but rather travels in a singular direction towards

certainty and mastery – working through cognitive schemata and evaluative thinking to make the

other's words one's own.

In summary then, it is listening that makes the ethical response possible. The inextricable

link between listening and response-ability is evidenced in Kierkegaard's understanding of

ethical subjectivity as a communication of capability that is first and foremost expressed

indirectly. As we shall witness in the next chapter, in Levinas, the expression of the face that

brings forth the summons to responsibility functions as a communication of capability, both

demanding from and giving to the ethical "I." On the one hand, the face demands a

responsibility from which the self cannot escape. On the other hand, the expression of the face gives to the self a most precious gift by communicating to her her own capability for response. Embedded in this ability to respond is the act of listening – a communicative act that moves towards the other by shrinking back, creating a definitive space for the co-constitution of meaning and the revelation that responsibility for the other is infinite.

The Dialogue of Response-ability

Appreciating the unique way that alterity and dialogue interact with one another in Levinas's thinking is not only critical to comprehending his project as whole, but is a necessary component in tracing its implications for communicative responsibility as rooted in response. Cissna and Anderson have identified numerous characteristics of dialogue including "recognition of 'strange otherness,'" "vulnerability," and "mutual implication" (13-14). In identifying these primary components of the dialogic tradition, they have emphasized that dialogue surfaces in communication theory primarily as an issue of the quality of the relationship between interlocutors. Noting the primary influence of Martin Buber, Cissna and Anderson also acknowledge Gadamer and Bakhtin as significant theorists in the tradition. While Levinas's overall disagreement with Buber's reciprocal notion of the "I-thou" has typically excluded him from inclusion in the dialogic tradition, it is nevertheless clear that Levinas's work invokes an understanding of dialogue that culminates in the affirmation of communication that is both indirect and also existentially transformative.

Levinas's phenomenology of alterity places dialogue in a unique and significant position. For Levinas, the Other is in proximity precisely because she is distant, and in order to be interested in the Other, one has to be disinterested. Arnett has explained this in terms of a contrast between Buber's "personal attentiveness" and Levinas's "impersonal attentiveness" and

has argued that "the important issue for Levinas is that ethics and attentiveness to the third party, the unseen, trumps the notion of dialogue" ("Beyond Dialogue" 150). Further, Arnett notes that Levinas's view is unconventional in that instead of emphasizing a leaning towards the Other in dialogue, it stresses the movement of the Other leaning towards us in demand ("Beyond Dialogue" 150). Arnett concludes, "This Levinasian focus on disinterestedness brings to dialogue an ironic twist – in order to privilege dialogue, it must be decentered" ("Beyond Dialogue" 151). In this way, claims Arnett, Levinas is successful in rendering dialogue more powerful by de-privileging it. Whereas the primary themes of dialogic theory have stressed personal attentiveness and interpersonal interaction through conversation (Buber), the dialogic characteristics of language itself (Bakhtin), and the relationship between interpreter and text (Gadamer), dialogue does not take center stage in Levinas, and yet, it is dialogue that allows Levinas to validate the primacy of ethics and to affirm the origins of communicative responsibility.

Levinas's view of "otherness" contrasts with traditional views of subjectivity that rest upon the idea of a self that opens onto and encompasses the other as an object. Levinas maintains that "subjectivity is structured as the other in the same" (OTB 24). Further, says Levinas, subjectivity as the other in the same does not indicate a correlation like the one that is characterized by Husserlian intentionality, but rather a "restlessness of the same disturbed by the other" (OTB 25). As Levinas explains, this "restlessness" indicates "a responsibility of the same for the other, as a response to his proximity before any question" (25-26). Levinas views the encounter with the other in terms of its *affect* on the self, and indicates quite clearly that it is an impact that is deeply felt. As Alphonso Lingis explains, in the introduction to his translation of *Otherwise than Being,* "it is especially as pain that Levinas conceives the impact of alterity. It is

being shaken in the complacency and pleasure of contentment" (xxiv). As Lingis's comments illustrate, Levinas understands the ethical relation as one in which *pathos* – the individual's struggle to exist – plays a key role.

How is it then that Kierkegaard's metaphor of "communication of capability" might work to upbuild an understanding of the dialogic component of ethical responsibility in Levinas? First, it is necessary to understand the sense in which Levinas's view of alterity points towards an unconventional interpretation of dialogue: the imperative of the Other (the other's demand/plea) creates the possibility of response, but more importantly, it teaches the *capability* of response, which is in the end a way of living, a struggle that the self must encounter and endure a striving that is never complete. This is illustrated in Kierkegaard's point that virtue is a "being-able." Ethical truth is not mere transmission of knowledge, but is a matter of assisting persons in the achievement of a way of existing, a way of life that is guided by attentiveness to particularities of communicative situations and contexts.

Second, by placing emphasis on personhood and actuality, Kierkegaard's "communication of capability" shifts the focus to particularity in a way that is quite similar to Levinas's insistence that the ethical be positioned before the ontological. The similarity is in the emphasis on a mode of communication that conveys a way of *being* in the context of a particular communicative situation, as opposed to a convergence or correspondence of particular "beings" with the center of Being (as is the case in Heidegger). As Arnett notes, "Radical alterity does not seek the final answer or resolution, but attends to that which is before us, trying to listen to the idea, the project, the vision, that another offers" (Arnett, "Beyond Dialogue" 143). As in Kierkegaard's example of the sergeant and the soldier, the goal in communicating capability is the performance of a particular action (as in the soldier's ability to respond to the particular

demands of the situation). Again, we see here that the end result is not pursuit of knowledge or possession of Being, but rather the ability to respond, and to respond appropriately and ethically.

In light of Kierkegaard's idea of communication of capability, Levinas's understanding of the relationship between alterity and dialogue can be seen to rely on a fundamental (and quite Kierkegaardian) connection between pathos and the ethical. This is evidenced in Levinas's view of subjectivity as *jouissance*, or the primordial experience of enjoyment. Levinas employs this term as a means of describing our original experience of the world (the world as it presents itself apart from any devised logical system). *Jouissance* represents a metaphysical desire for the other that is distinct from need, and which is ultimately insatiable. In the first section of *Totality and* Infinity, titled "Metaphysics and Transcendence," Levinas describes this primordial experience, explaining that "metaphysical desire for the other" is unlike any other desire experienced in human life: "The other metaphysically desired is not "other" like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate…I can 'feed' on those realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their alterity is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor" (33). In contrast to the commonly assumed movement from a world that is unfamiliar into a world that is known, Levinas describes a radically different experience, a desire that "does not long to return," a desire that is not for the "land of our birth." This desire is far more radical than those of sexual or even moral or religious needs. It is rather a sublime hunger, a desire that has a wholly other intention, "beyond everything that can simply complete it" (TI 33-34). Levinas indicated that our primordial experience of the other (an experience that has been frequently overlooked by phenomenologists) is one of disruption, and ultimately rupture. As John Wild explained in the introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas's phenomenology of the other reveals that "the

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other person as he comes before me in a face to face encounter is not an *alter ego*, another self with different properties and accidents but in all essential respects like me…He is not a mere object to be subsumed under one of my categories and given a place in my world" (12-13). Wild's summary here emphasizes an important aspect of Levinas's vision of the face-to-face encounter of self and other, namely that it is alterity itself that constitutes the very grounds of the possibility of separation, and that the self exists because the Other is absolutely foreign to it. While self and other most certainly exist in relation to one another, this relation is for Levinas founded and based in its separation, a distance and distinctness that calls the self into question and makes possible his struggle for existence by questioning his mastery over the world.

In short, for Levinas, dialogue is connected to a universal ethical demand that requires attentiveness to the specifics of the communicative situation and the response that it invites. Arnett explains it this way:"Levinas articulates a communicative act that acknowledges and recognizes an ethical echo of responsibility for another, attending to a phenomenological movement from an impersonal visual ethic to an oral ethic of responsibility for the Other that connects one to a universal charge of responsibility for another, charged with the obligation to discern the particulars of response and communicative engagement" ("Beyond Dialogue" 140). Since in Levinas's view alterity renders absolute knowledge (of the Other) impossible, the focus of attention must necessarily include a third party, whose function is to issue responsibility from a position outside of the relationship, an aspect of communicative responsibility that is decidedly rhetorical. In this way, as Kierkegaard's metaphor suggests, the Levinasian Other is first and foremost a teacher, but not in the didactic sense. The distinctiveness of Levinas's view of dialogue lies in its identification of location – for Buber dialogue occurs in the "between," that is, in the ontological space between the I and the Thou; for Levinas, dialogue happens in the

presentation of the face, which has the effect of bringing one into contact with the unseen neighbor (Arnett 142-143). In other words, the origin of the site of responsibility are a primary point of contention between Buber and Levinas, with Buber finding it in the I-Thou relation itself, and Levinas locating it prior.

In summary, Levinas views alterity as a complex inter-relation where self and other are distinct but intimately connected; in proximity, but simultaneously distant. In Levinas, we see that radical alterity does not negate the possibilities of dialogue but repositions it in such way as to render visible the primordial components of the ethical relation as existential struggle. The metaphysical truth of the ethical relation (alterity and transcendence) is an existential truth that can only be communicated indirectly (through the metaphor of the face), and when it is communicated, it is expressed as capability; a prompting of the Other to realize her potential for response.

Chapter Four

Attuning to the Face: The Rhetoric of Demand

The notion of the face, to which we will refer throughout this work, opens other perspectives: it brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinnebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power. It signifies the philosophical priority of the existent over Being, an exteriority that is not reducible, as with Plato, to the interiority of memory, and yet maintains the I who welcomes it…Though of myself I am not exterior to history, I do find in the Other a point that is absolute with regard to history – not by amalgamating with the Other, but in speaking with him.
--Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1961)

The present chapter looks at the rhetorical aspect of communicative responsibility in the context of Levinas's metaphor of the face. This chapter will respond to the question, "How does Levinas's use of the face as a major metaphor counter standard interpretations of rhetoric and is the face rhetorical?" As Bizzel and Herzberg have noted, the rhetorical studies have largely been devoted to an effort to comprehend the complexities inherent in "the relationships between discourse and knowledge, communication and its effects, language and experience" (16). While contemporary rhetorical theory contains multiple intersecting accounts of rhetoric's role and purpose, rhetoric will be understood here with reference to the philosophical hermeneutic tradition. When rooted in constructive hermeneutics, philosophy of communication is fundamentally concerned with the question of human agency, and committed to the presupposition that as communal/social beings, we are necessarily rhetorical. Philosophical hermeneutics understands rhetoric not simply as the art of speaking, but as a key aspect of interpersonal interaction and a determinant of the way that we are communicatively situated in the world. As Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith have noted, "The primordial function of rhetoric is to 'make-known' meaning both to oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being and in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making-known that meaning" (348). Hyde and Smith's description of rhetoric's essential

purpose as making meaning known to oneself and to others situates rhetoric within a context that seeks to privilege the primordial significance of interpersonal interaction with respect to ethical subjectivity.

The chapter opens with "Levinas and Rhetoric," a discussion of Levinas's antagonistic view of rhetoric. This section argues in support of Levinas's view that rhetoric is a discourse that fails to reside within exteriority. "The Face as Metaphor" explicates Levinas's use of the face as a major metaphor in the phenomenological description of alterity. Next, "Anxiety and Attunement" utilizes Kierkegaard's understanding of existential anxiety as a means of comprehending the rhetorical disruption of the face. Drawing upon Kierkegaard's distinction between the lyrical (discourse) and the dialectical (deliberation), this section argues that the discourse of the face attunes us to our infinite ethical responsibility. The final section of the chapter, "The Rhetoric of Demand," asserts that the face evokes an entirely different "rhetoric" – one in which the roles of listener and speaker are reversed and the reality of the Other's rhetorical command takes center stage as the primary catalyst for an ethic of response-ability.

This chapter will not only consider why and how the face speaks, but also whether or not, and in what sense, the face might be rhetorical. Drawing upon the understanding that ethical subjectivity is born in the context of a universal particularity that extends beyond dialogue, this chapter maintains that a communicative ethic of response-ability incorporates a pragmatic view of rhetoric that encourages moral deliberation in the context of the discovery of the Other. In the course of acknowledging Levinas's disdain for rhetoric's totalizing effects, this chapter will also acknowledge ways in which recent scholarship has interpreted Levinas's work as inherently rhetorical. Despite Levinas's general disdain for rhetorical discourse, this chapter contends that Levinas's philosophy opens an interpretation of rhetoric that, while unconventional, nevertheless

posits a practical and ultimately edifying role for rhetorical practice in the journey towards communicative responsibility.

Levinas and Rhetoric

In the first section of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas outlines the importance of infinity in terms of transcendence. Throughout this section, "The Same and the Other," Levinas creates an indissoluble link between language and ethics by arguing that the meeting of the Other constitutes a revelatory truth that defines the ethical self through utterance. For Levinas, interpersonal interaction becomes an impersonal reminder of the ethical demand – a discourse which is already in progress, prior to any finite encounter between persons (Arnett, "The Responsive I" 45-46). Levinas explains that this relation of truth rests on language and is contextualized in the expression of the face: "The face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimilated. The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is discourse" (TI 66). This is one of several passages in which Levinas aligns the face with language in an effort to establish that the Other not only addresses the self, but addresses her in such a way as to break through all thematizations (i.e. disclosures) of Being. Self and other do not exist in a subject-object relation, but rather are related as interlocutors – that is, they converse.

It is important, however, to remember that in his positioning of self and other as interlocutors, Levinas does not view self and other as equals. In fact, Levinas does quite the opposite, maintaining that discourse itself is indicative of the Other's mastery: "Speech, better than a simple sign, is essentially magisterial…The object is *presented* when we have welcomed an interlocutor. The master, the coinciding of the teaching and the teacher, is not in turn a fact among others…The exteriority that language, the relation with the Other, delineates is unlike the

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exteriority of a work, for the objective exteriority of works is already situated in the world established by language – by transcendence" (TI 69-70). Levinas takes care to emphasize that the ethical relation is fundamentally asymmetrical – and this is evidenced by the fact that he places the Other's address in both a prior and privileged position. Throughout the opening sections of *Totality and Infinity,* Levinas substantiates the claim that ethics is first philosophy by challenging the assumption of an autonomous and self-generated agent (Arnett, "The Responsive I" 39). Levinas asserts that self-identity arises in and through the communicative event of address and response. By decentering the communicative agent in this way, Levinas places language itself at the fore, maintaining that ethical responsibility is born not out of theoretical dictum, but from a communicative phenomenological reality that is witnessed in the expression of the face.

