
TOTALITY AND INFINITY

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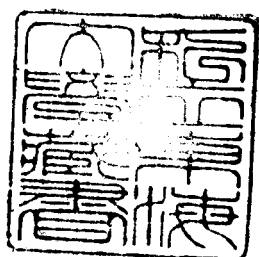
TOTALITY AND INFINITY
AN ESSAY ON EXTERIORITY

by

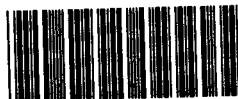
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To Marcelle and Jean Wahl



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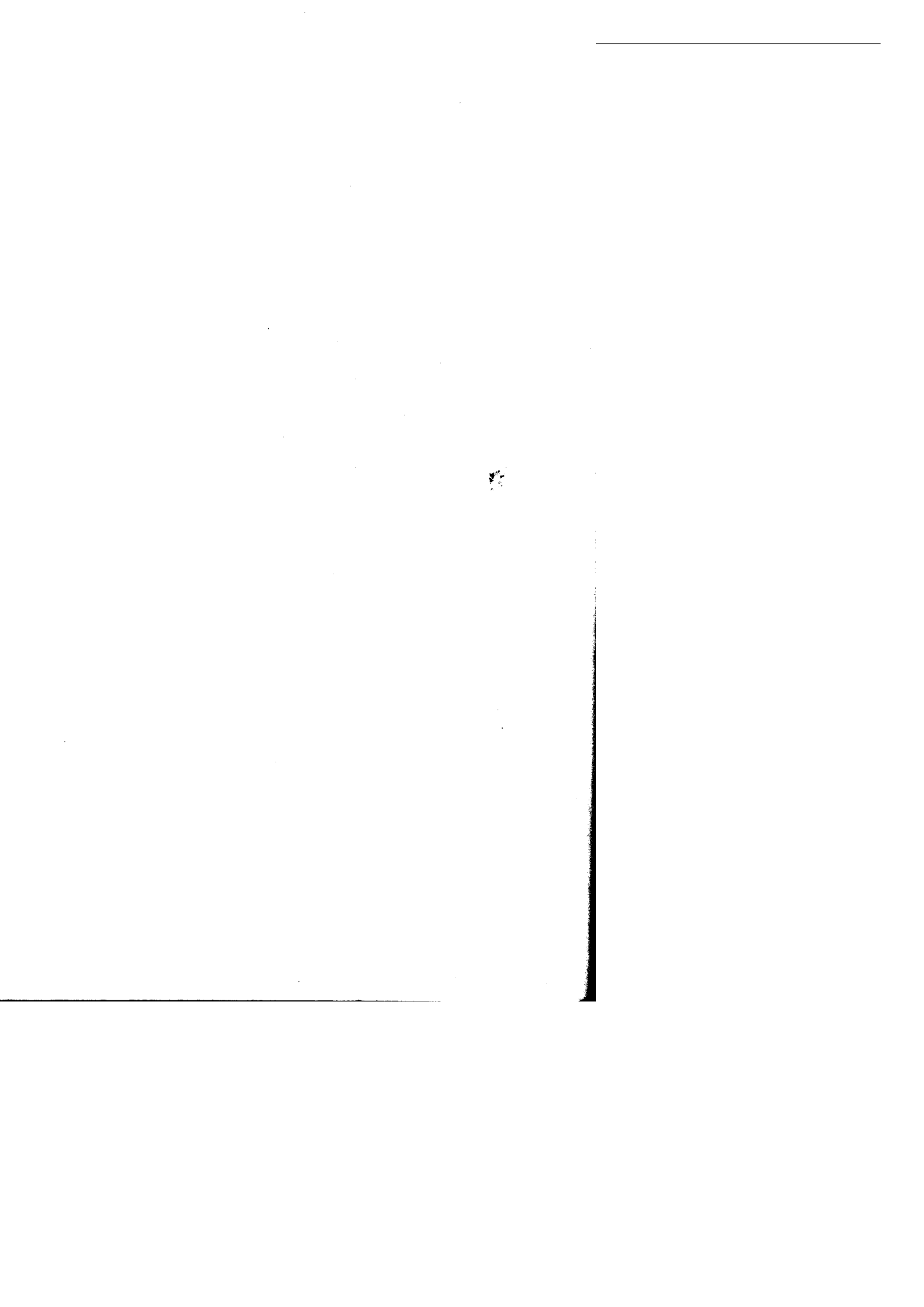
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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the beginning of the modern phenomenological movement disciplined attention has been paid to various patterns of human experience as they are actually lived through in the concrete. This has brought forth many attempts to find a general philosophical position which can do justice to these experiences without reduction or distortion. In France, the best known of these recent attempts have been made by Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* and by Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* and certain later fragments. Sartre has a keen sense for life as it is lived, and his work is marked by many penetrating descriptions. But his dualistic ontology of the en-soi versus the pour-soi has seemed over-simple and inadequate to many critics, and has been seriously qualified by the author himself in his latest Marxist work, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Merleau-Ponty's major work is a lasting contribution to the phenomenology of the pre-objective world of perception. But aside from a few brief hints and sketches, he was unable, before his unfortunate death in 1961, to work out carefully his ultimate philosophical point of view.

