The Word of the Other: Teaching Versus Anamnēsis in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE WORD OF THE OTHER: TEACHING VERSUS ANAMNESIS
IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE FACULTY IN THE HUMANITIES
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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Socratic philosophy represents a long-standing tradition within philosophy that understands the journey to truth in terms of the traveler's innate capacity. Anamnesis, maieutics, and elenchus each confirm that truth is not utterly foreign but is instead always within my possession or grasp. Other people, to the extent that they participate in my philosophical exploration, serve only to enable my capabilities or potential. They are not teachers to me. Nor would I need them, since I am always already in the neighborhood of truth.

Emmanuel Levinas's description of the "face to face" encounter between people challenges the adequacy of this model. Another person is not simply a midwife who leads me to a recovery of truth that was always within me or within my domain. Rather, the Other (Autrui) comes to me from a dimension of height or transcendence and teaches me. By this teaching Levinas means that I, as one who might claim truth for myself, find myself put into question. Before the Other I discover that my claims to knowledge are inadequate, even unjust, insofar as the Other exceeds, and thereby resists, my comprehensive claim on the world. The Other, in other words, reveals the naivete and the dogmatism characteristic of my familiar world, and puts me on a new and unforeseen path to truth.

This dissertation, by way of an explication of the category of transcendence, examines how the autonomous world of Socratic maieutics is transformed by the teaching encounter with another person into a heteronomous world. Heteronomy suggests my answerability to an order beyond the resources of anamnesis. This answerability, which Levinas describes as my responsibility to the Other, demands that we re-examine language not in terms of its systematicity or thematic capability but as the condition for all speaking whatsoever, i.e., my being called into communication. The word of the Other signifies a transcendent domain, a domain beyond my familiar world. It also makes possible a sincere life lived to the Other.
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INTRODUCTION

In the twin doctrines of anamnesis and maieutics Socrates gave eloquent expression to what has come to be a guiding feature of philosophical exploration -- its solitary nature. To be sure, philosophers sometimes carry out their exploratory work in the midst of other people, as is witnessed by the Socratic dialogues themselves, but others are not essential to the exploration itself. The philosopher, like the slave boy in the *Meno*, turns inward to recollect the truth, takes hold of the truth that was always within his grasp. Others are not teachers. They are at best spiritual midwives who, like Socrates, help and enable me to bring to light the truth that was always within.

Emmanuel Levinas, in his description of the "face to face" encounter between individuals, has argued that the anamnesis/maieutic model fails to give an adequate account of the nature of philosophical exploration. The truth that I seek is not simply a feature of my as yet unrecollected past -- it is somehow "outside" of me. Nor is another person merely a midwife who helps me remember the truth that was always within me. Rather, the other is my teacher, leads me "beyond" myself, as I make my way toward truth. In Levinas's view, teaching is indispensable to philosophical exploration because teaching questions the sufficiency of my recollective powers and introduces me to truth I otherwise could not know. In the "face to face" encounter philosophy is transformed from being a solitary quest to being the journey made possible by the teaching of the other.

Philosophical exploration conceived as a solitary journey presupposes that the one doing the exploring have some familiarity with the goal of his or her search. Meno brought the question of familiarity to a head when he said that we cannot seek after that which we do not know, because if we do not know it, then we cannot seek it (*Meno* 80d). If,
however, we already know what it is we are looking for, then there really is no need for us to look at all -- exploration is cut off entirely. Socrates, wanting to keep the philosophical journey alive, argued that we can speak of an exploration, but this exploration must be conceived as a path through terrain once known but now forgotten. The truth the philosopher seeks is not completely unfamiliar. Philosophical exploration would thus resemble a movement in which the philosopher returns home, returns to the place of familiarity.

Levinas would point out, however, that there is another strain within Plato which has Socrates say that the philosophical journey entails a movement toward the "yonder" (Phaedo 117c), toward the Good "beyond being" (Republic 509b). The Good is not reducible to a forgotten moment in the life of the philosopher, is not of the land of the familiar. Exercising the powers of recollection will not bring the philosopher nearer to the Good. If the sojourning philosopher is to make the ascent to the Good, to that which "gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower" (Republic 508e), then he or she will need to go beyond him or herself -- the power to know does not rest within the knower. But how can the knower truly go beyond him or herself? Levinas answers that this self-surpassing movement depends on the self being taught in a non-maieutic way. In order for the philosopher to learn about the unfamiliar he or she must come into contact with a teacher who can redirect the learner's focus and thus carry him or her to the "beyond."