Immediately following this elaboration of the integral relation between discourse and ethics, Levinas moves to a discussion of rhetoric and justice where he emphatically states, "Not all discourse is a relation with exteriority" (TI 70). In a brief but nevertheless substantial section entitled "Rhetoric and Injustice," Levinas explains that rhetoric functions primarily as an assault towards the Other – an act of violence which totalizes: "[Rhetoric] approaches the other not to face him, but obliquely – not to be sure, as a thing, since rhetoric remains conversation, and across all artifices goes unto the Other, solicits his yes. But the specific nature of rhetoric (of propaganda, flattery, diplomacy, etc.) consists in corrupting this freedom. It is for this that it is preeminently violence, that is, injustice…" (TI 70). Levinas further characterizes rhetoric as a "psychagogy," a "demagogy," and a "pedagogy," that can only be renounced by facing the Other in "veritable conversation" (TI 70). Levinas is clear on this point:

Justice consists in recognizing in the Other my master. Equality among persons means

nothing of itself; it has an economic meaning and presupposes money, and already rests

on justice – which, when well-ordered, begins with the Other. Justice is the recognition

of his privilege qua Other and his mastery, is access to the Other outside of rhetoric,

which is ruse, emprise, and exploitation. And in this sense justice coincides with the

overcoming of rhetoric (TI 72).

Rhetoric functions in Levinas's eyes like other systems that exploit the Other as an object of

knowledge. Its "eloquence" deceives, and ultimately stands in the way of genuine ethical

discourse, which can only be transmitted through the face of the Other to a responsive self. If we

consider the sense in which the Other *is* her address (her face, her expression) and the Self *is* her

response (the fact that her ability to answer the call issued forth from the other is what makes her

a being-in-the-world), then we can appreciate why Levinas is and must be fundamentally

opposed to traditional systems of rhetorical discourse.

Levinas extends his position on rhetoric in *Outside the Subject* (1987). In this work,

Levinas is again critical of rhetoric's totalizing effects. He writes, "Rhetoric, as is well known,

designates the art that is supposed to enable us to master language…" (135). He goes on here to

reference the Greek tradition wherein rhetoric is thought to persuade either by means of

appearances (Plato) or by verisimilitude and extension of the truth through contingencies and

probabilities (Aristotle) (OS 135). The key phrase that Levinas uses here is "to enable us to

master language." This is the primary reason for Levinas's hostility towards rhetoric, namely

that it consists in domination, and more pointedly, a means of dominating discourse. In

Levinas's eyes, any attempt to "master language" equates to an attempt to master or to totalize

the Other, and this is fundamentally problematic. In many instances Levinas equates language

with alterity itself. Levinas explains to Phillipe Nemo in *Ethics and Infinity*: "Face and discourse are tied. The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse. I have refused the notion of vision to describe the authentic relationship with the Other; it is discourse and, more exactly, response or responsibility which is this authentic relationship" (EI 87-88) The alignment of otherness with discourse is visible in the tension between the Said and the Saying, and while Levinas recognizes that there is no Saying that is not the Saying of a Said, he adamantly maintains that the Saying does more than merely signify the Said – that there is a meaning that is irreducible to the thematization of the Said (OS 141-142). In *Outside the Subject,* Levinas describes the important distinction between mere "eloquence" and pure ethical discourse:

> In everyday language we approach our fellow man instead of forgetting him in the "enthusiasm" of eloquence. In everyday language we approach the other person. The *Saying* is not exhausted in the giving of meaning as it inscribes itself in the Said. It is communication not reducible to the phenomenon of the *truth-that-unites*: it is a non-indifference to the other person, capable of ethical significance to which the statement of the Said is subordinate (142).

Levinas further indicates that the essence of existence (of "the life-world" and of "everyday language") is defined in terms of the proximity to one's neighbor, which is stronger than "speech" in the traditional sense, and therefore, the measure of all rhetoric (OS 142-143). In other words, all philosophical thought and rhetorical discourse are preceded by the relation with the infinite, and therefore all "rhetoric" stems from and is a consequence of ethical intersubjectivity.

Consequently for Levinas "rhetoric" (in the traditional sense), like philosophy, comes too late.[20] Prior to any entrance onto the scene that rhetoric can make, the self is always already addressed by the Other. There is, as Michael Hyde notes, a proximity to one's neighbor that already exists, prior to any initiation of rhetorical practice (107). Levinas is attentive to the fact that in the everyday social world the presence of others is a given, or as Hyde explains, "the primordial temporal and spatial relationship between self and others is always there before one even knows" (81). In short, the other is *always* and *already* present, prior to any thematization or concrete relation.   Ethics is, as Levinas has argued, prior to all systematic and cognitive accounts that may be rendered by philosophical reflection. Therefore, rhetoric, as part and parcel of the systematization of "truth," commits the same wrongs as philosophy by failing to maintain a relationship with exteriority.

As Hyde has noted, Levinas's hostility towards rhetoric bears many similarities to Plato's views in *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, and is undoubtedly influenced by the ambiguity with which the Hebrew tradition has treated the subject. In *Outside the Subject*, Levinas explicitly characterizes the saying of the face as a "rhetoric without eloquence" (135-40). Interpreting exactly what Levinas might mean by this requires first that we recall the sense in which the face is a primordial expression of the Other's vulnerability (more will be said about this in the sections that follow), and second, an understanding of how Levinas thinks of eloquence. Levinas's interpretation echoes Plato's in that it associates eloquence primarily with ornamentation in everyday language and characterizes rhetoric as an art that seduces with flattery:

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[20] In *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy,* Michael Weston argues that for both Levinas and Kierkegaard philosophy always comes too late. Weston maintains that "Levinas goes beyond or behind philosophy in the attempt to bring the ethical relation of the saying into the said…showing this relation as the condition for all other relations…For Levinas, the ethical relation is one which one discovers one is *committed to already* by the discourse through which one lives one's life" (171-172).

Clearly in our time the effects of eloquence are everywhere, dominating our entire

lives…The media of information in all forms – written, spoken, visual – invade the home,

keep people listening to an endless discourse, submit them to the seduction of a rhetoric

that is only possible if it is eloquent and persuasive in portraying ideas and things too

beautiful to be true (138-139)

Not only is rhetoric inherently seductive, it is, for Levinas, clearly a totalizing discourse in that it

invades and dominates, seeking to persuade with appearances.   Furthermore, the workings of

rhetorical discourse appear to run entirely counter to that which Levinas is trying to achieve by

re-positioning philosophy in the context of exteriority. For Levinas, the face epitomizes exactly

the opposite of "eloquent discourse" in that it breaks through all attempts at covering what lies at

the heart of human existence, which is, at base, our pathos – the inherent vulnerabilities that

characterize the struggle to survive. This aspect of Levinas's view will become more apparent in

the section that follows, where his use of the face as metaphor will be analyzed in greater detail.

It is clear that Levinas's attitude towards rhetorical discourse is less than favorable, but

nevertheless consistent with both his appraisal of ethics as first philosophy and his understanding

of the phenomenological experience of alterity. Hyde considers Levinas's "biased way of

speaking" about rhetoric unfortunate and ultimately questions Levinas's interpretation of the

saying of the face as a rhetoric without eloquence (109-110). Hyde maintains that the face does

in fact speak, and that it is not a speech without eloquence. He sees, rather, in the saying of the

face an epideictic rhetoric that evokes a "call of conscience": "The saying going on here, I

submit, is not a rhetoric without eloquence, especially if, as Levinas suggests, this saying speaks

of something that is 'closer to God than I.' The other's face, in all its nudity, vulnerability, and

alterity is a most revealing and fitting work of art – a rhetorical interruption *par excellence*"

(111). Whether or not the face is itself rhetorical is an important question, and Hyde's suggestion that the "call of conscience" necessitates the development of rhetorical competence carves out a clear role for rhetorical practice in the application of a Levinasian work. These assertions prompt the question of whether or not rhetorical practice is a significant component of living out an ethic invested with the meaning that Levinas gives it.

While Levinas's obvious disdain for traditional forms of rhetorical discourse is consistent with ethics understood as first philosophy, it does not preclude careful consideration of the complexities inherent in the relationship between his work and the rhetorical tradition. This consideration includes questions concerning what Levinas may contribute to the study of rhetoric, and also what roles rhetoric might play in the application of Levinas's ideas.[21] And while the complexity of the relationship may in fact yield certain ambiguities, the important point to be made here is that for Levinas, the "art of persuasion" is a totalizing force, operating within the realm of interiority, directed by the Said's need for certainty, and indifferent to the subjectivity of the Saying.

The Face as Metaphor

As we have seen, the self exists in constant proximity to the other and is always engaged in the activity of trying to negotiate alterity. The ethical subject finds herself having to repeatedly come to terms with the ongoing presence of difference, a presence that continually calls the self to accountability. Levinas terms this presence of the other *the face*.

"The face" is one of Levinas's most well-known and most complex metaphors. Like much of his work, the concept of the face (which is not even properly termed "a concept") is difficult to discuss precisely because it is meant to describe the indescribable. As Diane Perpich

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[21] For more on the implications of Levinas's work for rhetorical studies, see *JAC, A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics*, Special issue on Levinas and rhetoric. Vol. 29, Issue 3 (2009).

writes, "Rhetorically, the face is an image that represents the inadequacy of every image for representing alterity. That is, it represents the impossibility of its own representation…" (103). In carrying out a phenomenology of alterity, Levinas needed a way to designate exactly what it is that is encountered in the exposure to pure otherness. Levinas designated "face" as a means of describing the channel through which alterity presents itself (Davis 135). He provided his most detailed treatment of "the face" as a metaphor for "otherness" in *Totality and Infinity,* where its significance for his work as a whole is evident. The depth and complexity of Levinas's use of the term make it worth quoting the following passage in full:

> The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me…*It expresses itself.* The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its 'form' the totality of its 'content,' finally abolishing the distinction between form and content. This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by 'thematization' turning into conversation (TI 50-51).

Levinas provides a number of important insights regarding the face as metaphor in this passage, including the ideas that the face is tied to the aural as opposed to the visual, that the face conveys a non-thetic, revelatory truth, and that the Other's primary mode of expression is as interlocutor. Levinas maintains that the face is expressive – that is, it does not present itself as an object to perceiving consciousness. Additionally, the face does not point towards an Absolute, in the

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Platonic sense. Rather, its particularity breaks through and goes beyond any universal meaning we might attempt to attribute to it. To be sure, the face is visible, but not in the traditional sense of the word.

Levinas's use of face as a metaphor for alterity is yet another example of the way that his thinking works to divest familiar terms of their common meanings. According to Colin Davis, the idea of the face as an image that is not available to sight has consistently presented a challenge in interpreting Levinas's work. Davis points out that even Phillipe Nemo had difficulty during the *Ethics and Infinity* interviews (1982). During the interviews Nemo made the following comment, "War stories tell us in fact that it is difficult to kill someone who looks straight at you," even after Levinas had just explained that, "The face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that" (EI 85-86/Davis 132). While it is difficult to talk about "the face" without imagining that part of the person (eyes, nose, and mouth) that we see most regularly in everyday interaction, this is not what Levinas has in mind. The face is, according to Levinas, "beyond the image I myself make of the other man – his face, the expressive in the Other (and the whole human body is in this sense more or less face)" (EI 97). The face is not something that we look at, nor does it look at us – it does not fall under our gaze, nor can it be thematized, for then it would be subject to totalization.

A consequence of the fact that the face is not a visual image (i.e. an intentional object presented to consciousness) is that the face cannot be grasped by perception; it overflows every idea that we might have of it, brimming forth with a surplus of meaning. Levinas emphasizes this point in a later essay "Ethics as First Philosophy" (1984) where he wrote, "The proximity of the other is the face's meaning and it means from the very start in a way that goes beyond those plastic forms which forever try to cover the face like a mask of their presence to

perception…Prior to any particular expression…there is nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defenselessness, vulnerability itself" (82-83). This is significant because, while the face is itself not a phenomenon, it describes the experience of alterity, demonstrating a phenomenological reality where the ethical relation precedes all else. Levinas indicates that the face resists any attempt to grasp it in thought, and this is precisely why it has proven problematic in interpretation. The face defies comprehension, and yet it is truth itself, reflective of a process of knowing that turns outwards in order to receive rather than to possess: "The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp" (TI 197). The resistance to the grasp is an integral component of the metaphor because it guarantees that the Other cannot (because it ought not) be an object of my perception, subsumable under the contents of a totalizing truth. Rather, the face interrupts the delimiting processes that systematize knowledge, working to break through any preconception or presupposition, resulting in revelatory knowledge that ultimately allows for genuine encounter with alterity.

It is in this sense that the face demonstrates a hyper-visibility, that is, a visibility that is not firstly theoretical, and for this reason Levinas states, "The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes!" (EI 85). Levinas is adamant about the fact that the face is aural – we do not see the face, but rather respond to it. This aspect of the metaphor goes a long way towards substantiating the primordial nature of the ethical demand. The face "speaks," and in doing so, it initiates a relationship between self and other that is based on interlocution: "The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my power, but my ability for power. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby

invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge" (TI 198). It is important to recognize that the face does not present an image to be analyzed, grasped and ultimately understood by a perceiving consciousness. Rather, the face speaks; it calls into question my very existence, and puts my inescapable obligation in front of me. Simultaneously, the discourse of the face invites me into a relation that is based upon its communicative, conversational origins (TI 198, 207). It is in this way, Levinas writes, that "The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity – its hunger – without my being able to be deaf to that appeal" (TI 200). For Levinas, then, "the face" is the mode of expression in which alterity presents itself -- not to a perceiving consciousness ready to comprehend, but rather to an unsuspecting auditor who cannot avoid its summons.

The face is a highly paradoxical image that Levinas uses to pinpoint a primordial discourse from which ethical obligation is born. Levinas maintains that in its helplessness and vulnerability, its destitution and its hunger (EI 86/TI 200), the face "demands justice" (TI 294), expressing both preeminence and "the dimension of height and divinity from which he descends" (TI 262). For Levinas, the face is a "living presence," a reality that cannot be reduced to mental images or abstract philosophical conceptualizations. This is the "infinity" of which Levinas speaks – the impossibility of capturing the other conceptually or otherwise.

Levinas's use of face as a key metaphor in the phenomenology of alterity reflects the degree to which his thinking is rooted in unresolved dialectical tension. As I have argued in Chapter 2, "Forgetting Recollection: The Dialectic of Response-ability," Levinas's re-orientation of philosophy towards exteriority provides an antidote to the hubris of Western metaphysics and speculative ontology. The ability to envision the philosopher's role as host to the uncertainties of

existence is realized in Levinas's metaphor of "the face." In the face, we see the alternate

dialectic at work – a process of coming to know the other. It is "a dialectic" that is marked by a

willingness to forget recollection of what may already be found within the self, in order to focus

attention outward towards receiving the genuine expression of alterity.