This leaves us then with the German philosopher, Heidegger, as the only contemporary thinker who has formulated a total ontology which claims to do justice to the stable results of phenomenology and to the living existential thought of our time. There is no doubt that Heidegger's early work, *Sein und Zeit*, is a highly original contribution to philosophy. But as critics have pointed out, it is marked by certain special features and one-sided emphases which are open to serious question. The author himself has apparently recognized the exaggerated anthropocentrism or subjectivism of its point of view which he has tried to correct by an opposite emphasis on a quasi-independent Being in his later and more obscure writings. Another fact needs to be noted. Since the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 there has been a great outpouring of German works attacking or defending certain special theses of Heidegger in different fields. But he does not seem to have stirred up original thinking along new lines in his native country.

The present book *Totality and Infinity*, of Emmanuel Levinas, shows,

however, that this is definitely not true in France. The author is thoroughly familiar with recent phenomenology and existential philosophy, and has an exhaustive knowledge of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Without these new developments, his work would have been impossible. It contains many penetrating descriptions of patterns of experience as we live them through, and many far-ranging reflections on these. It is basically phenomenological in character. But it is far more than a mere elaboration or correction of past insights. It is not often that one finds a philosophical work that is both radically original and carefully thought through. This book is both. It is striking out along new lines to formulate a general position which is opposed to Husserl's transcendental idealism as well as to Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy of Being. In this way it shows the inexhaustible richness of our lived experience and the fruitfulness of reflecting on its forms and patterns. The radical empiricists who, since the time of William James, have doubted that the methods of transcendental idealism fit the patterns of experience, will find much supporting evidence in this work, which is full of novel insights and argument.

According to Levinas, I find myself existing in a world of alien things and elements which are other than, but not negations of myself. The latter is a logical relation which brings its terms together into a neutral system in the light of which each can be understood impartially, as we say. But the world as I originally experience it is not a logical system of this kind, in which no term takes precedence over the rest. My primary experience is definitely biased and egocentric. I take precedence over the various objects I find around me, and in so far as my experience is normal, I learn to manipulate and control them to my advantage, either as the member of a group which I identify with myself or simply as myself alone. In general, these objects are at my disposal, and I am free to play with them, live on them, and to enjoy them at my pleasure.

Levinas finds that this primordial experience of enjoyment (*jouissance*) has been neglected by Heidegger and other phenomenologists, and he devotes many pages to describing it in its major manifestations. There is a strong tendency in all human individuals and groups to maintain this egocentric attitude and to think of other individuals either as extensions of the self, or as alien objects to be manipulated for the advantage of the individual or social self. According to Levinas, neither of these egocentric views does justice to our original experience of the other person, and the most fundamental part of the book is devoted to

the description and analysis of this experience—the *phenomenology of the other*, as we may call it.