This dissertation will have as its central focus the nature and possibility of teaching. How does teaching occur, and what form does this teaching take? The importance of teaching for philosophical exploration should not be underestimated because teaching, as we shall see, makes possible a knowing which is not naive but critical. If the learner need only turn inward to grasp the truth, what is to insure that the truth the learner recollects is not opinion or dogma? Whatever truth the learner claims to have grasped must be
susceptible to critique, to being put in question (maieutics precludes this possibility). Teaching, in its most primordial dimension, rather than referring to the passing on of information, signifies precisely at the moment when the knower's claims to know are put in question. According to Levinas, this moment comes to pass pre-eminently in the ethical relation of the "face to face."

By turning to a close examination of what Levinas means by the "face" (visage) of another person we will be able to gain a clear sense for how teaching is to be conceived. The face intrudes upon self-enclosed maieutics by questioning its self-sufficiency. Another person is not merely a midwife who serves to help the recollective process along. Rather, in the face of another person I am met by a "resistance" which questions the very basis upon which I would establish knowledge and truth. Socrates envisioned this second possibility when he suggested to Phaedrus that other people play a vital role in philosophical exploration: "You must forgive me, dear friend: I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do" (Phaedrus 230d). Other people, as opposed to trees and open country, have the unique capacity to resist the thoughts by which I would contain or comprehend them, thereby putting my thought processes in question, and this is why they can teach me. Levinas thinks that we can best understand this capacity if we recognize that another person is not merely an object who enters my field of thought or is a maieutic facilitator of thoughts, but is instead a being who can challenge the thought I would offer. In order for this to be possible, the other must not be reducible to what I think of him or her, but must also stand outside or beyond my thought -- it is only the absolutely foreign that can teach me. Levinas describes this standing beyond my thought in terms of the face's transcendence with respect to me. The other is "above" me in the sense that he or she is not simply a feature of recollective forces within me. In the face of the other thought is surprised and interrupted because the other refuses to be comprehended by thought's grasp. As Levinas puts it, when encountering a
face one encounters an excess to thought which is not reducible to the self-reflective nature of thought (maieutics determines all thought, including the thought of an exterior world, as self-reflective). From out of the "face to face" encounter, then, the possibility exists that my thoughts and my thought processes will be put into question, i.e., that I as a thinking being will be taught.

Language will be the form that the teaching of the other will take -- the face of another teaches me because it speaks to me. Teaching is inextricably tied to the other's ability to communicate to me. Philosophical exploration understood as a solitary quest would preclude the possibility of this communication. To be sure, philosophers may talk with one another, but their talk often dissimulates the transcendence of the other who speaks to me -- the other, if he or she is to be understood by me, must speak in terms that are already familiar to me. To the extent that dialogue presupposes a common ground or shared set of assumptions upon which I and another can move, I do not find my position radically challenged -- the other circulates within a shared and pre-determined world of meaning. Dialogue is, as Levinas would suggest, a foray within the land of the familiar. The speech of the other's face, however, comes to me from "beyond," from the unfamiliar. His or her speech is not reducible to the familiar terms of my world; the other speaks with its own voice. Teaching would thus make possible the critique of a model of language based on dialogue. Language, rather than being the sharing or participation in a universal system of signs, presupposes the transcendence of another person who speaks to me and calls me into conversation. This "speech," which is not resolvable as a sign, signifies as the other's approach to me "from on high." In the "face to face" encounter I am taught by the word of another which puts into question the truth apprehended and recollected by my own powers. And so philosophy, far from being a solitary quest, turns out to be conversational in the radical sense of the term, a discourse (discours) as Levinas calls it. One of the questions we will need to determine is the difference between this radical conversation and
To understand the nature of the teaching we have briefly described requires that we first be clear about how anamnesis and maieutics contribute to a tradition within philosophy that precludes teaching. Levinas speaks of this tradition in terms of the knower's autonomy with respect to what he or she claims to know. As autonomous, a law unto him or herself, the knower is unconstrained by the known, does not sense the questionability of his or her knowledge. Knowledge is grounded in the self-reflective, self-recollective power of the knower. Levinas describes this self-referential activity in terms of the knower's reduction of the external world to a feature of the thought process of the knower. The world is grasped, understood, appropriated to the extent that its otherness, its strangeness, is stripped away. Otherness is swallowed up as the knower integrates the world into a comprehensive whole characterised by familiarity, or as Levinas would call it, the "Same." In *Totality and Infinity* he writes: "The primacy of the Same was Socrates's teaching: to receive nothing of the Other (*Autrui*) but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from outside -- to receive nothing, or to be free" (*TI*, 34/43). The first chapter of this dissertation will focus on what Levinas means by autonomy. We will not treat the many doctrines or philosophers Levinas groups under this category. Instead, we will restrict our discussion to Levinas's understanding of the Socratic doctrines of anamnesis and maieutics since they, besides bearing directly upon the theme of teaching, give a powerful expression of the autonomy of the thinking being.