According to Bettina Bergo, "The face is arguably the most important 'concept' and

'moment' for Levinas's thought. It is both of these – both concept and pre-linguistic moment –

and in that respect it engenders a tension throughout his work between an original mode of time,

the interruption, and a set of discursive strategies that 'dramatize' situations, from living in the

world, creating a dwelling, to facing the other" ("The Face in Levinas" 1). Bergo's observations

reflect the sense in which the face expresses unresolved tension – a dialectic between presence

and absence that Levinas has subtly woven into its rendering. As Levinas has described it, the

face is an interruption that storms onto the scene while simultaneously receding: "The presence

of the Other, or expression, source of all signification, is not contemplated as an intelligible

essence, but is heard as language, and is thereby effectuated in exteriority. Expression, or the

face, overflows images, which are always immanent to my thought…Such an exteriority opens

in the Other; it recedes from thematization" (296). The traditional philosophical dialectic

between pure experience (thought) and linguistic expression (language) remains unresolved in

Levinas's concept of "face," although Levinas has made it clear that the face speaks prior to any

(supposed) act of cognition. The face is pure expression: its constant movement between

proximity and distance creates a dialogic ebb and flow of presence and absence that characterizes

the precognitive core of the intersubjective relation. The Saying of the face escapes

concretization while always showing a trace of itself, prompting an opening onto the other and

pointing towards responsibility as irrevocably tied to the ability to respond. In

phenomenological terms, the face brings attention to a primordial call of ethical responsibility for the other. As such, the face functions as an "existential signpost" that takes us from visual awareness of alterity to the communicative act that acknowledges an "ethical echo" of responsibility for the Other (Arnett, "Beyond Dialogue" 140). At once an invitation, summons, a plea, and an imperative, the ethical call is born in the metaphor of the face. Referring to a key passage in *Time and the Other* wherein Levinas indicates that the first saying is a word, and that word is God, Hyde observes that "the responsible response of commitment" is one whereby one says "Here I am" and really means it (98). And it is in this that Levinas again defied conventional wisdom by indicating that in order to get to the universal (God) we must begin with the particular (the Other, the face).

In this way, the face explains the sense in which we are "children of the word": "Discourse conditions thought, for the first intelligible is not a concept, but an intelligence whose inviolable exteriority the face states in uttering the 'you shall not commit murder.' The essence of discourse is ethical. In stating this thesis, idealism is refused" (TI 216). As Michael Hyde has argued, the discourse of the Other's call functions as a rhetorical interruption, coming to us from something other than ourselves – something that speaks of the importance of authenticity, accountability, responsibility, and justice (111). The face invites moral deliberation, invokes conscientiousness, and calls for responsible action by providing direct exposure to the Other's need. Rather than providing a set of principles that can be universally applied in meeting ethical demands, the face interrupts, summons, teaches, and ultimately persuades, not by giving us a calm certainty in the knowledge that we are "doing the right thing," but rather by moving us towards ethical response – urging us to act despite uncertainty. Not only does the face dwell within an unresolved dialectic that in its metaphorical

forgetting to recollect, becomes opened to the other's call, it also communicates capability by lighting the path towards a way of existing for the other that ultimately gives birth to the self. The face is an aural image that provides non-theoretical, revelatory knowledge of alterity by establishing the Other as an interlocutor, rather than as an object of perception. The face is audible; it speaks, and its speaking works to bring us to a frame of mind wherein both our origins and obligations are revealed.

Anxiety and Attunement

Levinas's use of the face as a metaphor for alterity is a critical theoretical component in framing communicative responsibility as "response-ability." The face not only shifts ethical discourse away from its constant obsession with the autonomous rational agent, but also works to focus attention on the communicative event that lies at the origins of the ethical relation. By privileging the aural over the visual, Levinas conceived of the Other as interlocutor and the Self as participant in dialogue. Conceptually speaking, this move is significant because it sets the stage for the possibility of ethical communication based on welcoming the Other and sustaining interaction with difference. In a postmodern age that requires us to make difficult choices without the reassurances and guarantees of "a universal truth," Levinas provides an ethical discourse that makes living with the reality that what we may "know" or "understand" can and will change in specific contexts and particular moments not only manageable but affirming. This is perhaps the most important contribution of Levinas's use of the face as metaphor, and the weight of its teachings emerges with clarity when situated within the context of a Kierkegaardian understanding of the redemption that is to be found in living from within existential uncertainty.

While Levinas only occasionally uses the idea of "interruption" to describe the relational tension between Said and Saying, Amit Pinchevski has argued that the communicational aspect

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of his work is perhaps best conceptualized in terms of interruption. According to Pinchevski, "Interruption occurs in the puncturing of the Saying in the Said, in the constant tension between the potential of language to thematize and its primary modality as a response-ability toward the Other who is addressed. Interruption is thus immanent in communication, expressing the elemental relation of the one for the Other by both separating from and drawing to the Other" (11). On Pinchevski's reading, subjectivity becomes an elemental site of interruption, as it is always already compromised by the Other. In other words, language itself signifies the priority of the Other, making communication irreducible to information exchange, and necessarily interpersonally interactive, but always involving an element of uncertainty (Pinchevski 11). According to Pinchevski, "[the face] is the elemental manifestation confronting and unsettling the self; it is the forefront of the Other's otherness" (76). For Pinchevksi, this becomes a most significant element of Levinas's work because it not only emphasizes that a tactile (i.e. affective) element lies at the heart of communication, but also because it offers a radically different approach to communication, suggesting that "interruption" or "rupture" might be the essential correlative between communication and ethics. Pinchevski therefore has maintained that, contrary to conventional wisdom, ethical communication may have little to do with a successful sharing of ideas, knowledge or emotions, and everything to do with the ultimately startling and unsettling experience of alterity.

As Pinchevski's interpretation reveals, the face is not a source of comfort, but rather affects us because it rattles us, creating a pervasive anxiety that we are not necessarily moved to alleviate, but rather are compelled to engage in, so as to live from within it. The face is a double-edged sword – in its extreme vulnerability it attains its mastery over us. The expression of the face is enticing, but also fills us with a sense of dread: "But in its expression, in its mortality, the

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face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business…The other man's death calls me into question…as if I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his mortal solitude. 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" ("Ethics as First Philosophy" 83). The affective power of the face is undoubtedly unsettling, but it is a disturbance that we also welcome. This is the essence of the problem of justification – the calling into question of existence, an element that is felt most keenly in the Other's address.

As the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard is one of the first significant philosophers to embrace the rupture of subjectivity, and to place the role, task and action of the philosopher in living from within it rather than trying to resolve it. When we consider Levinas's construal of "the face" from a Kierkegaardian perspective, we can begin to appreciate the rhetorical component of communicative response-ability. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard distinguishes between anxiety and fear. He maintains that fear has a definite object – it is directed towards things or events in the outside world. In contrast, anxiety is directed inwards, and generally arises from consciousness of one's self. For this reason, Kierkegaard writes, anxiety is related to "something that is nothing" and is reflective of "freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" (CA 42-43). Kierkegaard's view suggests that anxiety is tied to the self's awareness of his unbounded freedom, and this is a freedom that defines our very being[22]. At the root of Levinas's ethical relation is a similar angst, but it arises not from the knowledge of

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[22] This construal of anxiety was later developed by Jean-Paul Sartre and other twentieth century existentialists into what is familiarly recognized as *existential angst* regarding the apparent arbitrariness of one's existence and the boundless freedom that characterizes it.

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our freedom, but rather from an awareness that our freedom is always and already compromised by infinite responsibility for the Other.   Kierkegaard's conceptualization of anxiety as fundamental to the human condition may appear to run contrary to Levinas's insistence that philosophy be re-conceived in terms of exteriority, but it nevertheless is suggestive of an important philosophical perspective that undergirds the phenomenology of alterity. Specifically, Kierkegaard connects anxiety to choice – to the consciousness of self as an actor who can envision and respond to multiple possibilities.   Levinas's work reveals that choice is not a primary function of the ethical call itself. We are not free to choose responsibility, we merely *are* responsible – and the reality of infinite responsibility is the very condition of subjectivity. This explains why, according to Levinas, "Responsibility is what is incumbent upon me exclusively, and what, *humanly*, I cannot refuse" (EI 101). The ability to respond to the call of the Other requires, in some sense, the acceptance of an objective uncertainty (anxiety) that is tethered to the resolve to welcome difference rather than to absolve it. The face prompts this awareness of subjectivity by requiring justification, which, as Kierkegaard recognized, can only be rightfully addressed existentially (as opposed to ontologically).

With his use of the face as a metaphor for alterity, Levinas transforms the concept of existential angst from despair about one's solitude to anxiety about one's infinite and inescapable responsibility for the other. This is an anxiety that constitutes the identity of the self and is therefore not to be escaped. Rather, it becomes a dwelling for existence. The face demonstrates the sense in which existence itself is characterized by a communal interaction between self and other. In *Ethics and Infinity,* Levinas explains, "In the communication of knowledge one is found beside the Other, not confronted with him, not in the rectitude of the in-front-of-him…The social is beyond ontology" (55-56). In this way the face is not merely the expression of alterity,

but also the action that characterizes subjectivity (i.e. the other "faces" us): "The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me…not in synthesis, but in the face to face of humans, in sociality, in its moral signification" (EI 77). In "facing us" the Other draws us in, interrupting, prompting, and attuning us not only to our infinite moral obligation but also to what it means to be human. As Kierkegaard has shown, the meaning of human existence is tied to a constant process of striving that is motivated by passionate commitment to the things that one values the most.

In this way, the face is an attunement that brings us to a frame of mind in which our ability to respond (ethically) can be realized. The significance of attuning the listener to the appropriate frame of mind for receiving the message is pervasive throughout Kierkegaard's works via the format in which he chooses to write. Kierkegaard's decision to present his philosophy through the voices of pseudonymous authors, who, for better or for worse, speak rigorously and candidly about their subjects reflects his understanding that communication is always more than mere information exchange. For example, the notion of "attunement" figures predominantly in Kierkegaard's retelling of Abraham's story in *Fear and Trembling*, where the pseudonym, Johannes *de silentio,* presents first a lyrical description of Abraham's narrative, followed by a dialectical rendering of his story[23]. The lyrical telling of the tale works to put the reader in the narrative itself, so that the reader may appreciate Abraham's experience (what he suffered and endured) (Hannay 13). The dialectical rendering of the narrative works, on the other hand, to convey what it is that we are to learn from Abraham's experience. The "lyric" begins with an "attunement" wherein Johannes *de silentio* prepares the reader for what is to

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[23] The distinction between lyrical and dialectical that is at work throughout *Fear and Trembling* is similar to the one that Kierkegaard makes in *Two Upbuilding Discourses* between discourse and deliberation, where in discourse the subject is thought to be positioned inside the subject matter, and in deliberation, the subject stands outside. Kierkegaard suggests here that deliberation is essentially polemical while discourse is fundamentally edifying.

follow (tuning his frame of mind) by presenting four different versions of the narrative, all of which make Abraham intelligible (as an object of rational perception). Each story demonstrates the futility in attempting to "grasp" Abraham, demonstrating the impossibility of comprehending Abraham's actions in thought. In order to uncover Abraham as interlocutor (as Other), Kierkegaard must engage in epideictic rhetoric, praising him specifically for his unique demonstration of response-ability: "There was one who was great in his strength, and one who was great in his wisdom, and one who was great in hope, and one who was great in love; but greater than all was Abraham, great with that power whose strength is powerlessness, great in that wisdom whose secret is folly, great in that hope whose outward form is insanity, great in that love which is hatred of self" (FT 50). What is particularly significant for our purposes here is the fact that prior to praising Abraham for his ethical response, Kierkegaard (through his pseudonym) must prepare the reader by putting him in the proper frame of mind to feel and to experience Abraham's greatness, rather than to try to understand it conceptually.

It is my contention that "the face" in Levinas functions in a similar way, working primarily as a lyrical rhetoric that attunes us to our primordial ethical origins, and renders us capable of responding to the demand of the Other in a way that does not rely on the application of abstract (rationalistic) ethical principles. Paradoxically, the attunement of the face is discordant, interrupting and disrupting as it fills us with an anxious joy that challenges us to meet the demands of the ethical (Hyde 112). As Weston notes, for Kierkegaard the universal problematic (the problem of the justification of existence) has long been (wrongly) understood to be philosophical, when it is in fact existential – that is, it is not about the intellectual apprehension of Being (human nature), but rather about uncertainty, anxiety, choice, decision, commitment and action that characterizes the human struggle towards becoming. What

Kierkegaard allows us to see is that the rhetoric that is at work in Levinas's ethical relation is not one that is or can be responsive to a universalist ethic. Rather, it is a rhetoric that is responsive to the complexities and uncertainties of a postmodern age, and it responds in a wholly unconventional way. Rather than rely on the ornamentation of language and the functions of rhetorical style, it relies squarely on the passions of the heart.

The Rhetoric of Demand

By situating Levinas's use of the face as metaphor in the context of these Kierkegaardian themes, I have hoped not only to heighten awareness of the way that the face renders genuine experience of alterity possible, but also to draw attention to the sense in which the face is itself rhetorical, albeit in a way that defies conventional understandings of rhetoric. The face enacts an attunement by prompting a meeting of the Other in dialogue, which in turn opens multiple interpretive possibilities for appreciating a rhetoric that is wholly other. Additionally, the face is persuasive, but its persuasiveness lies not in the artful use oof logical forms or skillful ornamentations. Rather, the face is persuasive precisely because it breaks through all of these forms, interrupting and unsettling our everyday language, demanding justification of our own existence, and moving us towards commitment and action despite uncertainty. With the metaphor of the face, Levinas introduces an entirely different rhetoric – one that decenters the communicative agent, placing creative control squarely in the hands of the Other. "The face" of Levinas's rhetoric avoids objectification by initiating both an ethical demand for accountability and a dialogue of welcome. The Other rhetorically calls the self, both assigning her a role and prompting her to speak its lines in a dialogue that welcomes difference.

The inherent complexities and ambiguities of rhetorical theory and practice aside, when we consider the degree to which Levinas's work as a whole both responds to and

reconceptualizes traditional metaphysical speculation and ontological inquiry, it becomes

obvious that his philosophy is itself highly rhetorical. Robert J. S. Manning's extended study of

the dialectical relation between Heidegger and Levinas proves this point. As Manning has noted,

Levinas developed his ethical philosophy in large part by "interpreting otherwise than

Heidegger," and this fact alone demonstrates the sense in which Levinas's philosophy is in a

"constant arguing against" and "interpreting otherwise" (9). According to Manning, Levinas

engages in a "highly rhetorical" philosophy precisely because he wants to enact alternative

interpretations, and this is why Levinas's meaning cannot be studied apart from his method (9).