The 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. This may be the expression of an optimistic hope from a self-centered point of view which is often verified. The other may, indeed, turn out to be, on the surface at least, merely an analogue of myself. But not necessarily! I may find him to be inhabiting a world that is basically other than mine and to be essentially different from me. He is not a mere object to be subsumed under one of my categories and given a place in my world. Most of us are now familiar with this other-reducing theory which Sartre propounds in his *Being and Nothingness*. It may describe a widespread manner of dealing with the other person but it fails to do justice to his own existence, as is clearly indicated by the slavery and rebellion to which it leads. Nor finally do we take account of these inner depths of alien existence by regarding the other along Hegelian lines as a mere negation of the self. This only encompasses him in a supposedly neutral system that is readily identified with the rational self. Can it be that the underlying, unifying *one* of our monistic systems has been the avaricious, power-seeking, organizing, self-same self?

In any case, whether or not they are truly rational, these traditional theories are one-sidedly egocentric and reductive. None of them does justice to the other as I meet him for the first time in his strangeness face to face. I see this countenance before me nude and bare. He is present in the flesh. But as Levinas points out in his revealing descriptions, there is also a sense of distance and even of absence in his questioning glance. He is far from me and other than myself, a stranger, and I cannot be sure of what this strangeness may conceal. Hence the need to show friendly intent which brought forth the earliest forms of introduction and greeting. For example, the closed fist might conceal a knife, and coming "open handed" means no enmity, as Ortega y Gasset has shown in his reflections on the handshake in his *Man and People*. But this is only a bare beginning. Even if he comes with no ill will, he remains a stranger inhabiting an alien world of his own. Of course, I may simply treat him as a different version of myself, or, if I have the power, place him under my categories and use him for my purposes. But this means reducing him to what he is not. How can I coexist with him and still leave his otherness intact?

According to Levinas, there is only one way, by language, and some of the more provocative sections of the book are devoted to this topic. The questioning glance of the other is seeking for a meaningful response. Of course, I may give only a casual word, and go on my own way with indifference, passing the other by. But if communication and community is to be achieved, a real response, a responsible answer must be given. This means that I must be ready to put my world into words, and to offer it to the other. There can be no free interchange without something to give. Responsible communication depends on an initial act of generosity, a giving of my world to him with all its dubious assumptions and arbitrary features. They are then exposed to the questions of the other, and an escape from egotism becomes possible.

It has been and is still widely held that this can be achieved only by a joint sacrifice of self to a neutral, englobing system. But Levinas brings forth very strong evidence to show that this is not the case. By speaking to the other I enter into a relation with him. But this speaking does not bind me down or limit me, because I remain at a distance from what is said. Hence real conversation with an other cannot be exhaustively planned. I am never sure just what he will say, and there is always room for reinterpretation and spontaneity on both sides. My autonomy remains intact. In fact, in so far as I have any, it is stimulated to further intensity by searching questions from a point of view that is not merely opposite and therefore correlative to mine, but genuinely other. I can always say what I wish, and even begin once again *de novo*. The same is true of the other. He does not merely present me with lifeless signs into which I am free to read meanings of my own. His expressions bear *his* meanings, and he is himself present to bring them out and defend them. There is no difference between the active expression and what is expressed. The two coincide. The other is not an object that must be interpreted and illumined by my alien light. He shines forth with his own light, and speaks for himself.

Levinas, of course, is not denying that a great part of our speaking and thinking is systematic and bound by logic of some kind. What he is interested in showing is that prior to these systems, which are required to meet many needs, and presupposed by them is the existing individual and his ethical choice to welcome the stranger and to share his world by speaking to him. In other words, we do not become social by first being systematic. We become systematic and orderly in our thinking by first freely making a choice for generosity and communication, i.e., for the

social. What we call thinking and speaking is very often only a playing with our own words and concepts or a succession of egocentric monologues. But according to Levinas, speaking becomes serious only when we pay attention to the other and take account of him and the strange world he inhabits. It is only by responding to him that I become aware of the arbitrary views and attitudes into which my uncriticized freedom always leads me, and become responsible, that is, able to respond. It is only then that I see the need of justifying my egocentric attitudes, and of doing justice to the other in my thought and in my action.