In the second chapter we will turn to Levinas's description of the human face as the possibility whereby autonomy is interrupted and genuine teaching inaugurated. The face, as we will come to see, does not signify as a moment within the knower's recollective grasp. Rather, as transcendent, the face disturbs comprehension because it cannot be contained by the comprehensive grasp of the knower. Much of our discussion will need to pay particular attention to the nature of this transcendence and its possibility. The transcendent signifies
not as something standing alone in some *Hinterwelt*. Transcendence, or more properly, "transascendence," signifies to the extent that a thinking being can find its thought put in question, can discover the nonadequation between the thought and what is thought about. The face inaugurates this excessive signification.

Once the order of autonomy is shaken we can turn directly to the question of how teaching and learning are to be reconceived. Teaching is not the maieutic art which enables me to turn inward, nor the mere transmission of factual information from one person to another. Instead, teaching signifies as the radical interruption of thought, as the moment when thought itself is put in question. Teaching, which stands in opposition to the model of anamnesis and maieutics, makes possible the philosopher's journey to the land of the unfamiliar, the land of the "beyond" which gives the knower the power to know critically. And learning, now no longer understood as recollection, begins as the potential knower acknowledges the transcendence which interrupts and disturbs. This acknowledgment, however, entails a reorientation with respect to what is encountered. Since the other who is encountered resists my grasp, is transcendent, the learner is no longer autonomous. The relation with the other is heteronomous, meaning that the learner finds him or herself in a position of having to give an answer to the one who teaches. Levinas describes this answerability in terms of my responsibility to the other, a responsibility which extends to the point of my substitution for the other. The third chapter will try to make sense of what Levinas means by teaching as interruption and learning as responsibility.

The third chapter will also introduce sections of Soren Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* because Kierkegaard, as Levinas acknowledges, has given us a profound meditation on the possibility of a teaching not reducible to maieutics. By laying Kierkegaard's account alongside Levinas's we will not only see more clearly how transcendence is vital to the possibility of teaching, but also how radical the nature of teaching and learning becomes in the face of this transcendence.
In the fourth chapter we will see why Levinas's account of teaching entails that we reconsider language in terms of the other speaking to me. By this speech, the form which teaching takes, he does not mean what is thematized or spoken through phonetic utterance. The word of the Other signifies beyond the signification associated with a system of signs or world of meaning. It would be better to think of the Other's speech as expression itself, the overture of the other person to me, his or her self-presentation. Language, rather than being simply a pre-formed system of signs communicants live in, would itself live from the face to face encounter in which genuine interlocutors speak to and teach one another. Language presupposes a radical distance between myself and another if there is to be a genuine discourse or conversation. Before there is monologue or even dialogue, there is the speech of the other to me which teaches.

In *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* Levinas deepened the analyses of language begun in *Totality and Infinity*. The difference between speech and what is spoken is now developed in terms of the difference between the "saying" (*Dire*) and the "said" (*Dit*). By providing an analysis of the saying/said distinction we will have another vantage point from which to view the teaching/learning relationship because the saying signifies at the point where the said (understood as thematization, the primacy of the Same) is interrupted. This interruption, we will see, has close parallels to the tradition of skepticism within philosophy. The saying, like skepticism, interrupts the said, shows us its insufficiency, by refusing to be disposed of or dissimulated. The fifth chapter will show how the said, as the primacy of the Same, harbors within itself the possibility for its own disturbance. The tradition of philosophy animated by the ideal of autonomy and typified in Socratic maieutics is not sufficient for the ascent to truth. Autonomy is already handed over to heteronomy in the teaching of the other.

Our investigation into the nature of teaching will reveal that philosophy understood as a solitary quest can no longer be maintained. Philosophy, if it is to be critical, demands a
primordial teaching, the radical conversation made possible by the speech of the other to me. What is more, it will embody a primordial learning which takes the form of the saying of sincerity, the life lived to the other. Philosophical exploration, now understood in terms of the teaching encounter between individuals, will find its inspiration in the other who calls me to responsibility. Rather than being the love of wisdom, philosophy will turn out to be "the wisdom of love at the service of love" (OB, 253/162).
CHAPTER ONE
ANAMNESIS AND AUTONOMY

In his 1957 essay "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" ¹ Levinas described in broad outline the nature of the philosophical quest for truth. Truth suggests an experience in which a thinking being comes to see reality as somehow distinct from him or herself. Philosophy begins when a thinking being realizes that there is something outside or separate from him or her which merits attention. The philosopher does not simply think; he or she thinks about something. From this rather simple, and perhaps obvious, formulation two interrelated questions emerge which are of interest to us: what is the nature of the reality which is distinct from the thinking being, and what is the nature of the relation which holds or joins the thinking being and this reality together?