In fact, Manning suggests that Levinas employs a particular rhetorical strategy in that he makes

reading his philosophy together with Heidegger's not merely a matter of analysis or comparison,

but an either-or (105). Similarly, in "Reason as One for the Other," Steven Smith maintains that

Levinas "makes a great contribution, for his entire philosophy is deliberately and self-

consciously rhetorical (68).   If in fact Levinas's project as a whole is highly rhetorical, it would

make sense that "the face," as the central metaphor in his ethical philosophy, would itself be

highly rhetorical.

Manning maintains that the rhetoric involved in Levinas's use of the face as metaphor is

what often leads to its misinterpretation. He suggests that the reader guard against

misunderstandings by recognizing that Levinas's depiction of the self-other relation relies

heavily on hyperbolic rhetoric.[24]   Levinas's reliance on rhetoric has also been recognized by

Perpich, who argues that "Levinas's thought relies on a *figure* or image – a rhetorical trope – to

convey its main philosophical (and supposedly nonfigural) point" (117). Levinas has indicated

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[24] According to Manning, Derrida's assertion in "Violence and Metaphysics" that Levinas produces a language that is both without rhetoric and without concept is a misreading that results from the failure to recognize the level of exaggeration that is at work in Levinas's rendering of the other as infinitely greater than the self. In comparison to the other, the self is as if it were nothing, but this is different from actually being nothing (111).

that the Other is approachable only outside of rhetoric, but yet implements a rhetorical image to express alterity. Perpich sees this as an irresolvable contradiction in Levinas's work: "The contradictory image of the face (which represents the unrepresentability of alterity) pinpoints not just a tension in his work but something that is both necessary to his ethical enterprise and simultaneously puts it at risk, working both for and against his 'system'" (119). Perpich's view affirms that the face works to articulate the critical distinction between things which are given to consciousness (ontological concerns) and the way that human beings are encountered (ethical concerns). Nevertheless, Perpich shares Derrida's concern that the paradoxical component of the face (that is, the sense in which it allows us to think that which is fundamentally unthinkable) is an inherent difficulty in Levinas's philosophy.[25] She notes that this problem is primarily a function of the limitations of language since the moment that one attempts to put pure alterity into words, the Other is automatically reduced to an abstract and generalizable entity (105). While the boundaries of language undoubtedly present numerous challenges to Levinas's thinking, the paradox that underlies much of his formulation of the ethical relation is an essential component of his transcendental philosophy. Much of Levinas's entire project can be characterized as an intellectual paradox, and this is due in large part to the fact that its primary goal is to describe the nature of human interaction without reducing it to the language of ontology. As a result, Levinas's thought process is constantly fluid, and meaning is given and then withdrawn in the blink of an eye (Davis 38). In prioritizing ethics over ontology, Levinas enacts a kind of "double movement" that, in working to defy traditional ontological descriptions, often come head to head with the limits of language. Perpich concludes that these limitations are not "external" or "incidental" features that present obstacles to be overcome, but rather that

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[25] In "Violence and Metaphysics," (1978) Derrida maintains that by arguing against any possibility of the other as a phenomenon, it would be impossible even to speak of the Other, or have any sense of alterity whatsoever (123).

they express a fundamental tension at the heart of Levinasian ethics, namely that "singularity must be said and it cannot be said" (105). This irreconcilable tension that characterizes the face may suggest that the face is itself rhetorical, but even as we recognize the highly rhetorical elements in Levinas's work as a whole, it is difficult to avoid falling back into more traditional (and hence more totalizing) definitions of what "rhetoric" is and what the "rhetorical" signifies. This, as we have indicated above, is part and parcel of Levinas's intellectual project, and in many ways a requirement of the attempt to enact a truly transcendental philosophy.

The question of whether or not the face is itself rhetorical goes beyond Levinas's criticism of and argument against the Western philosophical tradition. Levinas has interpreted both philosophy and rhetoric otherwise, and we need only look to the face to be reminded of this primary implication of his work. Certainly, Levinas has revealed a level of rhetorical methodology as he has employed the metaphor of the face, but this is, I submit, a separate consideration (with distinct implications) from the rhetorical function of the face itself. Metaphorically speaking, the way that the face persuades is through interruption. Pinchevski has argued that the communicational aspect of Levinas's work is best described by the concept of interruption. Pinchevski situates interruption as the main correlative between communication and ethics:

> Interruption occurs in the puncturing of the Saying in the Said, in the constant tension
> between the potential of language to thematize and its primary modality as a response-
> ability toward the Other who is addressed. Interruption is thus immanent in
> communication, expressing the elemental relation of the one for the Other by both
> separating from and drawing to the Other. Following this reading of Levinas, it is

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possible to view subjectivity as an elemental site of interruption – as always and already accessible and addressable by means of the Other's interruption (11).

Pinchevksi argues that the tension between the Said and the Saying formulates the core of a Levinasian conception of what constitutes ethical communication. He further argues that interruption is ultimately what is denied in the Said, but what is prevalent in the Saying. Pinchevski develops this argument to include the claim that "the limits of communication are precisely what give rise to communication as an ethical event" (67). In Pinchevksi's view "interruption" carries ethical significance in that it represents a transformative space of exposure and vulnerability in the self-other relation (68).   Pinchevski explains: "Neither inclusion nor exclusion, interruption is a relation upon which ethical communication is founded…Interruption allows the Other to retain his or her singularity as a face and address in Saying. Communication understood as a form of interruption (and perhaps also vice versa) upholds the very possibility of being response-able to and for the other person" (12-13). Pinchevksi points out that contrary to conventional wisdom, ethical communication has little to do with the sharing of information or an experience of commonality. Rather, Pinchevski argues that Levinas's work reconceptualizes "ethical communication" as communication that "exceeds the successful completion of its operation" (68). Pinchevski's reading emphasizes the sense in which "interruption" is itself an important pre-condition of ethical communication. Pinchevski further argues that the condition of the possibility of communication is its impossibility – communication could not take place if it were not for the immanence of failure and risk: "Communication reveals itself as an ethical involvement precisely when it transcends beyond the reciprocity of exchange" (241 -243). Thus, the interruptive nature of the Saying is a key component in situating communication ethics within the framework of response-ability.   Communication can only begin to be conceived as

an ethical event when we start to appreciate the sense in which it is, like many of the metaphors that Levinas enacts to describe it, inherently paradoxical.

When we acknowledge the pivotal role that the tension between the Said and the Saying plays in conceiving the ethical relation, we may also recognize that in Levinas's thinking, the face, as a metaphorical manifestation of the Saying, is the primary means by which ethical responsibility is signified. The face is inherently rhetorical in that it begins to persuade the moment that it initiates its address, that is, the moment that it interrupts. Further, this interruption functions rhetorically as an attunement. It brings us to a frame of mind where we realize that ethics is in fact inextricably linked to response. Hyde's contention that the call functions as a rhetorical interruption supports this position. Additionally, Hyde reminds us that the call comes from something other than ourselves – something that speaks of the importance of moral deliberation and accountability (111). The face of the Other makes an appeal, and in this sense, it is explicitly directed towards an audience. According to Hyde, "the call's disclosure is persuasive: it speaks to our hearts to encourage a critical questioning of who we are and how we might think and act for the better" (113). In Hyde's view, the "call of conscience" speaks directly to the heart. In this way, its "eloquence" can be interpreted not as "rhetorical flattery" but rather as an arousal of the heart that moves us towards commitment to our chosen sense of the good. Additionally, Pinchevski's situation of interruption as the primary correlative between communication and ethics points towards the sense in which the face of the Other persuades through the anxiety that it causes. The face persuades by dislocating, that is, by attuning its addressee to her infinite and inescapable responsibility for the Other. The face is disruptive in that it shakes the self out of its reverie, demanding that she confront the demand that issues forth from exposure to the Other's vulnerability. We see here that the Other's call is epideictic in that

it expresses an original showing forth of humanity's nakedness and vulnerability. Paradoxically, its eloquence resides in its disruptive affect. The expression of the face does not provide serenity or comfort, but rather attunes us to our infinite obligation by inciting an overwhelming anxiety that characterizes human existence. Disagreeing with Colin Davis's suggestion that the Other issues forth a demand, but has no means of persuading the Self to obey, Hyde argues that the call of conscience "can fill us with anxiety and/or joy as it beckons us to meet the existential challenge of thinking and acting in morally responsible ways" (112). There is an inherent level of discomfort underlying the face, and this is especially evident when we consider the ethical call in terms of its ability to act as a catalyst for moral responsibility in contexts where contingencies, probabilities and uncertainties abide. In short, the face carries rhetorical exigency. It makes us uncomfortable and anxious, but is also that which lies at the heart of pathos, in what Kierkegaard would describe as our striving towards existence.

The face "attunes" by rhetorically calling the other to responsibility. In the context of Levinas's phenomenology of alterity, we witness the enactment of an entirely different rhetoric. This "rhetoric of demand" is characterized by the displacement of the autonomous agent. In place of an originative and willful moral agent, Levinas places a "derivative I" that is called to response-ability by the Other (Arnett, "The Responsive I" 39). According to Merold Westphal, Levinas develops this understanding in phenomenological language as an "inverted intentionality" where "the arrows of intentional awareness do not emanate from me toward an object, but toward me from the Other. I am aware of myself, my world, and the Other not by looking but by being seen, not by naming, but by being addressed" (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 6). The inversion here is that instead of the other being constituted in me, I am constituted in the other. Westphal also points out that Kierkegaard develops many of the same

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structures, but not in the same vocabulary as Levinas. While both philosophers recognize the

asymmetry that lies at the heart of absolute alterity, a primary difference between Levinas's and

Kierkegaard's understanding of the rhetoric of demand has to do with the question of its origins.

For Kierkegaard, God is the undeniable origin of the rhetorical demand and it is God who serves

the role of prompter – assigning us a script and a role that we have not, on our own, created

(Westphal *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 6, 56). For Levinas, the ethical demand clearly

originates in our interaction with the Other, who prompts our awareness of infinite responsibility.

Kierkegaard recognizes the absolute and asymmetrical voice of God to be a wholly independent

origin of responsibility (this is particularly evidenced in Abraham's story in *Fear and*

Trembling). By contrast, Levinas's rhetoric speaks specifically through the face of the human

neighbor (Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 148). Westphal considers this to be

one of the primary (and only) significant disparities between Levinas's and Kierkegaard's

thinking and maintains that both philosophers characterize the ethical command in terms of a

"traumatic heteronomy" (*Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 5, 79). Both Kierkegaard and

Levinas understand that who we are is the function of the relation that we did not choose and

dependent upon a rhetoric that initiates in exteriority. In this sense, "the actor" is demoted to a

supporting role in that the rhetoric of demand places limits on our natural expression of self-love

(Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 5-6). While both Levinas and Kierkegaard

subscribe to this rhetoric of demand, they envision a different role for the leading players with

Kierkegaard designating God as the intermediary between self and other, and Levinas clearly

indicating that the divine is experienced through the rhetorical saying of the human face.

Nevertheless, the overall similarities in their understanding of subjectivity and the inherent

connections between existential suffering and ethical responsibility make Kierkegaard a useful interlocutor in the analysis of Levinas's major metaphors.

Therefore, despite the divergence in vocabulary between Levinas and Kierkegaard on the matter of intersubjectivity, for both philosophers, the call is fundamentally disruptive, and it is by virtue of its disturbance that responsibility as response-ability takes shape. It is perhaps the asymmetry of the ethical relation that proves to be the rhetoric of demand's most significant characteristic. The transcendent voice of the rhetoric of demand issues forth a non-negotiable responsibility that, in exposing us to the Other's need, exposes us to a vulnerability of our own. In Westphal's view, this element of Levinas's depiction of the ethical relation is best understood in Kierkegaardian terms as a teleological suspension of the transcendental ego. This suspension occurs by means of the issuance of a command whose origin I can never be (Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 150). This is particularly significant because it demonstrates that subjectivity corresponds to transcendence, and further, that it is a particular type of subjectivity, namely, a subjectivity that is decentered, a transcendence that is both responsible and response-able.

As a lyrical attunement to the Other's address, the rhetoric of demand enacted by the face does not present us with a choice as to whether or not we are responsible, but it does require us to acknowledge the priority of infinite responsibility. Ultimately, this involves both attentiveness to the other's ground and awareness of our own story, since it is this that enables us to move theory into meaningful and effective practice. In this regard, rhetorical practice is crucial to living our lives in accordance with the meaning of the ethics offered by Levinas. According to Hyde, Levinas provides an opening for developing a fundamental appreciation of rhetoric, and this occurs primarily through the "call to conscience" which "recognizes the moral quality of

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rhetoric and calls for the development of rhetorical competence" (114). Notwithstanding the promising role that Hyde's arguments have carved out for rhetorical practice understood in the traditional sense, this chapter has maintained that both the sense in which Levinas's philosophy is itself rhetorical and the rhetorical components of the Other's call (issued forth in the metaphor of the face) go beyond standard interpretations of rhetoric by being demonstrative of a rhetoric that is wholly Other. The rhetoric of demand is what constitutes identity and that which attunes the self-actor to her moral responsibilities by prompting her to assume the role that has been created for her by the Other. In this way, the actor who is in front of the curtain (the self) relies upon the behind-the-scenes voice of the prompter (the other) to fulfill her role.

What we have witnessed in the course of this discussion is that the rhetoric of demand is a lyrical rhetoric, in the Kierkegaardian sense. It is lyrical (as opposed to dialectical) in that it does not present itself as a polemic. Rather, the other affects the self by disrupting, prompting, demanding, and speaking directly to the heart. Arnett captures this element of the rhetorical demand in the concept of the "ethical echo." Arnett explains that Levinas's unique contribution lies in his assertion that alterity functions as an "ethical signpost that moves one from visual recognition of the face of the Other to attentiveness to an oral echo" ("Beyond Dialogue" 140). The metaphor of the "ethical echo" describes the rhetorical component of the face – that is, the way in which the face reminds us of the "primordial Said," pointing directly to our *a priori* role as our brother's keeper. It is in this way that the "I" finds identity as a derivative invention (Arnett, "The Responsive I" 41). The rhetoric of the face enacts a complete reversal wherein the Other is in possession of creative control. As Arnett explains, once the self is understood as derivative rather than originative, concern for the Other and the historical situation can begin to take center stage as that which is of primary value ("The Responsive I" 39). When the actor

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forgets his lines, the prompter is there to whisper a trace of what he has forgotten until the actor is able to fully come to life in her assigned role. In this radical inversion, the rational, autonomous, and self-willed agent is deprivileged, and the Other serves as the origin and catalyst of the ethical demand.