Hegel and his followers have also seen the accidental biases and eccentricities that make the personal freedom of the individual unreliable and open to criticism. They have therefore attacked the personal existence, which Levinas calls "the inner life," as capricious and subjective, and have defended those objective rational systems and social organizations which subordinate, or even repress, the individual. Levinas grants that they have dominated the course of human history. He points out, however, that while this view may have weakened the influence of individual fantasies and delusions, it has led to forms of social suppression and tyranny which are even worse. Must we always choose one or the other of these evils? Anarchy on the one hand and tyranny on the other?

In politics, in education, in every phase of our cultural life, are we not constantly presented with alternatives of this kind? One may say that a main argument of this book is the working out of a third way between the horns of this recurrent dilemma. Totalitarian thinking accepts vision rather than language as its model. It aims to gain an all-inclusive, panoramic view of all things, including the other, in a neutral, impersonal light like the Hegelian *Geist* (Spirit), or the Heideggerian Being. It sees the dangers of an uncontrolled, individual freedom, and puts itself forth as the only rational answer to anarchy. To be free is the same as to be rational, and to be rational is to give oneself over to the total system that is developing in world history. Since the essential self is also rational, the development of this system will coincide with the interests of the self. All otherness will be absorbed in this total system of harmony and order.

According to Levinas, however, there is another way, not yet fully explored, which he is suggesting in this book. It cannot be identified with subjective anarchism since it takes account of the other and his criticism. But it also differs from the holistic thinking of traditional

philosophy in the following ways. Instead of referring to the panoramic sense of vision as its model for understanding, it refers to language where there is always room for the diversity of dialogue, and for further growth through the dynamics of question and answer. This other-regarding way of thought rejects the traditional assumption that reason has no plural, and asks why we should not recognize what our lived experience shows us, that reason has many centers, and approaches the truth in many different ways. Instead of building great systems in which the singular diversities of things and persons are passed over and diluted, this way of thinking prefers to start with the careful analysis of the peculiar features of each being in its otherness, and only then to clarify its relations with other things in the light of its peculiar and distinctive features.

This other-oriented mode of speaking and thinking will pay less attention to things as they appear to the separated self, and more attention to the search for what they are in themselves, in their radical otherness, even though this is less certain and always more difficult to find. This will mean less interest in conceptual constructions and a greater readiness to listen and learn from experience. It will not think of knowing, in the sense of gathering, as the primary aim of man from which action will follow as a matter of course, but rather of action and of the achievement of justice and peace as prior to speaking and thinking.

The basic difference is between a mode of thought which tries to gather all things around the mind, or self, of the thinker, and an externally oriented mode which attempts to penetrate into what is radically other than the mind that is thinking it. This difference emerges with peculiar clarity in the case of my meeting with the other person. I may either decide to remain within myself, assimilating the other and trying to make use of him, or I may take the risk of going out of my way and trying to speak and to give to him. This does not fulfill a *need*. I can satisfy my needs more adequately by keeping to myself and the members of the in-group with which I am identified. And yet it is the expression of a *desire*, as Levinas calls it, for that which transcends me and my self-centered categories. This desire is never satisfied, but it seems insatiable, and feeds on itself.

By communicating with the other, I enter into a relation with him which does not necessarily lead to my dependence on him. Nor does he become dependent on me. He can *absolve* himself from this relation with his integrity intact. Hence Levinas calls it absolving, or absolute.