The relation a thinking being adopts with respect to reality will have a great deal to say about how reality itself is perceived, and vice versa. Levinas makes this clear when he describes autonomy and heteronomy as two elements within thinking, two directions thinking takes on its route to truth. Heteronomy bespeaks a law (nomos) which is different or other (heteros) than the thinking being, thereby suggesting that the thinking being is

answerable to a law which is beyond him or herself. Truth here implies an experience which stresses the separation of the reality from the thinker who thinks it. This separation, or "absolute otherness" as Levinas calls it, is important because heteronomy signals an experience in which the thinking being is not only concerned with exteriority; he or she is met by transcendence. Transcendence suggests an exteriority so radical that the relation a thinking being might take up with it cannot encompass this exteriority. "Truth would thus designate the outcome of a movement that leaves a world that is intimate and familiar, even if we have not yet explored it completely, and goes toward another region (vers l'étranger), toward a beyond (là-bas), as Plato puts it." 2 In going to "another region" the thinker finds him or herself in a foreign place, a place unexplainable in terms of previous experience.

The difference between exteriority and radical exteriority or transcendence becomes apparent as we turn to Levinas's characterization of the path of autonomy. Autonomy suggests that the relation one takes up with an exteriority is in an important sense tied to the freedom of the one initiating the relation. The relation is determined by a law of oneself (autos). Here an exteriority is certainly encountered -- the autonomous thinker does not only think him or herself -- but in the encounter the radical foreignness of the exteriority, its transcendence, is denied. The autonomous thinker refuses the possibility of an experience which might in some way prompt a movement to the completely unfamiliar, to a region which could limit or impair the thinker's freedom. In other words, an autonomous self resists being answerable to anything but itself, and in so doing keeps all relations with exteriority within its control. As it moves from place to place it encounters surroundings

2 Ibid., p. 165/89. Peperzak has noted that vers l'étranger suggests not only the stranger who knocks at my door but also a foreign region beyond my familiar world. Here we can see Levinas laying Greek wisdom (Plato's Good "beyond being") alongside Hebrew wisdom (Prophetic call to minister to the destitute). We also catch a glimpse that for Levinas the revelation of transcendence will be tied inextricably to the appearance of the human other. This movement from otherness to the human other will receive more detailed examination in the next chapter.
which, though somewhat unfamiliar, are integratable in terms of the life the autonomous being has chosen for itself.

In refusing the possibility of an encounter with the completely unfamiliar Levinas suggests that the autonomous thinking being prefers, on one level, to remain the same, to remain within the realm of the familiar. To be sure, an autonomous being is not static -- he or she has experiences or adventures. These experiences, however, do not have the effect of radically transforming the thinker. On the path of autonomy the thinking being remains master over all that he or she encounters, and in so doing, insures that his or her identity will be maintained or preserved. An autonomous being chooses for itself the experiences it will have, decides what it will or will not relate to in the world. The path of heteronomy, however, with its radically unfamiliar surroundings, makes such mastery questionable. In an important sense, my ability to choose and decide has itself become problematic.

Levinas argues that the path of autonomy inevitably leads to the reduction by the thinking being of all that would be absolutely other to the Same: "philosophy would be engaged in reducing to the Same all that is opposed to it as other. It would be moving toward auto-nomy, a stage in which nothing irreducible would limit thought any longer, in which, consequently, thought, nonlimited would be free." Reduction bespeaks the denial of absolute otherness, a denial of that which is completely foreign to the thinking being. We can speak of this reduction in terms of the mastery suggested by autonomy in the following way: the autonomous self has experiences, encounters an exterior world, but the nature of that experience is such that exteriority is made to become a feature of the self's mastery. This mastery has the form of taking what is disparate, i.e., what is not identical to the self, and making of it something identifiable by the self. To identify something is to understand it in terms that are already known, to place it in a framework of the familiar.

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3 Ibid., p. 166/91.
The activity of turning what is otherwise unidentifiable (foreign, other) into something identifiable is the activity of reduction. In this reduction otherness has been dissimulated so that the self's freedom is not limited (assuming that I can control the things I know, or if not control them, at least know how to position myself with respect to them). The self remains master of itself, a law unto itself, as long as its experiences are its experiences, i.e., the experiences of an autonomous being have the feature of fitting reality within a familiar world. Otherness comes to have meaning to the extent that it figures somehow within the life of the free being, which is to say that the other is no longer radically other. The law of the self thus resembles the law of the home, an economy, in that the home (oikos) is the region wherein the self secures itself, finds protection from an alien world.

We can see now how different this otherness or exteriority is from the otherness characteristic of heteronomy. The heteronomous self is not master over that which he or she encounters. Instead, the transcendent other somehow carries the self beyond the security of its own world to the beyond -- a stranger knocks at my door and disturbs the tranquility I thought was mine by right. The land of the familiar, the household which the autonomous being works so hard to maintain, comes under the law of the unfamiliar. The heteronomous self, on the other hand, rather than remaining the same throughout its assimilation of the world, is radically changed or taught, as we will later say -- a stranger who enters my door redirects me and my home to another purpose. We can now return to our earlier contention and see how the perception of reality and the relation one maintains with that reality are intimately connected. Autonomy, which stresses the relation one has with reality in terms of the life of a free being, alters reality to the extent that its radical otherness is denied or dissimulated. Heteronomy, however, which stresses the transcendence of the reality encountered, alters the relation one might have with this reality because the thinker is changed by, or made to learn from, its radical otherness.