The decentering of the rational, autonomous, and all-knowing subject is perhaps Levinas's most significant contribution to 21st century postmodern communication ethics scholarship, and is the key element in substantiating a rhetoric of demand. The Western philosophical tradition has long been characterized by the assumption that an autonomous individual acts upon human existence through the determination of freedom and the will. By deliberately placing creative control into the hands of the Other, Levinas disrupts the Husserlian correlation between noesis and noema, effecting a substantial alteration in our phenomenological understanding of human experience. In this radical movement "from cognition to solidarity" (OTB 119, Westphal *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 141), Levinas reconfigures intentionality by insisting on the absolute transcendence of the object/other, placing the intentional subject squarely in the position of the independent variable (Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* 141). In other words, Levinas enacts a radical move by directly contradicting the basic tenet of phenomenology -- the idea that it is my horizons of expectation that provide the condition of the possibility of experience. Instead, Levinas asserts that meaning is not a product of the cognitive schemata that the "knowing subject" brings to a given situation. For Levinas, meaning is not limited by "categories" or structures of the mind, but is dependent upon our very interaction with others and the particular ground upon which they stand (i.e. their distinction from and difference from us).

In summary, by begrudging agency its privileged position, Levinas denies a long and substantial philosophical tradition that includes the Platonic epistemology of recollection, Cartesian dualism, Hegelian realism and transcendental idealism. In doing so, Levinas enacts a radical reconceptualization wherein interpersonal interaction and rhetorical competence emerge at the heart of a simplistically complex ethic that is defined primarily by its ability to respond to a demand that disrupts philosophy's unbridled solace of self-assurance. Levinas's work radically alters philosophical discourse about ethics by initiating genuine possibility for ethical response in a postmodern age that has often been characterized by difference, disagreement, ambiguity, and ambivalence. It is only when we begin to understand ourselves as being constituted in the Other that the violence of totality can be avoided. When we frame our experience as dependent on the communicative act of being addressed by the Other rather than as a function of our assimilation of "objects of knowledge," we can begin to understand the sense in which rhetorical discourse is a primary component of ethical response-ability. This does not require that we be resigned to the impossibility of knowledge whatsoever, but is rather a clear affirmation of Kierkegaard's understanding that truth *is* subjectivity – that is, any meaning that comes to us in experience is realized by virtue of the fact that we are *ethically* situated in relation to our neighbor. Ethics *is* first philosophy, and it begins with the rhetoric of demand.

Chapter Five

An Ethic of Response-ability: Levinas's Ethical-Existential Voice

Take my hand, and lead me to salvation
Take my love, for love is everlasting
And remember the truth that once was spoken
To love another person is to see the face of God!
--Epilogue, *Les Miserables* (Schönberg/Kretzmer, 1985)

I do not want to define anything through God because it is the human that I know. It is God that I can define through human relations and not the inverse…The inadmissible abstraction is God; it is in terms of the relation with the Other that I speak of God. I do not start from the existence of a very great and all-powerful being. Everything I wish to say comes from this situation of responsibility which is religious insofar as the I cannot elude it…The abstract idea of God is an idea that cannot clarify a human situation. It is the inverse that is true.
--Emmanuel Levinas, *Transcendence and Height* (1962)

Introduction

"Communication and Response-ability: Levinas in Conversation with Kierkegaard" has

endeavored to provide temporal answers to the challenges of postmodern communication ethics

by framing communicative responsibility as the ability to respond. This work has maintained

that the postmodern demand for an audible ethical voice is best answered via a philosophical

shifting of ground towards affectivity, and through attentiveness to the connection between

existential pathos and the ethical. To that end, this work has examined Levinas's

phenomenology of alterity in the context of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy of

communication. This conversation has focused on the unique interplay between thinking,

listening and speaking that lies at the heart of Levinas's understanding of elements of human

interaction.

This chapter provides a narrative exemplification of the dialectical, dialogical, and

rhetorical components of communicative response-ability via an analysis of the communicative

practices exhibited by the protagonist in the story of *Les Misérables*. In order to illustrate the

way that dialectic, dialogue, and rhetoric function in an ethic of response-ability, this chapter

looks at the communicative practices of Jean Valjean, a paroled convict who is given an

opportunity to transform his life through the kindness of a stranger. Valjean's narrative serves as

an exemplification of "response-ability" in action. His story is shaped by his communicative

relationship with several of the secondary characters, including most notably the Bishop of

Digne (a clergyman who comes to Valjean's aid in a most desperate time of need), Fantine (a

poor factory worker to whom Valjean provides assistance), and Javert (the stoic and unyielding

police officer who devotes his life to pursuing Valjean). The first three sections of this chapter,

"Welcoming the Other," Attention to Alterity," and Valjean's Lyric," utilize Valjean's story to

illustrate a dialectic that is characterized by the forgetting of recollection, a dialogue that is

substantiated in the communication of capability, and a rhetoric that persuades through

interruption. "Beyond Dialectic, Dialogue, and Rhetoric: Unending Obligation" provides a

summary of the way in which ethics as first philosophy enacts a dialectic, a dialogue, and a

rhetoric "of a wholly different type" (TI 23). This section considers the specific ways that

Levinas re-works dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric to challenge standard philosophical discourse

about ethics and to re-think conventional assumptions about the nature of interpersonal

interaction. The project concludes with "The Other as Prompter: Rethinking Communicative

Response-ability as Existential Pathos." This final section considers the ways that Levinas's

alternative framings of dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric may provide promising solutions to the

problems posed by postmodernity. The investigation concludes with the assertion that the

Levinas-Kierkegaard conversation prompts a re-thinking of the ethical relation in terms of

existential pathos and considers the implications of this re-positioning for communication ethics

in postmodernity, an age characterized by narrative disagreement and the demand for increased dialogue.

Concluding the way that it began, with attentiveness to affectivity in human interaction, acknowledgement of the sense in which all meaning is defined by the joyousness of existential suffering, and sensitivity to the complexity of Levinas's treatment of alterity and the challenges inherent in discussing concepts, that, by their very nature, seek to transcend, move beyond, and escape the confines of ordinary discourse, this project culminates with the understanding that neither Levinas nor Kierkegaard provide a final answer to the "why" and the "how" of communication ethics. Instead, both thinkers contribute to an ongoing conversation that attends to the impact of alterity against the backdrop of the particularities of human existence. It is important to emphasize, as previously noted, that "dialectic," "dialogic" and "rhetoric" do not depict a linear progression of the stages of interpersonal interaction, nor do they work to create a formulaic rendering of what constitutes "ethical communication." Rather, they represent meaningful coordinates in the ongoing journey through the philosophical, rhetorical, and narrative components of ethical communication. As Jean Valjean's story illustrates, the paradoxical tensions that form the basis of a Levinasian ethic of response-ability go a long way towards informing communicative praxis in an age that requires public justification and the negotiation of difference.

Valjean's History

Ronald C. Arnett, Janie M. Harden Fritz and Leanne M. Bell have previously utilized Victor Hugo's classic novel, *Les Misérables* in *Communication Ethics Literacy: Dialogue and Difference* (2009) to illustrate primary approaches and contexts for communication ethics, as well as its pragmatic applications. Arnett, Fritz and Bell use literary exemplification of Hugo's

work as a means of engaging metaphors of communicative praxis, including a dialogic learning model, interpersonal responsibility, and the differentiation between public and private space. Additionally, they offer analysis of the central characters' communicative behaviors to characterize communication ethics as the protection of and promotion of a given sense of the good in the context of the current historical moment (30). In considering the primacy of response and the complexity of the interplay between thinking, listening and speaking in Levinas's work, dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric have emerged as significant coordinates of ethical interpersonal interaction. This chapter will use Valjean's story as means of accessing these coordinates with a view towards appreciating the ever-present connection between existential pathos and the ethical in the context of interpersonal interaction. Specifically, this chapter seeks insight into Levinas's assertion that the Other is first and foremost a teacher and that responsibility requires the ability to learn from the other at every turn.

While the present chapter will work from Hugo's original 1833 novel as a general point of reference, it will draw in larger degree from the 1987 Broadway stage production, with music by Alain Boublil, and lyrics by Claude Michel Schönberg and Herbert Kretzmer[26]. The reasons for this choice are threefold. First, in keeping with Kierkegaard's actor/prompter metaphor, the emphasis here on narrative explication of communicative response-ability in action stands to benefit from attentiveness to the way that Hugo's complex and illustrious characters have been brought to life (over a twenty-five year period) on stages all over the world. Second, reference to the stage production affords me the opportunity to draw upon my extensive theater background, which includes the direction of multiple full-length productions of *Les Miserables* with high school and college-aged actors. I wish not only to reference Boublil and Kretzmer's lyrics as a

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[26] All references to lyrics from the stage production are taken from the libretto by Boublil, Schonberg, and Kretzmer, New York: MTI Enterprises, Inc., 2001.

means of describing communicative response-ability in action and the lyrical rhetoric that it entails, but I hope that the insights I have gained during my work as a director will enhance my overall interpretation. Finally, the selection of *Les Miserables* was made on the basis of widespread familiarity with the plot and characters through the novel, the stage, and the cinema[27]; the significance of the life, background and political convictions of the author, Victor Hugo, for this project; and the existential promise that Jean Valjean represents for communicative response-ability in action.

Les Miserables was published in 1862 by Victor Hugo (1802-1885), who, at the time of its publication, was widely known as a prolific writer spanning a variety of genres. By 1856, Hugo had already completed twenty volumes of poetry, nine novels, ten plays, and numerous sociological and political works. Hugo received a diversified and thorough education in the humanities and was intently preoccupied with the social and political issues of the time. While his political views underwent numerous transformations throughout his life and he eventually broke from the Bonapartism that he had inherited from his father, he remained committed to liberal principles and supported the ideals of free education and universal suffrage throughout his life (Denny 7-8). Hugo worked on the novel for nearly twenty years basing many of the characters on actual people and events. He loosely based the character of Jean Valjean on the life of Eugène François Vidocq, an ex-convict who became a successful businessman, and who was widely known for his philanthropic work. Additionally, Hugo used Bienvenu de Miollis (1753–1843), the Bishop of Digne, as a model for Monseigneur Myriel, the kindly Bishop who,

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[27] The novel *Les Miserables* was originally published in 1862, and was followed by numerous film and stage adaptations, including the earliest film version in 1934 starring Harry Baur as Valjean. The theatrical production opened on Broadway on March 12, 1987 and ran until May 18, 2003 for a total of 6,680 performances and has been followed by two major revivals. The most recent cinematic versions, the 1998 production starring Liam Neeson, Geoffrey Rush and Uma Thurman, and the 2012 musical film starring Hugh Jackman, Anne Hathaway, and Russell Crowe, have brought the story beyond its literary and theatrical boundaries and have received widespread critical acclaim.

through his initial encounter with Valjean, sets in motion his incredible life journey (Robb 27). The name "Bienvenu" is of no small significance, since it is the Bishop who both literally and figuratively "welcomes the Other" by inviting Valjean into his home with words and deeds that prove transformative. Additionally, in 1841, Hugo saved a prostitute from arrest for assault, and subsequently incorporated part of his dialogue with the police in the description of Valjean's rescue of Fantine. In February 1846, just after Hugo began working on the novel, he witnessed the arrest of a bread thief, and was known to have participated in the Paris insurrection of 1848, and many scholars believe that the character of Marius is largely autobiographical (Robb 56). While the novel has been highly criticized for the number of digressions it includes that have no relevance to the plot, it is generally considered to be one of the most important literary works of all time. Upton Sinclair has said that *Les Miserables* is "one of the half-dozen greatest novels of the world" (Robb 12). According to Norman Denny, translator of the 1976 edition of the novel, "*Les Miserables*, with its depth of vision and underlying truth, its moments of lyrical quality and of moving compassion, is a novel of towering stature, one of the great works of western literature, a melodrama that is also a morality and a social document embracing a wider field than any other novel of its time, conceived on the scale of *War and Peace* but even more ambitious" (9). The novel's stature in the literary world is undisputed, and its usefulness for narrative exemplification of communicative response-ability, as framed via this Kierkegaardian reading of Levinas, must be grounded in Hugo's own assessment of the novel's purpose and significance:

> While through the working of laws and customs there continues to exist a condition of
> social condemnation which artificially creates a human hell within civilization…while
> three great problems of this century, the degradation of man in the proletariat, the

subjection of women through hunger, the atrophy of the child by darkness, continue

unresolved; while in some regions social asphyxia remains possible; in other words, and

in still wider terms, while ignorance and poverty persist on earth, books such as this

cannot fail to be of value (Hugo 1862/1976).

Hugo's Preface to the novel evidences not only the story's relevance for foundational questions

of moral philosophy and social justice, but also points more specifically towards questions of

identity, agency, and discourse in public and private spheres. Furthermore, as a significant

intellectual of his time who was deeply concerned with issues of social justice and political

stability, Hugo shares an affinity with both Kierkegaard and Levinas, who have demonstrated a

similar interest in the socio-political realm, Kierkegaard responding to widespread religious and

cultural upheaval and Levinas to the realities inflicted by the Holocaust.

This project culminates with reference to Hugo's story in order to provide narrative

examples of the primary metaphors of communicative response-ability. Utilization of narrative

exemplification is a key component in the philosophical study of communication ethics, and the

significance of narrative for communication studies has been established in the work of Kenneth

Burke and Walter Fisher. Fisher (1984) has argued that narrative is the fundamental paradigm of

human communication and that we are largely defined by our roles as storytellers. Fisher's

"narrative paradigm" is philosophically rooted in the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) and

Richard Rorty (1931-2007), and it maintains that people are essentially storytellers at work in the

co-creation of meaning. The significance of narrative for the study of human behavior is well

established in the work of both philosophers, who similarly describe a significant theoretical

connection between narrative and ethical responsibility. In *Time and Narrative* (1990),

Ricoeur argued that it is narrative that allows us to respond to the ethical summons to recall our

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debts to those who have gone before us (33). In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)*,* Rorty affirmed a primary role for narrative in his rejection of Platonic epistemology. As an alternative to the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty advocated a pragmatic philosophy of historicity that acknowledged the importance of interpretive judgment and situatedness (73). Fisher has utilized this type of approach in his development of the narrative paradigm, which seeks to de-privilege logos in the study of human discourse. According to Fisher, "viewing communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)"(18). Fisher further argues that human communication is rooted in metaphor, and cannot be understood in terms of absolute verifiable truths. Much of the significance of Fisher's work comes from his characterization that human communication becomes intelligible when discourse and action are viewed as occurring within the human story.

Over the past decade, narrative has consistently occupied a central position in philosophy of communication because, according to Arnett and Holba it "provides stories that illuminate relationships in a given historical moment" (40). Narrative exemplification of key metaphors is critical for philosophy of communication because it provides a vision of an embedded and embodied self that is narratively constituted. As Arnett and Holba explain, "We do not dwell in pristine truth; we dwell in fuzzy horizons of meaning that shape communicative understanding" (35). Narrative reminds us that all meaningful communication is a form of storytelling, and the analysis of narrative examples puts us in a position to do what Levinas considered to be an absolute necessity – to begin with the particular in order to get to the universal. As Walter Benjamin has aptly described, "[Storytelling] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, as in information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to

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bring it out of him again" (87). In an age that has been characterized by the collapse of the meta-narrative, narrative exemplification allows us to recognize the importance of doing philosophy historically, helping to establish narrative as a fundamental starting point for genuine encounter with difference and an authentic welcoming of the Other.