And he finds many other relations of this kind, for example, that of truth. In so far as I am related to another entity and share in its being, it must be really changed. But as classical metaphysics pointed out, in so far as I discover the truth about something, it is absolved from this relation and remains unchanged. The same is true of the idea of absolute perfection which is clearly radically other than what I am. But I can strive for such an other without changing it, or losing my own integrity, just as I can respond to another person and engage in dialogue without jeopardizing his or my own being. Levinas suggests that this may be the reason for Plato's well-known statement at *Republic* 509 that the good lies beyond being, and relates it to his own view that the conclusions of our basic philosophical questions are to be found beyond metaphysics in ethics. My way of existing conveys my final answer.

As Levinas points out, one answer is given by the totalizers who are satisfied with themselves and with the systems they can organize around themselves as they already are. A very different answer is given by those who are dissatisfied, and who strive for what is other than themselves, the infinitizers, as we may call them. The former seek for power and control; the latter for a higher quality of life. The former strive for order and system; the latter for freedom and creative advance. This leads to the basic contrast which is expressed in the title of the book, between totality on the one hand and infinity on the other. Many examples of the former can be found in the history of our Western thought. The latter is largely unknown and untried.

It is this outwardly directed but self-centered totalistic thinking that organizes men and things into power systems, and gives us control over nature and other people. Hence it has dominated the course of human history. From this point of view, only the neutral and impersonal, Being, for example, is important. "What is it?" is the most basic question that requires an answer in terms of a context, a system. The real is something that can be brought before the senses and the mind as an object. The acts of sensing, thinking, existing, as they are lived through, are discounted as subjective. A priority is, therefore, placed on objective thinking, and the objective. The group is more powerful, more inclusive, and, therefore, more important than the individual. To be free is to sacrifice the arbitrary inner self and to fit into a rationally grounded system. Inner feelings and thoughts cannot be observed. They are private and unstable. So men are judged by what they do,

their works that are visible and remain. Since they endure, they can be judged by the group which also remains. They are what they are judged to be by the ongoing course of history. Since this is the inclusive system, with nothing beyond, there is no appeal from this judgment. It is final. As Hegel said, *Die Weltgeschichte ist die Weltgericht*. History itself is the final judge of history.

To the infinitizers on the other hand, this seems like a partial and biased doctrine. Systematic thinking, no doubt, has its place. It is required for the establishment of those power structures which satisfy necessary needs. But when absolutized in this way and applied to free men, it constitutes violence, which is not merely found in temporary and accidental displays of armed force, but in the permanent tyranny of power systems which free men should resist. Slavery is the dominance of the neutral and impersonal over the active and personal. In a living dialogue and even in a written monologue of many volumes it is more important to find out who is speaking and why, than merely to know what is said. We do not *need* to know the other person (or thing) as he is in himself, and we shall never know him apart from acting with him. But unless we *desire* this, and go on trying, we shall never escape from the subjectivism of our systems and the objects that they bring before us to categorize and manipulate. We do not get rid of our thoughts and feelings by ignoring them or by any other means. But we may seek to transcend them, first as individuals and only later, perhaps, as a group. The individual person becomes free and responsible not by fitting into a system but rather by fighting against it and by acting on his own.

Those who are not limited to visible objects and who have some sense of the inner life that is revealed in dialogue will not judge a man exclusively by his works. They will recognize the alien factors that always intervene between the man himself and the objects he produces. They will also be aware of the difference between those who judge and the other whom they are judging. They will understand that the judgment of history is made by survivors on the works of the dead who are no longer present to explain and defend them. They will see that this judgment is crude and subjective, varying with the otherness of those who judge differently from place to place and from time to time. So they will never accept it as final. They will seek rather to separate themselves from this course of history to make judgments of their own with reference to a standard of perfection that is radically other and

transcendent. To this "idea of the infinite," as Levinas calls it, an appeal can be made. We are not bound to accept the *status quo* as right, and history itself is not the final judge of history.