It is Levinas's contention that western philosophy has most often chosen the path of
autonomy in its quest for truth. Without going into detail for the many reasons why this has been the case, we can gain a sense for this tendency simply from the perspective of mastery: what is to insure that the mastery of the other over me does not end in tyranny, or at least alienation? Given these possibilities of tyranny and alienation, one can understand why a thinking being would want to maintain an insular stance to the other such that its otherness does not radically affect the thinking being. One might even see in the life of an autonomous being the instinct of self-preservation. The path of autonomy would therefore represent a determined effort by the thinker to dissimulate that which could stand over and against it as unfamiliar and foreign and thereby threaten or put in question its self-directed life. Levinas, however, would encourage us to ask what grounds this spontaneous freedom. By what right is self-preservation granted the highest value? We will need to return to these important questions later on.

Having briefly outlined the paths of autonomy and heteronomy we must now turn to a more detailed examination of autonomy, reserving an examination of heteronomy for the next chapter. How does the autonomous self come to reduce otherness to sameness, i.e., how does the radically foreign and unfamiliar come within the law of the self? As we have already noted, the autonomous self encounters an exteriority, but in this encounter the radical alterity of the exteriority is dissimulated or denied. Levinas gives us two ways by which to understand this dissimulation and denial. One is to suggest that the self is simply oblivious to the exteriority around it, does not recognize it as radically exterior. The self simply enjoys the world, is immersed within it, lives from it. 4 One could say that the exterior world is not fully and consciously understood as an impediment to my instinctual

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4 We will not give a detailed description of Levinas’s understanding of jouissance here. For fuller treatment of the themes of enjoyment and “living from” one can consult the opening section of Levinas’s “Le Moi et la Totalité,” (Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale 59, 1954 -- translated by Alphonso Lingis as “The Ego and the Totality” in CPP, pp. 25-45) and section II, “Interiority and Economy,” of Totality and Infinity.
life. The other way, however, moves from a self who does see the world as exterior, perhaps even as an obstacle that needs to be overcome. This second way, in which a self overcomes the exteriority of the world by integrating it within itself, more clearly demonstrates the path of autonomy because it presupposes a conscious and self-conscious stance with respect to exteriority.

Autonomy presupposes that the thinking being understand itself as free. As a law unto itself, this being assumes that it is not answerable to anything further than itself. If the self is answerable only to itself, yet encounters a reality which is beyond itself (this being a basic definition of exteriority), then the external reality comes to be viewed as an obstacle, perhaps even a death threat, to the free movement of that self. The question becomes, what is the relation with this exteriority to be? One can destroy it, thereby clearing a path on which the self can move. But if one does not destroy it one can also integrate it, make it a possession. Economical life moves within these possibilities.

Integration can take the form of transforming the world so that it becomes the arena in which the autonomous self can fulfill its inclinations or needs. Labor, as the activity whereby the self transforms and appropriates the world for itself, is the condition for the overcoming of alienation within the world, i.e., the condition for the emancipation of the self. 5 Here the world is quite literally remade so that it can find a place within the plan of an autonomous being. This applies not only to inanimate objects, which may become the tools and equipment that assist or make possible the completion of a plan, but also to people. Slavery would represent a possibility in which another person, who might

5 Karl Marx is representative of a tradition in philosophy which understands labor in precisely this way. We might note, however, that this labor refers both to the work of one's hands and the work of the mind. See Marx's "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole," (in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, ed. Dirk J. Struik, New York: International Publishers, 1964) p. 177. We will refer shortly to the work of the mind as the power of the "I think." Later on we will speak of Levinas's understanding of "dwelling" as the concrete mode of this power.
otherwise compete with me for the same goods, and thus be an obstacle, is forcibly made to assist me in the procurement of my own designs. Rather than the other being master over me, and thus introducing the possibilities of tyranny or alienation, I become master over the other.

Integration can, however, take another form. Levinas describes it in terms of the thinking being's self-identification. The autonomous being need not physically transform everything that comes within its reach, for there will clearly be times when this being does not have the need or the physical power by which to effect such a transformation. At the point of physical exhaustion, the autonomous being can lay hold of another power. This other power Levinas calls the power of the "I think."