Welcoming the Other

It is the communicative encounter between Jean Valjean and Monseigneur Bienvenu Myriel, Bishop of Digne, that propels the entire action of Hugo's 1,000+ page novel and Schonberg and Boublil's 3+ hour stage production. The major action of the story takes place in France between the years of 1815-1848, a historical moment that is characterized by political upheaval and economic instability. Both readers and theater-goers alike are drawn into the story of Jean Valjean, a man sentenced to twenty years of hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his family. Having just been released on parole, Valjean is repeatedly turned away as he seeks employment and housing. Upon seeing a near destitute Valjean, the Bishop immediately welcomes him into his home, offering shelter and food:

> Come in sir for you are weary, and the night is cold out there,
>
> though our lives are very humble, what we have, we have to share.
>
> There is wine here to revive you, there is bread to make you strong,
>
> rest from pain and rest from hunger.

The Bishop's words and actions reflect a dialectic that rejects the epistemology of recollection. By addressing Valjean as "sir" ("Monsieur"), the Bishop responds to the immediacy of the moment and to the particularity of Valjean's unspoken address. Rather than return to a preconceived image of "ex-convict" (a Said), the Bishop meets existence in the moment,

allowing him to both suspend judgment and open a path to multiple interpretations of Valjean's story (a Saying).

The dialectical tension between the Said and the Saying is palpable in this communicative interaction, as the Bishop responds to the situation rather than to idea (i.e. the abstract, universal concept of "ex-convict"). Drawing upon the work of Richard Rorty, Arnett and Holba maintain that ethical communication requires a privileging of "seeing as," which as opposed to "seeing is," is "dynamic and driven by a framework that permits a shift from singular recognition to genuine perception. 'Seeing as' invites interpretive possibilities, contrary to a totalizing 'seeing is' that restricts interpretive meaning" (38). After sharing bread and wine with the Bishop, Valjean steals away during the night, taking with him the Bishop's silver. Valjean is subsequently apprehended by the authorities and returned to the Bishop, who responds by welcoming Valjean into a narrative quite different than the one others have assigned to him under the title of "ex-convict." When Valjean claims that the bishop gave the silver to him as a gift, the bishop responds by presenting Valjean with two silver candlesticks, suggesting that they were also part of the "gift," but were mistakenly left behind:

> But my friend you left so early, surely something slipped your mind.
>
> You forgot I have these also, would you leave the best behind?
>
> But remember this, my brother. See in this some higher plan. You must use this
>
> precious silver to become an honest man. By the witness of the martyrs, by the
>
> passion and the blood. God has raised you out of darkness, I have bought your soul
>
> for God.

Valjean had no interpretive possibilities until the Bishop communicated them to him, and with these words, Valjean is launched into his own act of forgetting to recollect. The Bishop's

response allows Valjean to embrace a dialectical tension between the already and the not-yet that

prompts him to examine his own self-identity. The bishop welcomes Valjean into his own

Christian narrative, a story in which Valjean can envision the not-yet of an alternate, and

promising new life:

> One word from him and I'd be back, beneath the lash, upon the rack. Instead he offers
>
> me my freedom…I'll escape now from the world, from the world of Jean Valjean. Jean
>
> Valjean is nothing now, another story must begin.

The Bishop's communicative interactions exemplify the first movement towards ethical

response-ability. The Bishop seeks to learn about Valjean rather than to know him, and this

movement works to expand the Bishop's horizon of interpretive possibilities. Unlike others from

whom Valjean had sought shelter and support, the Bishop did not assume that he had all the

answers (that he knew Valjean's story), but rather imagined other stories for him from within the

Christian framework that formed his narrative ground[28].   By making the dialectical move of

placing confidence (absolute knowing) in check, the bishop was able to communicate those

possibilities to Valjean. As the Bishop illustrates, the communication of multiple interpretive

possibilities is made possible through a dialectical tension between the already and the not-yet,

between the Said and the Saying, which remains unresolved.

Attention to Alterity

Valjean's encounter with the Bishop illustrates the dialectic that is at work in a

communication ethic grounded in response-ability, a dialectic that by turning outwards to receive

that which is Other, accomplishes a critical move of humility that paves the way for invitation to

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[28] In *The Disciplined Heart*, Caroline Simon develops a similar line of thinking in which she argues that loving another person requires being able engage one' s own imagination in order to envision multiple possibilities or ways that that person might fulfill their destiny. Loving with imagination is viewed by Simon as part of one's ethical obligation to the other. See Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 11-66.

dialogue. Following the transformative interaction with the Bishop, Valjean positions himself

within a narrative that commits him to seeking the good of others. Through the Bishop's words

and actions, Valjean is able to imagine a different life for himself, one that is grounded in

honesty, compassion, and hard work. It is not until a chance encounter with Fantine, a poor and

destitute factory worker turned prostitute, that we witness Valjean beginning to learn how such a

life must be lived, and what it requires of him communicatively. Valjean's interactions with

Fantine exemplify the unique interplay between alterity and dialogue that is at work in Levinas.

As we have seen, a process of knowing (i.e. a dialectic) that places the knower in a position to

learn rather than in a position to judge forms an integral component of response-ability. The

second movement towards response-ability is fundamentally dialogic, and involves a meeting of

the other through a communication of capability that occurs in Valjean's interaction with

Fantine.

Having assumed a new identity as Monsieur Madeleine, Valjean has, after eight years,

become a successful businessman and Mayor of Montreuil-Sur-Mer. Upon witnessing a

skirmish between Fantine and several factory workers, Valjean, owner of the factory, initially

fails to intervene and Fantine is sent out into the streets by the factory foreman, penniless and

without a way to feed herself and her child. Valjean later comes to Fantine's aid when he

witnesses her being abused and subsequently arrested: "I've seen your face before, show me

some way to help you. How have you come to grief in such a place as this?" Fantine's

embitterment and despair is evident in her reply: "M'sieur, don't mock me now I pray. It's hard

enough, I've lost my pride. You let your foreman send me away, yes, you were there and turned

aside." For Valjean, this becomes a second pivotal moment in his story, as Fantine's plea sets

the stage for a dialogic encounter. A dialogic communication ethic attends to what emerges

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between self and other, with the result a revelatory surprise (Arnett, Fritz and Bell 46). In this moment, Valjean encounters absolute alterity, and in confronting the unknown and the unexpected, a new course of action is revealed in response to the Other's plea: "Is it true, what I've done? To an innocent soul? Had I only known then…In his name, my task has just begun. I will see it done." Valjean's communicative interactions with Fantine reflect the primary coordinates of dialogic communication: learning from listening, restraint from a demand for dialogue, acknowledgement of bias, invitation to conversation, and a move towards keeping learning foremost (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 80). Further, the communication between Fantine and Valjean is reflective of Levinas's view of dialogue, which affirms that the Other precedes the self, and that it is the priority of the Other (which is manifested primarily in her summons, that is, her demand that the self be justified; her plea, "do not kill me") that constitutes the foundation of ethical responsibility. Valjean's narrative exemplifies the radical inequality that lies at the heart of Levinas's understanding of alterity and dialogue, first, in the conversation that takes place between Valjean and the Bishop, and later in Valjean's encounter with Fantine. Further, these examples reflect Levinas's contention that subjectivity is not a matter of the self-subject opening onto the other-object. Rather, subjectivity is the other's calling into question of the self, and the demand that the other makes for justification. This is a demand that may never be able to be fully satisfied, but to which the ethical subject is required to respond. The encounter is, as Kierkegaard would describe, a communication of capability rather than a communication of knowledge. Valjean becomes capable of speaking for Fantine when she cannot speak for herself, and this capability illustrates the sense in which the ability to respond means speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Valjean's Lyric

The first pivotal moment in Valjean's narrative occurs when, in his communicative interaction with the Bishop, he is exposed to an alternate dialectic that is transformative, allowing for multiple interpretive possibilities. A second pivotal moment occurs when Valjean finds himself in a position similar to that of the Bishop in his encounter with Fantine. Here, Valjean experiences absolute alterity in the Other's face which acts as a reminder of responsibility. These moments provide narrative exemplifications of the dialectical and dialogic components of a communication ethic framed as response-ability by underscoring the significance of Levinas's re-positioning of ethics as first philosophy and his insistence that dialogue occurs only with attentiveness to absolute alterity, where learning from the other is the primary focus.

A final pivotal moment takes place during Valjean's encounter with Javert at the barricade. As Valjean was once set free by the Bishop, Valjean sets Javert free (both literally and figuratively), revealing that communicative response-ability resides within in a lyrical rhetoric. A "lyrical" rhetoric attunes one to a frame of mind that prompts ethical response by communicating an existential way of being. In this way, Levinas (and Valjean) demonstrate that ethical "knowledge" is not propositional, but rather involves a way of being that is attentive to absolute alterity.

The interactions that take place between Valjean and Javert are particularly insightful since these two pivotal characters demonstrate opposite modes of thinking, and hence of communicating. Valjean is a subjective thinker – an existential thinker who, in communicating indirectly, communicates the capability of the ethical relation. On the other hand, Javert is an objective thinker – an analytical thinker who is uncomfortable being placed in the role of

prompter and is ultimately unable to act as the prompter does, with passion. Having been in pursuit of Valjean for numerous parole violations, Javert finds himself in the unexpected position of being at Valjean's mercy. In the stage production, Javert is seen posing as a student revolutionary in order to gather pertinent information about their plans. His identity uncovered, the students plan his execution, but Valjean, who is also working to support the student cause, requests that he be the one to carry out Javert's execution, and the two men exit to a back alley. Once they are alone together, Valjean's lyrical rhetoric begins to take shape as he shows mercy by sparing Javert's life. Having endured both physical and verbal abuse from Javert during his prison sentence, and in the years following while he was on the run, one would expect Valjean to exact revenge by carrying out the execution. Instead, Valjean cuts Javert free from his bonds, fires a shot into the air, and allows Javert to go free, sparing his life. As the Bishop's words arose from a dialectic directed towards the attainment of revelatory rather than speculative knowledge, so too do Valjean's words here affirm a multiplicity of interpretive possibilities:

Valjean: We meet again.

Javert: You've hungered for this all your life. Take your revenge.

Valjean: You talk too much. Your life is safe in my hands.

Javert: Don't understand.

Valjean: Get out of here.

Javert: Valjean, take care. I'm warning you.

Valjean: Clear out of here.

Javert: Once a thief, forever a thief. What you want, you always steal.

Valjean: You are wrong, and always have been wrong. I'm a man, no worse than any

man. You are free, and there are no conditions…

Whereas the Bishop enabled Valjean to imagine interpretive possibilities beyond the life of an ex-convict, Javert is unable to interpret Valjean's life any differently, despite the transformation he has made. Valjean and Javert's paths cross one final time, as Valjean struggles to save the life of a wounded Marius, his daughter's beau. Despite the fact that Valjean had spared Javert's life at the barricade, Javert is poised and ready to finally bring justice to bear by arresting Valjean. Valjean pleads with Javert to be allowed to go free, so as to deliver Marius to the hospital. Javert concedes, and perhaps, in this moment, experiences a genuine act of dialogic communication, in which he responds to the Other's call, and emerges with revelatory knowledge that come quite unexpectedly. He is, however, unable to live within this narrative, and, shortly thereafter, commits suicide by drowning:

> Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief. Damned if I'll yield at the end of the chase.
>
> I am the law and the law is not mocked. I'll spit his pity right back in his face.
>
> There is nothing on earth that we share. It is either Valjean or Javert…
>
> Is he from heaven or from hell? And does he know, that granting me my life today
>
> This man has killed me even so?

 Whereas the multitude of interpretive possibilities that emerge in the context of a dialectic that places ethics prior to ontology proved transformative for Valjean, it was unbearable for Javert. Ultimately, Javert could not reside within a narrative grounded in an unresolved dialectic. His preference for the good of duty precluded his ability to embrace an ethic of response-ability. Javert is uncomfortable with contradiction, and looks for dialectical tensions to be resolved in the form of rules, laws and codes. When in this instance his behavior contradicts the rule of law, it becomes impossible for him to live. Javert exhibits dualistic thinking as opposed to dialectical

thinking, failing to recognize that interpersonal interaction is characterized by "both/and-ness[29]."

For Javert, the Saying cannot exist in tension with the Said, but must be resolved. For him it is *either* Valjean *or Javert*, but it cannot be both.

Valjean, on the other hand, embraces and utilizes a lyrical rhetoric. This is a rhetoric that is pedagogical rather than polemical, that embraces contradiction and uncertainty rather than working to resolve it, and that "meets existence on its own terms"[30] by embodying a way of being that welcomes alterity and searches for meaning in the existential meeting of the Other. This is a rhetoric that arises from the expressivity of the face and points to a universal ethical demand that is discovered in particularity. Valjean's lyrical rhetoric utilizes the artistry and passion of indirect communication to both exercise one's own capability of response, and to attune the other to an expanded horizon of interpretive possibilities. It is a rhetoric for the other, in which the emergent reality has an undeniably transformative impact on the future. Because Valjean was able to engage in the existential, subjective thinking that underlies such a rhetoric, he was able to move towards the interpretive horizon that the Bishop's words set in motion for him. For Javert, this type of thinking and action was not a possibility for him, and his story ends tragically with the act of suicide.

Hugo's timeless characters are passionate, bold, daring, and motivated by strength of conviction. The story is undoubtedly one of human suffering and the pain of ethical choice, but it is Valjean's transformation that is especially revealing for this inquiry. Valjean's narrative demonstrates that response to human suffering requires not only the compassion of an open heart, but also the wisdom of knowing that one does not know. This is, in simple terms, what

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[29] See Baxter and Montgomery, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (1996): p. 10.
[30] See Ronald C. Arnett and Annette M. Holba, *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning* (2012): pp. 21-22.

Levinas seeks to affirm when he asserts that the ethical relation is prior – both in the sense that it occurs first and that it is also of first priority. Being able to engage the type of thinking and action that affirms that ethical communication is a function of the ability to respond requires that we set aside (as do both the Bishop and Valjean) modern philosophical notions of what "thinking," "listening" and "speaking" ought to look like. Ethical communication requires a teleological suspension of Western philosophical conceptions of "dialectic," "dialogue," and "rhetoric" in order that we might recover them in their purest forms. In short, ethical communication in a postmodern age requires nothing less than a leap of faith.