This is only the bare suggestion of a few major points in the careful exposition of a pluralistic point of view which is supported by a wealth of concrete illustration and phenomenological description. This is particularly true of the author's studies of our human meeting and communication with the other, which underlies the whole work. But it is also true of his studies of suffering and patience, of the lived human body which is neither a thing nor a purely subjective principle as Merleau-Ponty sometimes seems to think, and of the condition of violence as a systemic condition to which man is always subject, and which should be of special interest to the contemporary reader. Levinas' description between *need* which seeks to fill a negation or lack in the subject, and *desire* which is positively attracted by something other not yet possessed or needed, is worked out in very original ways and grounded on a rich array of phenomenological evidence. The same is true of his suggestive interpretations of time, the parental relation, and the family which is not a mere step on the way to the state, as Hegel supposed.

The careful reader may find certain deficiencies in the argument. He may wonder why the original state of enjoyment is called purely subjective and even solipsistic when this separated self is clearly encompassed by the elements, and existing, in some sense not fully clear, with others in the world. He may seek for more light on what the author calls the "inner life" and on its specific differences from the preceding subjective condition. He may find himself doubting whether his experience of the other person is a sufficient ground for "the idea of the infinite" as the author seems to suppose. Furthermore, he may wonder about the strange asymmetry, the complete supremacy of the other, that the author finds in the self-other relation. He may be finally puzzled about some of the things Levinas seems to read into the parent-child relation. Other difficulties may arise for the critical reader.

But whatever his point of view may be, he will not be the same after reading this work with any care. It is the disciplined development of a pluralistic point of view that has not been thought through before. It takes account of a wide array of empirical patterns that are carefully and accurately described and analyzed. The book shows the lasting fertility of the phenomenological movement in the broad sense of this phrase with which we are now becoming familiar. But it is not merely

a reinterpretation of what has been said before. It is something highly original and, to use its own language, radically other. For example, though it comes, as we have indicated, from a phenomenological background, and without Husserl and Heidegger could not have been written, it is highly critical of Husserl and constitutes one of the most basic attacks on the thought of Heidegger that has yet been formulated. Alphonso Lingis is thoroughly familiar with recent French philosophy and with the background of this work. The original French of the author is not written in a popular style. But Lingis has given us a translation which is accurate and discerning. The work deserves to be widely read not only by professional philosophers, for it is carefully thought out by an original mind, but by intelligent laymen as well, for it is close to life.

John Wild
Yale University

PREFACE

Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.

Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives. In advance its shadow falls over the actions of men. War is not only one of the ordeals—the greatest—of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory. The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means—politics—is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté.

We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real. In war reality rends the words and images that dissimulate it, to obtrude in its nudity and in its harshness. Harsh reality (this sounds like a pleonasm!), harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its fulguration when the drappings of illusion burn war is produced as the pure experience of pure being. The ontological event that takes form in this black light is a casting into movement of beings hitherto anchored in their identity, a mobilization of absolutes, by an objective order from which there is no escape. The trial by force is the test of the real. But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. Not only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior. War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same.

The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves.

The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts; the last act alone changes beings into themselves. They are what they will appear to be in the already plastic forms of the epic.

The moral consciousness can sustain the mocking gaze of the political man only if the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war. Such a certitude is not obtained by a simple play of antitheses. The peace of empires issued from war rests on war. It does not restore to the alienated beings their lost identity. For that a primordial and original relation with being is needed.

Morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superpose itself upon the ontology of war. Philosophers distrust it. To be sure they profit from it to announce peace also; they deduce a final peace from the reason that plays out its stakes in ancient and present-day wars: they found morality on politics. But for them eschatology—a subjective and arbitrary divination of the future, the result of a revelation without evidences, tributary of faith—belongs naturally to Opinion.