We have come to associate the power of the "I think" with Descartes, for it is he, after all, who attempted to secure philosophy on the self-certainty of the thinking being. There is, however, a much earlier tradition which assumed a similar posture. In the *Sophist* Plato described thought as an interior dialogue, the soul's conversation with itself. The Stranger says: "thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound" (263e). As an inward dialogue, thought does not need to be answerable to an external reality. Instead, reality must be made to fit in with this dialogue. The external world is integrated to the extent that it can become a part of an interior dialogue. Other texts in Plato, such as the *Phaedo*, would support this view. Socrates says: "I once heard someone reading from a book ... asserting that it is mind that produces order and is the cause of everything. This explanation pleased me. Somehow it seemed right that mind should be the cause of everything" (97b-c), and then later on, "I first lay down the theory which I judge to be soundest, and then whatever seems to agree with it -- with regard either to causes or to anything else -- I assume to be true, and whatever does not I assume not to be true" (100a). These citations from Plato reveal that integration need not rely on the physical
transformation of the world in order for that world to fall within the law of the self. The world can also be integrated as it figures within a horizon of meaning; whatever does not agree with the theory of meaning and truth as determined by myself, I simply assume not to be meaningful or true. Levinas describes the freedom and the power of the "I think" as follows: "Every experience of the world, of the elements and objects, lends itself to this dialectic of the soul conversing with itself, enters into it, belongs to it. The things will be ideas, and will be conquered, dominated, possessed in the course of an economic and political history in which this thought will be unfolded." Autonomy would reach its highest fulfillment when all of reality would be encompassed by the power of the "I think," when all of reality would have submitted to a standard of intelligibility essentially formed by a free being. Is this not the dream of philosophy?

Autonomy attained one of its most lasting formulations in the Socratic doctrines of anamnesis and maieutics. Levinas is explicit in his conjoining of autonomy and anamnesis when he writes: "The 'I think,' thought in the first person, the soul conversing with itself or, qua reminiscence, rediscovering the teachings it receives, thus promote freedom." And again, "This is Socrates' teaching when he leaves to the master only the exercise of maieutics: every lesson introduced into the soul was already in it. The I's identification, its marvelous autarchy, is the natural crucible of this transmutation of the Other (Autre) into the Same." How does the doctrine of anamnesis contribute to a philosophy characterized by autonomy?

6 The various "genealogical" researches of Michel Foucault demonstrate that the bounds of meaning apply not only to things but also to people. The discourses of marginalized people, i.e., those not part of the dominant group, are subjugated or discarded as meaningless, insane, unintelligible, etc., and thus not worthy of serious consideration.


8 Ibid., pp. 167/94 & 167/96.
The doctrine of anamnesis, particularly as we find it in Plato's *Meno*, arises within the context of a discussion about the nature and possibility of teaching and learning. The dialogue opens with the questions: can virtue or excellence (*aretê*) be taught, do we acquire it by habit, or do we already possess it as part of our very nature? One can already see that one of the things being asked here is, what is the nature of the relation between virtue and the self? If one needs to be taught about virtue, then the relation takes the form of a distance or separation between them which the learner cannot overcome on his or her own. If, however, virtue is our natural possession, i.e., part of my familiar world, then it is clear that separation is not decisive or determinative -- it is just temporary or provisional. These two alternatives, which suggest the two paths of heteronomy and autonomy we have already described, set the stage for the dialogue that follows.

Socrates does not answer Meno directly. Instead he suggests that we should first endeavor to understand what virtue itself is before we venture into the question of whether or not it can be taught or otherwise learned. After a series of attempts to discover what virtue is Meno becomes frustrated. Each time he thinks he provides Socrates with an answer, Socrates replies that he has not described virtue itself, but some action or deed which might be called virtuous. One must not think that one has defined virtue itself (its *eidos*) if one calls an action virtuous because it exhibits a part of virtue (79b-e). Socrates, of course, is no better off than Meno. He does not know what virtue itself is either. The question becomes, how is one to strike up a relation with that which one does not know?

In this question we can see the possibility of an heteronomous experience. Virtue, at this point in the discussion, is unknown and unfamiliar. It is, in some sense, foreign, perhaps even transcendent. Its radical exteriority is suggested by the question Meno poses: "How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know" (80d -- my emphasis)? By putting
the question this way Meno seems to preclude the possibility of ever finding an answer — either we know what it is we are looking for, and thus we do not need to look in the first place, or we do not know what we are looking for, and thus there is no point in looking. The separation between the self and what the self is looking for is unbridgable. Virtue remains beyond, other. The implication of Meno's question is that virtue is not our natural possession, that if we are to know it we must be taught it. What is more, this teaching will be of the sort which will not only communicate something, i.e., what it is one seeks to know, but will also determine how one is to be related to that which was previously unknown, i.e., the teacher will orient our aim and our meeting.

Socrates does not leave the matter here. He wants to keep philosophical exploration alive, and so he recounts what he heard from men and women wise about divine things. What he hears is the myth of anamnesis.