Beyond Dialectic, Dialogue, Rhetoric: Unending Obligation

Throughout the course of this investigation, we have witnessed numerous ways in which Levinas implements aspects of dialectic, dialogue, and rhetoric to challenge standard philosophical discourse about ethics and to re-think conventional assumptions about the nature of interpersonal interaction. In a characteristically Kierkegaardian move, Levinas enacts a teleological suspension of dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric that moves us beyond traditional philosophical constructs and towards a postmodern and post-metaphysical ethic of response-ability. The work that Levinas does to confront and re-frame conventional conceptualizations of ethical communication calls forth a dialectic, a dialogue, and a rhetoric of an entirely different order.

To begin, Levinas re-situates the role and purpose of philosophy in relation to exteriority. By challenging the traditional understanding of philosophical dialectic as a process that works to reveal a truth that lies within, Levinas establishes a solid and clear connection between discourse and ethics. A Levinasian "dialectic" contrasts with Western philosophical dialectic in three distinct ways. First, it is not a means to an end, but is rather an end in itself. When ethics is first,

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dialectic does not function as a method for the production of knowledge, but rather as an ongoing

tension that characterizes the process of becoming. This dialectic does not work to resolve its

tensions. Rather, its workings are fundamentally bound up in its un-resolvability. As a result,

"knowledge" is not and cannot be an object of possession for the philosopher. Kierkegaard's

disdain of disinterested knowledge and his critique of Hegelian speculative philosophy have

worked throughout this investigation to shed light on Levinas's insistence that the ethical relation

is "first philosophy."

The second important way in which the dialectic of ethics as first philosophy is different

is that it precludes an epistemology of recollection. By forgetting to recollect, this dialectic sets

up an entirely different project for the philosopher – one in which thinking is not so much a

"knowing" as it is a "responding." Kierkegaard's framing of truth as "subjectivity" provides

useful theoretical grounding for understanding ethical subjectivity in Levinas as indicative of the

fact that philosophical truth is always subject to the continual striving of the interlocutors who

are engaged in conversation. Further, Kierkegaard's insistence that philosophical inquiry begin

with the first-person position of the philosopher (a position that retains the significance of

speaker and addressee) and her particular temporal moment helps us to appreciate the sense in

which the self is always already compromised by the Other.

Finally, the dialectic of ethics as first philosophy convincingly situates itself outside of

the Western philosophical tradition by working from a perspective where learning is privileged

over knowing. Whereas postmodernity has called into question the very notion of "truth," it has

also reinforced the idea that the negotiation of difference and the variability of uncertainty may

very well be conditions to be welcomed rather burdens to be alleviated. The demands of

postmodernity are such that we are required to move beyond a life of preoccupation with self in

order to seek knowledge about the Other (Arnett, "The Responsive I" 49).   As Ronald C. Arnett has consistently maintained throughout his work, the task of interpersonal communication in a postmodern age is first and foremost one of education.

In his overall dissatisfaction with the mores of nineteenth century and in his critique of the methods of speculative philosophy, Kierkegaard provides significant theoretical grounding for the twentieth century reaction against the ideals of Modernity. As Patrick Gardiner has noted, Kierkegaard's way of looking at things is pervasive – it gains its source in an "attitude to life from which a person could not be dislodged by intellectual argument alone" (42). This attitude has taken center stage in Levinas's re-positioning of ethics as first philosophy, and in his description of the phenomenological experience of alterity. As we have witnessed, the hope for ethical communication in a postmodern age begins with an attitude towards philosophical wisdom that is driven primarily by the metaphor of learning.

Philosophical inquiry that begins with the ethical relation as opposed to ontological speculation places radical alterity at its conceptual center. As a result, ethics as first philosophy challenges conventional assumptions about the nature of interpersonal interaction. Levinas reveals that philosophy begins in dialogue, specifically in the primordial conversation that is always already underway between self and other. Dialogue initiates in the Other's address to the ethical subject and continues throughout the process of self-awareness, reflection, and response. The "dialogue" of ethics as first philosophy sets itself apart in a number of ways. First, it cannot be conceived as an exchange of ideas or a meeting between persons. It is rather a communication of a *way* of being, a *how* of existence as opposed to a *what* of existence. Kierkegaard's distinction between the communication of knowledge and the communication of capability provides assistance in understanding the important way that Levinas moves beyond

dialogue. In working to position self and other first and foremost as interlocutors and as

fundamentally engaged in a conversation that is always already underway, Levinas demonstrates

that self is indebted to other for the ability to move towards existence, embracing its struggle and

its burden as a means of affirming that self-identity is irrevocably tied to infinite responsibility

for the other.

Second, dialogue in Levinas is distinct in that it occurs as an asymmetrical relation

between self and other. It is characterized by a double movement that cannot be accurately

described in terms of a placing oneself into the other's shoes, but rather one in which the other

effectively places the self into her own shoes by prompting her towards capability for response.

Through the dialogue of the ethical relation, we are summoned to responsibility, but we are not

told the "what" of our obligation – that is left for us to determine.   This is the sense in which

communication ethics is inextricably linked to choice. While the "what" of obligation goes

uncommunicated, we are told the "how" by being made aware of our capability for response.

The communication of "how" as opposed to "what" is a subjective truth that is necessarily

expressed indirectly, and can be appreciated as such from within the context of Kierkegaard's

understanding of the significance of indirect modes of communication.

Finally, in the context of Levinas's work, dialogue privileges listening over speaking.

Prior to the occurrence of any meaningful speech, listening makes a space in which the other can

be received. It creates a place where imaginative possibilities for both self and other can be

revealed. The pathos of the striving towards existence that resonates throughout Kierkegaard's

work is brought to its fruition in the indissoluble link between listening and response-ability.

Whereas dialogue has traditionally been associated with speech, a Levinasian-Kierkegaardian

understanding of dialogue offers evidence of the nascent role that listening plays in initiating the

possibility for ethical response. Listening is that which creates a space for the other to be received, opening imaginative spaces in which meaning can substantially dwell.

Perhaps the most significant implication of ethics as first philosophy lies in its discernment of the rhetoric of demand. Despite Levinas's aversion to the totalizing tendencies of rhetorical discourse, the communicative relation that defines ethics as first philosophy is essentially rhetorical. Levinas's metaphor of the face works to effectively decenter the communicative agent by shifting ethical discourse away from its constant obsession with self-willed rational action. Additionally, by privileging the aural over the visual, the face moves the Other from intentional object of knowledge to interlocutor. In a postmodern age that requires decision making without reliance on the certainty of metanarrative, the rhetoric of demand provides an ethical discourse that makes tolerable the reality that what we may "know" or "understand" can and will change in the context of the current historical moment.

Additionally, the rhetoric of demand not only concerns itself with contingencies and particularities, but also affirms the ongoing process of becoming that marks the existential truth of everyday life. The rhetoric of the face renders possible the experience of genuine alterity. The face is rhetorical – its pathos is persuasive, but not by virtue of appearances or by the use of form and flattery. Rather, the face persuades through rupture. It breaks through all designs towards perfection of form. The face dislodges us from self-preoccupation, creating an anxious sense of urgency for the justification of existence that can only be accomplished in the acknowledgment of our capability for response. As a metaphorical manifestation of the Saying, the face begins to persuade the moment that it initiates its address. The Other's call manifests itself as a rhetorical exigency, creating a level of discomfort that demands response by attuning us to our own capabilities. This is a rhetoric that discovers the possibility of ethical

communication via attunement to the ethical subject's infinite obligation to the Other – an

obligation that presents itself primarily as capability for response.

Finally, the rhetoric of demand is essentially dialogic; it allows for the possibility of

response, and attunes the ethical subject to her capability for response, but does not demand

through command. Rather, its ethical imperative comes in the form of a communication of

capability – a prompting towards ethical action that is the result of an expansion of the

interpretive horizon of potentiality. This enlargement of understanding reveals to the "I" that her

identity is tied to the way that she is communicatively situated in the world, in a unique and

singular position of being able to respond to the Other.

But what constitutes the ability to respond and what allows for the possibility of a

response to the address that issues from exposure to the Other? In taking us beyond the

conventional renderings of dialectic, dialogue, and rhetoric, Levinas enacts a restoration of these

primary philosophical concepts to their purest forms. The meaning of ethics, as Levinas

understands it, exceeds all traditional discourse concerning dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric.

Levinas breaks conventional boundaries, imploding our most treasured philosophical tools, only

so that he can return them to us in their pristine forms. While dialectic, dialogue and rhetoric

hardly represent a chronological architectonic of the ethical communicative act, each, as given to

us by Levinas in its restored and remodeled form, provides invaluable insight into the essential

awareness that communicative responsibility is fundamentally tied to the ability to respond.

Levinas's work offers hope for an audible ethical voice at a time where what is "good" is

no longer publicly agreed upon. By challenging conventional assumptions about the nature of

philosophical dialectic, communicative dialogue, and persuasive rhetoric, Levinas creates a

climate in which the act of loving one's neighbor can be practiced against the realities of the

current historical moment. As a result, ethical communication can be viewed as a process of learning about the self by first learning about the other.   This investigation has sought, with Levinas's help to frame communicative responsibility as response-ability. This task has been primarily accomplished by considering the radical revisions that Levinas enacts with regard to traditional philosophical discourse about ethics. Framed as response-ability, ethical communication consists in three primary movements.

First, ethical response-ability includes a dialectical movement in which we acknowledge that we do not know everything. It affirms that the philosopher does not and cannot stand in a privileged position in which she can pass judgment on history or lay claim to absolute knowledge. This movement is dialectical in the sense that it enacts the possibility for "thinking as response" as opposed to "thinking as knowing." The pursuit of knowledge is, in this way, directed towards appeal and welcome as opposed to assimilation and possession. The act of placing our philosophical hubris in check is critical if we are to enact a communication ethic that genuinely seeks to put the spotlight onto the Other.

The dialectical movement of thinking in response permits us to make a second movement which is essentially dialogical in nature. This is an overt movement towards learning about and understanding the other's narrative ground, and then acknowledging its difference from our own. This reaching outwards towards difference represents the initial expansion of one's interpretive horizon, ultimately leading towards the development of emergent insight and enlarged understanding. Further, it is in the context of this movement that the experience of alterity unfolds and the possibility for a genuine meeting of the Other in dialogue emerges as a real possibility.

The third movement of an ethic of response-ability consists in the individual's commitment to the values that define his or her narrative. This movement emphasizes that ethical action is essentially tied to the element of choice. It represents not just a commitment to response, but to respond in such a way that demonstrates awareness of one's own narrative ground along with the desire to seek understanding about the narrative ground of the other. This movement is essentially rhetorical in that it not only issues from the rhetoric of demand, but also requires passionate commitment on the part of the individual. It is a leap of faith, in the sense that Kierkegaard understands such a leap. It requires a teleological suspension of the universal in order that one might be able to listen to and offer a response to the particular. We are directed once again to the inverted intentionality that characterizes Levinas's view – a perspective that reminds us that in order to get to the universal one must begin with the particular. Further, this movement is representative of the individual's commitment to the rhetorical enterprise of utilizing her own narrative stance to expand the horizon of interpretive possibilities for the other, and in turn for self. The rhetoric of demand not only attunes us to infinite responsibility, but also to our capability for responding in a way that can work towards fulfilling those obligations. As Levinas has explained, our responsibility for the Other is infinite, and because it is so, there is no endpoint – there is no quantity or quality of response that can ever sufficiently relieve us of our obligation, and happily so! The existential burden has no end, but it is that for which we live.

The Other as Prompter: Re-Thinking Communicative Responsibility as Existential Pathos

Levinas's disruption of traditional philosophical discourse about ethics informs a communication ethic comprised of dialectical, dialogical, and rhetorical modes of interpersonal interaction that are fundamentally rooted in an existential understanding of pathos. Pathos has been conceived here as the multiple modes in which we are moved to response in conjunction

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with the way that we are communicatively situated in the world. Additionally, we have

associated pathos with "passion" as it emerges in the individual's commitment to what she has

determined to be of value. The inspiration for this rendering of pathos has been taken from

Kierkegaard, who adds nuance and complexity to standard interpretations of pathos by

conceiving it in terms of the existential condition which is marked by a process of continual

striving. Ultimately, Levinas's work lies in the realm of the ethical, and not in the realm of

"sentiment." [31] For Levinas, the Other's call cannot be reduced to mere sensation, and we must

remind ourselves of Levinas's insistence that awareness of ethical obligation towards the other

has little to do with the color of her eyes (EI 85). Rather, the face represents a trace of an

original ethical command that is, in Levinas's words, "irreversible" and "immemorial" ("Enigma

and Phenomenon" 69). In other words, while the ethical demand is itself not something that is

felt, its burden is. The existential pathos that lies at the heart of an ethic of response-ability is

beyond sentiment in that it is not a *feeling* for the misery of others, but rather an awareness of the

weight of infinite responsibility. This is not, as we have seen, a burden that we are instinctively

driven to eliminate (we couldn't even if we tried), but rather one that we live from within. This

explains the sense in which Levinas's approach is decidedly existential, and it is for this reason

that Kierkegaard's understanding of pathos as the individual's passionate struggle towards

existence is important. For Kierkegaard, the struggle "to become" represents the effort that one

makes at existence, and through the rhetoric of demand, we recognize that this effort is

intimately linked to our exposure to alterity and the capability for response that it reveals. It is,

in fact, the response that matters in the end. The rhetoric of demand is something that must be

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[31] This study has maintained throughout that both Levinas and Kierkegaard are thinkers of affectivity, that is, they are interested in the pre-cognitive moments of human experience. In this way, "pathos" is distinct from an Enlightenment notion of "sentiment" (as in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) in which ethical responsibility is intimately tied to psychological motives.

endured as part of the process, but it is also that which makes the process meaningful. Loving the Other is a struggle, but one that is ultimately worthwhile.

This study has brought Levinas's major metaphors into conversation with dominant themes in Kierkegaard's work in order to illuminate their significance for communication ethics framed as response-ability. Levinas and Kierkegaard's similar rootedness in the existential phenomenological tradition has provided the primary rationale for bringing them together. More specifically, both philosophers' attentiveness to the passionate conviction with which one must confront the everyday life of interpersonal interaction has prompted and sustained conversation between them. When we consider the degree to which postmodern communication ethics is, and must be, intimately tied to the element of choice, we can appreciate the enormous contribution that Kierkegaard has made to Levinas's work. Levinas's goal was not to construct an "ethics" but rather to find its meaning (EI 90). By providing a phenomenology of alterity, Levinas reveals that the meaning of ethics lies in the secret of subjectivity itself – the enigma surrounding the fact that human subjectivity is ultimately indiscernible, and that in the communication of knowledge, the self is beside the Other, not confronted by him (EI 78, 57). While twentieth century existentialism developed to include several themes that may appear to run contrary to Levinas's project (e.g. the emphasis on individualism, the theme of isolation), Kierkegaard did something that proved invaluable for Levinas – he brought philosophy to the ground of human experience. It is only from this ground that we can understand the meaning of "ethics as first philosophy" and the implications of rethinking the ethical relation in terms of existential pathos.