However, the extraordinary phenomenon of prophetic eschatology certainly does not intend to win its civic rights within the domain of thought by being assimilated to a philosophical evidence. In religions and even in theologies eschatology, like an oracle, does indeed seem to “complete” philosophical evidences; its beliefs-conjectures mean to be more certain than the evidences—as though eschatology added information about the future by revealing the finality of being. But, when reduced to the evidences, eschatology would then already accept the ontology of totality issued from war. Its real import lies elsewhere. It does not introduce a teleological system into the totality; it does not consist in teaching the orientation of history. Eschatology institutes a relation with being *beyond the totality* or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present. Not with the void that would surround the totality and where one could, arbitrarily, think what one likes, and thus promote the claims of a subjectivity free as the wind. It is a relationship with *a surplus always exterior to the totality*, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as

though another concept, the concept of *infinity*, were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality.

This "beyond" the totality and objective experience is, however, not to be described in a purely negative fashion. It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. The eschatological, as the "beyond" of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility. Submitting history as a whole to judgment, exterior to the very wars that mark its end, it restores to each instant its full signification in that very instant: all the causes are ready to be heard. It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants in time, when the living are judged. The eschatological notion of judgment (contrary to the judgment of history in which Hegel wrongly saw its rationalization) implies that beings have an identity "before" eternity, before the accomplishment of history, before the fullness of time, while there is still time; implies that beings exist in relationship, to be sure, but on the basis of themselves and not on the basis of the totality. The idea of being overflowing history makes possible *existents* [*étants*] both involved in being and personal, called upon to answer at their trial and consequently already adult—but, for that very reason, *existents* that can speak rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history. Peace is produced as this aptitude for speech. The eschatological vision breaks with the totality of wars and empires in which one does not speak. It does not envisage the end of history within being understood as a totality, but institutes a relation with the infinity of being which exceeds the totality. The first "vision" of eschatology (hereby distinguished from the revealed opinions of positive religions) reveals the very possibility of eschatology, that is, the breach of the totality, the possibility of a *signification without a context*. The experience of morality does not proceed from this vision—it *consummates* this vision; ethics is an optics. But it is a "vision" without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision; a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type—which this work seeks to describe.

* We are translating "*étant*" throughout by "existent," reserving "being" to translate "*être*." It will become clear that the distinction between "*être*" and "*étant*" in this work alludes to but does not reproduce the Heideggerian distinction between "*Sein*" and "*Seiendes*."

We shall distinguish between "*étant*" and the less employed term "*existant*" by using the form "*existant*" to translate the latter term.—Trans.

Is relationship with Being produced only in representation, the natural locus of evidence? Does objectivity, whose harshness and universal power is revealed in war, provide the unique and primordial form in which Being, when it is distinguished from image, dream, and subjective abstraction, *imposes itself* on consciousness? Is the apprehension of an object equivalent to the very movement in which the bonds with truth are woven? These questions the present work answers in the negative. Of peace there can be only an eschatology. But this does not mean that when affirmed objectively it is believed by faith instead of being known by knowledge. It means, first of all, that peace does not take place in the objective history disclosed by war, as the end of that war or as the end of history.

But does not the experience of war refute eschatology, as it refutes morality? Have we not begun by acknowledging the irrefutable evidence of totality?

To tell the truth, ever since eschatology has opposed peace to war the evidence of war has been maintained in an essentially hypocritical civilization, that is, attached both to the True and to the Good, henceforth antagonistic. It is perhaps time to see in hypocrisy not only a base contingent defect of man, but the underlying rending of a world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets.

But does not the experience of war and totality coincide, for the philosopher, with experience and evidence as such? And is not philosophy itself after all 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? Does not the eschatology of peace, outside of this evidence, live on subjective opinions and illusions? Unless philosophical evidence refers from itself to a situation that can no longer be stated in terms of "totality" . . . Unless the non-knowing with which the philosophical knowing begins coincides not with pure nothingness but only with a nothingness of objects. . . . Without substituting eschatology for philosophy, without philosophically "demonstrating" eschatological "truths," we can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the totality itself. Such a situation is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other.* The rigorously developed con-

* *Le visage d'autrui*. With the author's permission, we are translating "autrui" (the personal Other, the you) by "Other," and "autre" by "other." In

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