As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only — a process men call learning — discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. We must, therefore, not believe that debator’s argument [the one Meno just offered], for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. (81c-e)

Anamnesis precludes the possibility of heteronomy because there is nothing which the soul has not learned. The soul's immortality insures that it has seen everything, meaning that there is nothing which can any longer appear to it as wholly unfamiliar — the seeker always has an intimation of whatever it is he or she is seeking. Anamnesis suggests a natural familiarity with the virtue Meno and Socrates are seeking. At the same time it precludes the possibility of teaching: "there is no teaching but recollection" (82a). There can be no teaching because teaching, in this case, would presuppose a radical distance or
unfamiliarity that needs to be bridged by a teacher, whereas anamnesis denies outright this
distance or unfamiliarity. What may appear on first sight as unfamiliar really isn't -- it has
only been forgotten. The task of philosophical exploration, as suggested by the opening
lines of the *Meno* and confirmed by the myth of anamnesis, would therefore be the
recovery of possessions that are naturally mine. That I do not recognize these possessions
of mine is due to forgetfulness and my consequent idleness.

Before proceeding to further elaboration on the doctrine of anamnesis we should
note that we need not understand this doctrine solely as a relic of a bygone, perhaps mythic
past (consider the talk about the soul's immortality and life in the underworld). Even if one
denies these so-called mythical aspects of anamnesis, one can still maintain the view that
the soul has a deep familiarity or intimacy with whatever it is it is seeking. The common
experience of having a discussion with someone else and coming to the realization of some
truth is often accompanied by the thought: "But of course! I should have known." The
phrase "of course" gives expression to this familiarity. That I "should" have known the
truth of whatever it was you were saying indicates that the truth was always already within
me. It merely needed to be brought to the surface via my recollection of it. T.S. Eliot gave
expression to this intimacy in his poem "Little Gidding." He writes: "We shall not cease
from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started /
And know the place for the first time." 9 These lines can be read as giving expression to the
heart of Socratic anamnesis as well as contemporary philosophical perspectives represented
by Hegel and Heidegger. 10 Clearly, Socratic anamnesis cannot simply be identified with

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10 Tom Sheehan has suggested that Heidegger's thought can be read in the light of
Eliot in "Heidegger's Topic: Excess, Recess, Access," (in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 41,
1979) pp. 615-35, while Mark C. Taylor has made a similar observation with respect to
Hegel in his *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel & Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of
the philosophy of either Hegel or Heidegger. Our aim has rather been to suggest that Socratic anamnesis, to which we now again return, is not so far removed from modern sensibilities.

The proposition that there is nothing that the soul has not learned is as striking to Meno as it is to us. Is it not presumptuous to claim knowledge of everything, such that if one can recall a part of knowledge the rest will fall into place, provided one does not tire of the search? Meno, quite rightly, demands a demonstration of the thesis. In the pages that follow Socrates provides a dramatic example of anamnesis by guiding a slaveboy through a series of geometric problems. 11 Throughout Socrates does not claim to teach the boy anything -- he merely asks him questions (82e). By answering these questions the boy comes to the correct solution of a geometric problem all on his own. He did not know the answer previously, and was not taught it by anyone in the meantime, and so we are left with the conclusion that he must have drawn the solution from within himself. The person who does not know has within him or herself true opinions about the things that he does not know (85c). The status of these true opinions before they are known is one of forgetfulness, and as we already know, forgetfulness is not the same as complete unfamiliarity. The knowledge that the slaveboy needed to answer Socrates's questions correctly was always there, was previously known. It merely needed to be remembered, recalled.

Throughout the exchange between Socrates and the slaveboy Socrates has not acted as a teacher. He has not given knowledge to the boy. Instead he has acted as a spiritual midwife, as a helper who brings to light what was already within. Socrates makes this claim about himself not only in the *Meno*. In the *Theaetetus*, for instance, he says: "I am so


11 Socrates notes that anamnesis pertains to "all other knowledge" and not just geometric knowledge (85e). Geometry is a test case for claims about knowledge in general.
far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom ... Those who frequent my company at first appear, some of them, quite unintelligent, but, as we go further with our discussions, all who are favored by heaven make progress at a rate that seems surprising to others as well as to themselves, although it is clear that they have never learned anything from me. The many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within" (150b-d). In the Apology Socrates says he has no knowledge to give to others, but he can "examine" himself and others as to what is claimed to be known (21-23b). We can see here that the maieutic model Socrates claims for himself goes hand in hand with anamnesis, for if the prospective learner is already in possession of that which he or she seeks to know, then Socrates must turn the learner back to him or herself. Both the doctrines of anamnesis and maieutics presuppose that knowledge and the power to know are within the one who seeks.