In framing an understanding of ethical response from within the parameters of postmodernity, this study has endeavored to provide a narrative that attends to the primary components of a pragmatic philosophy of communication. With an eye towards offering

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relevant insights that may prompt understanding accompanied by continuation of the conversation, this study concludes that rethinking the ethical in terms of existential pathos offers hope for the affirmation of an audible ethical voice in an age characterized by narrative disintegration and disagreement over what is considered "good." Specifically, this study concludes that a re-thinking of the ethical relation as essentially pathos-filled offers a promising theoretical precursor for the everyday application of practices associated with meaningful, sustaining, and civilly responsible discourse. The ability to rethink the ethical in terms of pathos emerges from within the context of the Levinasian-Kierkegaardian critique of Western philosophy, and offers a theoretical contrast to a tradition that has regularly conceived of the ethical relation as a logical one. As we have seen, when the ethical relation is conceived as logos, communicative responsibility must issue from the application of rational theoretical principles. In contrast, when we understand that the ethical relation is a fundamental component of existential striving, communicative responsibility unfolds as a phenomenological reality that is witnessed in the rhetoric of demand. Rethinking ethics as existential pathos is radical in that it represents an inversion of roles, placing self-determined agency into question and situating the Other (i.e. the one to whom we are responsible) in clear creative control.

This study reveals three significant implications of re-thinking communicative responsibility as existential pathos: first, it positions emergent understanding at the core of the ethical relation; second, it creates an enlarged understanding of communication itself by offering new ways of conceptualizing "communication," "ethics," "responsibility," and the fundamental relation between them; third, it offers renewed promise for the study of rhetorical theory and practice.

It is quite obvious that there is no ability to respond without one to whom a response can be made, but when we view ethical communication from the perspective of an ethical relation that is born from and rooted in existential pathos, we are able to attend to particular individuals in particular contexts. Being able to do this is the key to making both effective and ethical responses to those who speak to us from narrative grounds that are entirely different from our own. The key to dialogue is that it is not owned by a single person, but rather is emergent. In other words, dialogue presupposes the derivative nature of human identity, making the ground of meaning central to its shaping (Arnett, Grayson, McDowell 3). While dialogue itself cannot be demanded, its very possibility lies in the rhetorical demand of the Other. The ability to respond to one who stands on different narrative ground is rooted in the expression of the face. And, this is an appeal that lies at the heart of existential suffering, calling us to our existence and ultimately working to justify it. It is important to remember here that with the metaphor of the face, Levinas moves us away from an image-driven, visual epistemology of recollection to an aural ethic, grounded in the rhetoric of the Other. As Levinas has shown, we are interrupted, prompted, and ultimately persuaded by the Other's rhetoric – a rhetoric that places concern for the particularities of the historical situation in a privileged position.

Ultimately, emergent understanding is significant because it leads to pragmatic, meaningful and transformative communicative practices, like the ones demonstrated by both the Bishop and Valjean in *Les Miserables*. In *An Overture to the Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning,* Arnett and Holba note that something becomes meaningful when there is an emergent pattern (11). Referencing the work of Victor Frankl, Arnett and Holba suggest three ways in which human beings find meaning: through what one gives, through what one gets, and through one's stand against the inevitable (10). Frankl's work reminds us that the

rhetoric of the Other is an important force in counteracting the tendencies towards emotivism, a form of decision-making that is motivated primarily by egoism (MacIntyre 57, Arnett & Holba 10). In contrast, the ideas of emergent understanding in dialogue and emergent patterns of meaningful communicative practice suggest that it is the conversation, the practices, and the patterns themselves that shape a life and ultimately make that life meaningful. This perpsective reflects Clifford Christians's sentiment that values themselves are dialogic; that is, they are not held as a part of an individual's inner life, but are rather interactive and shared (Arneson 89-90). Further, a dialogic ethic works on the assumption of an embedded communicative agent and asserts that communication takes place from within the context of an ongoing conversation that begins prior to any specific interpersonal interaction (Arnett, Arneson & Bell 164). Both Levinas's and Kierkegaard's attentiveness to the ethical meaning that underlies human emotion provides critical theoretical grounding for any dialogic approach to ethical communication since it focuses our attention towards that which is the foundation of communication, namely that moment where existence justifies itself by responding to the rhetorical call of the Other.

Enabling emergent insight to develop between communicators is the defining characteristic of dialogue. Emergent insights are not just the product of dialogue; they are the foundation of the communicative practices that support and sustain ethical discourse. Through emergent insights we develop patterns in our communication practices that work to shape and define our interpretive lives (Arnett & Holba 10-11). It is pattern that allows practice to become meaningful, and this is reflected in the communicative behaviors demonstrated by the Bishop, and later by Valjean. The Bishop's communication reveals a pattern of imaginative insight into individual destinies that are not immediately reflected by looking at a person, but rather initiated as animate possibilities through that individual's own rhetorical demand. The most significant

element of the Bishop's response occurs in his ability to imagine multiple interpretive possibilities for how Valjean's own narrative might be shaped. By literally setting in motion an alternate narrative to the one that Valjean was currently playing out, the Bishop propelled Valjean into a role that he hadn't initially been able to envision for himself, but one that he was, as a result of the transformative power of the Bishop's words, able to assume. The Bishop's response to Valjean in the moment of his arrest is a response to the rhetoric of demand -- it affirms a meaningful communicative pattern that Valjean then uses to shape an alternative narrative in which he is able to imagine multiple interpretive possibilities for others' stories as well as his own. Developing these kinds of "habits of the heart"[32] no doubt requires effort, and it is Kierkegaard who reminds us that "pathos" does not merely signify emotional response, but represents the larger effort that one makes at existence.

As we have seen, centering emergent understanding at the heart of communicative responsibility commits us to a process of learning as opposed to a process of knowing. In communicating with a genuine desire to learn about our interlocutor, rather than simply to "convey knowledge" we can actually help the other achieve important life goals as opposed to merely adding to her knowledge. If, as Kierkegaard indicates, subjectivity is nothing more than an individual's potentialities, and the Other's call is what allows the individual to realize her potential, beginning with her capability for response, then the sense in which the Other's plea constitutes the identity of the self is clear. The specific "truth" that the Other communicates in the rhetoric of demand is not merely an ethical imperative. Rather, it communicates a capability for response, a way of being in the world. This is a subjective truth, and is, therefore, expressed

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[32] In *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication: The Carrier of Meaning* (2012), Arnett and Holba draw inspiration from Alexis de Tocqueville in arguing that "philosophy of communication attends to meaning emergent from practices that form a pattern that shapes our 'habits of the heart.'" (11).

in a mode of indirect communication, which is, as Kierkegaard has revealed, a fundamentally

artistic form of expression. The other assists the self in coming to life onstage as an ethical actor

against the backdrop of postmodernity. Levinas's phenomenology of alterity demonstrates that

the obligation to communicate ethically and the capability to communicate ethically are

irrevocably bound to one another. In other words, ethical responsibility is response-ability.

Bringing Kierkegaard's philosophy of communication into conversation with Levinas's

phenomenological description of the experience of alterity has worked to characterize the ability

to respond in terms of the ability to expand one's interpretive horizons with the goal of engaging

difference. This process begins with an expression of humility that affirms that one cannot

presume to stand above the particularities of the historical moment. It continues with a

dialogical movement that seeks genuine learning about the ground of the other, creating a space

for insight and understanding to emerge. This movement indicates that response-ability is

sustained via rhetorical competence – the ability to choose a particular sense of "the good" and

then commit to its promotion and protection in everyday interpersonal interaction. The primary

challenge of postmodernity regards the issue of how it might be possible to make practical

judgments in an essentially contingent world. Levinas speaks specifically to this issue by

asserting not only that we *can* begin with the particular in order to reach the universal, but also

that we must do so. Ethics as first philosophy reveals that the possibility for ethical action lies

not in the logical determination of rational imperatives, but rather in the artistry of the rhetoric of

demand.

In addition to encouraging emergent understanding between individuals of differing

narrative grounds, rethinking the ethical relation as existential pathos allows for an enlarged

understanding of communication – one that offers new ways of conceptualizing the relation

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between communication and the ethical. Specifically, attentiveness to the affective origins of the ethical relation reveals that effective communication is not necessarily ethical communication. When the ethical relation is conceived in terms of existential striving, we can attend to the way in which ethical action arises from the affect of other on self. The other's rhetorical demand is a pathos-filled expression of one's vulnerability that impacts the ethical subject like a work of art, prompting her towards response.

The way in which Levinas's work leads to alternate conceptualizations of what constitutes ethical communication comprises a dominant theme in Amit Pinchevski's work. Pinchevski maintains that traditional ways of understanding communication as information exchange or as commonality of experience preclude the understanding of communication as an ethical event (13). Pinchevski points out that when we think about communication beyond essences and ontology, we can begin to think about communication as "an ethical involvement whose stakes exceed the successful completion of its operation" (13). Further, Pinchevski explains that Levinas's approach indicates that communication is "not only the transfer of signs but also the giving of signs to someone, a modality of approach" (21). Pinchevski suggests that Levinas's work challenges traditional conceptualizations of communication that rely on common binary oppositions including completion and failure, understanding and misunderstanding, speech and silence (22-23). Levinas does not attempt to neutralize the unsettling impact of encountering another, raising the important idea that "ethical possibilities in communication do not lie ultimately in its successful completion but rather in its interruption" (6). In short, Pinchevski's reading of Levinas suggests that ethical communication may have little to do with effect and everything to do with affect. By bringing Kierkegaard into the conversation in this investigation, this study has endeavored to highlight the sense in which the other's interruption

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has the potential to evoke response. Further, Kierkegaard has helped us to realize that ethical interaction relies predominantly on indirect modes of communication, and this is yet another example of the way that rethinking the ethical as existential pathos opens the door to alternate conceptualizations of the communicative process. When we conceive communication as an interruption rather than as the successful completion of a process of information exchange, we do justice to the fact that the ethical stakes are quite higher than successful message delivery.

Finally, rethinking the ethical relation as existential pathos offers renewed promise for the study of rhetorical theory and practice. In following the lead of scholars like Robert J.S. Manning and Michael Hyde this investigation has offered a reading of Levinas that acknowledges both the sense in which his philosophy is itself rhetorical, and also the space that it creates for meaningful and ethical rhetorical practice in everyday life. The historic tension between analytic philosophy and sophistic rhetoric has long been rooted in the seemingly insurmountable opposition between objectivism and relativism. As Richard Bernstein notes (*Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis,* 1983), much of our intellectual and cultural life has been structured according to a presumed dichotomy between objectivism and relativism (2). In Bernstein's view, post-metaphysical thinking aims to articulate a type of rationality that is "historically situated and practical, involving choice, deliberation, and judgment" (xiv). For this reason, communication scholars working to respond to the obstacles of post-modernity (and looking forward to the challenges of a post-postmodern future) must look to rhetorical theory and practice for guidance.

Owing to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the counterpart of dialectic,"[33] rhetoric has traditionally been oriented towards particularities, contingencies, and probabilities. But as

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[33] See Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* 1354a

Bernstein recognizes, relativism is no longer an inescapable end point of incommensurability (xiv). Rather, the uncertainty of unresolved dialectical tensions serves to clarify the openness of language and communication, as well as the challenges we confront in experiencing and coming to terms with difference. Bernstein suggests that a new conversation has emerged about human rationality – one that "illuminates the dialogical character of our human existence and our communicative transactions, and that points to the practical need to cultivate dialogical communities" (xv). Bernstein further maintains that this "new conversation" directs us towards the conclusion that "the shared understandings and experience, intersubjective practices, sense of affinity, solidarity, and those tacit affective ties that bind individuals together into a community must already exist" (226). While Bernstein's study attributes much of this shift in philosophical thinking to the work of Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty, and Arendt, it is clear that Levinas makes a significant contribution here as well. Levinas's conceptualization of derived agency as the first principle of ethics (enhanced and supported by a Kierkegaardian philosophy of communication) provides significant theoretical grounding for understanding rhetorical practice as both meaningful and ethical.

While Levinas's re-conceptualization of philosophy clearly precludes an epistemology of recollection, it also does not result in radical relativism. While the notion of an enlarged and emergent understanding undoubtedly complicates and unsettles our epistemological centers, the promise of ethical rhetorical practice provides a viable antidote to the afflictions of relativism and nihilism. As communication ethicist Julia T. Wood notes, rhetorical theory provides valuable guidance for making practical decisions in an inherently contingent world:

Rhetorical theories don't rely…on absolute and *a priori* principles or criteria for making

judgments. Instead, they encourage us to consider the specific circumstances, people,

and options available in the given case and to work to make sound judgments about

attitudes and actions – not absolute judgments, not judgments that are beyond question or

argument, and not the only possible judgments, but sound ones that are cognizant of the

particularities of the given case (Arneson 127-128).

Wood's comments emphasize the significant role that rhetorical theory and practice must play if

we are to develop a practical and pragmatic philosophy of ethical communication.

This inquiry has been guided throughout by the determination, made by communication

ethicists Sharon L. Bracci, Christopher Lyle Johnstone, and others, that responding to the

challenges of postmodernity requires a radical shifting of the grounds of our efforts. Bracci has

specifically maintained that the shift must include a movement away from grounding

communication ethics in discredited theoretical principles, justifying it rather in the "virtues of

the communicative process itself" (Arneson 29). This study has also argued that an important

step in this movement is a philosophical shifting of ground towards affectivity and the passionate

level of human experience, which goes a long way towards characterizing the realities of the

existential condition – a situation that is characterized by a set of demands that come to us from a

source other than ourselves. Furthermore, via the wisdom of Kierkegaard, this investigation has

shown that Levinas's project makes an invaluable contribution to the tasks with which

postmodern communication ethicists are confronted.

Rethinking the ethical relation in terms of pathos offers promise and direction in an age

of uncertainty by emphasizing the importance of being able to respond with humility, conviction,

and grace.   Acknowledging that no amount of scientific thinking or logical reasoning can

provide answers for ethical action in a post-911 world does not mean that our pursuit of "the

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good" is rendered hopeless. It is especially important for twenty-first century communication

ethicists to draw inspiration and guidance from Levinas, who, having suffered and survived the

atrocities of the Holocaust, was nevertheless able to affirm that we are not duped by morality.

And as we look forward to the opportunities and uncertainties of a post-postmodern future,

communication scholar can find reassurance in the understanding that responsibility is directly

and intimately connected to response-ability. As Merold Westphal has aptly noted, Levinas and

Kierkegaard are united in the conviction that it is not what you *know*, but who you *love* that

makes you truly human.

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