Each of these references to maieutics, however, also make clear a profound faith in the power of discussion, examination, question/answer to bring the one who does not know to knowledge. If we talk long enough with each other we will eventually come to truth because each of us is already in possession of the truth. All we need is the help of others to enable us to come to this realization. In the Meno Socrates is prepared to admit that even if all points of the anamnesis thesis are not correct (perhaps we should not assume the soul's immortality and its having seen all things) "I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know..."(86b). What motivates this faith in discussion? How are we to understand the power of the question?

One can begin to answer these questions by noting that Socrates's statements about anamnesis and maieutics come in close, sometimes immediate, proximity to the prospect of heteronomous experience (as Meno suggested it in his contention that we cannot possibly seek after that which we do not know at all). Faced with the possibility of heteronomy,
i.e., a radical distance that cannot be overcome by the learner, Socrates lays hold of autonomy, i.e., the possibility that I can venture to truth with my own resources. Reminiscence comes in response to the prospect, even need, of my being taught. Socrates wants to be able to seek, and it is the anamnesis thesis which makes him "energetic and keen on the search." But we must notice what this search is for. The search is not for the unknown. It is, rather, for the familiar, the knowledge that we have always known but had temporarily forgotten. Viewed in this light, Socratic  *elenchus*, the procedure of question and answer, bespeaks a fundamental confidence in oneself to retrieve what is already one's own. 12  *Elenchus* does not initiate a movement to the beyond, or the absolutely other. Instead, it keeps one within the household of the familiar. Socrates's questions to the slaveboy do not beseech him to go anywhere except within himself. The slaveboy's coming to knowledge will thus depend on his soul conversing with itself. Questioning, when viewed against the backdrop of anamnesis, does not put the one questioned at risk. The power of the question resides in the fact that it awakens, stirs up, true opinions that were always there (85c-d).

Anamnesis and maieutics as depicted here exemplify the movement of an autonomous being as we have so far described it. The slaveboy is not answerable to Socrates or anyone else in order for him to come to the truth. Truth is within himself, and so it is to himself that he must turn. What the slaveboy lacks can be filled from resources

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12 This confidence in the power of the question is also found in contemporary hermeneutics informed by Heidegger and Gadamer. To ask a question is already to have a sense for the answer, even if this "sense" is subject to the dialectic of the yes and the no made possible by conversation. See Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2nd revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, New York: Crossroad, 1991), particularly the section entitled "The hermeneutic priority of the question," pp. 362-79. John D. Caputo's discussion of Heidegger's hermeneutics, as found in *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), is especially helpful in clarifying the "hermeneutic circle" which states that interpretation already understands in some sense what is to be interpreted.  *Dasein* is a being ( *Seiendes*) such that it "always already" has a pre-understanding ( *Vorverständnis*) of Being ( *Sein*).
within himself. Anamnesis precludes an experience with transcendence. It also obviates the need for any teacher.

So far we have described the autonomous being's natural affinity or familiarity with that which he seeks to know. What we must still do is describe the relation this being has with an exterior world. Can it be characterized in terms of integration? We can state in a preliminary way that anamnesis and maieutics do indeed entail integration because knowledge finds its validity, if not its source, in the individual being who recollects — that which is known must be known in terms of a knower who has turned inward. Exteriority, if it is to have sense or meaning, must succumb to the interior conversation of a soul with itself.

If truth finally rests within the resources of an autonomous being, then the relation with all that is beyond this being must be understood in terms of that being. Levinas referred to this reduction of all external reality as the "marvelous autarchy" of the self. All that is unknown is a feature of the "already known" which is either invented or uncovered by the self. 13 One need not take the extreme view which says that the self invents truth solely from out of itself to insist on the autarchy of the self. Even if the self can be said to "uncover" the already known, and thus is not the originator of the already known, autarchy is exhibited because the uncovering takes place within the life of a being responsible to no one but itself. There is no place of appeal other than the self.

This lack of an external appeal is evident to anyone who has discussed the Socratic dialogues with another person. Socrates does not suggest that virtue, beauty, piety, etc., are the invention of the person who speaks about them -- contra Protagoras, man is not the measure. As these things are in themselves, their eidos or form, is not reducible to a person who might think about them. They are, in an important sense, separate from the fluctuating

opinions people might have about them. What is to be noted, however, is that the maieutic model does not provide the means whereby one can escape from the position which does indeed restrict the meaning of these eide to the one speaking or thinking about them. One could say that the "uncovering" of eide, while suggesting a reality beyond the self, nonetheless collapse this reality within the immanent perspective of the autonomous self. In this respect, the beyond has been dissimulated by a law which keeps the self turned inward. Whatever the slaveboy learns he learns in terms that make sense to him -- the "beyond" must be made to fit the "within."

We can better understand the nature of this uncovering if we turn to Levinas's 1954 essay "The Ego and the Totality" where he describes the beginnings of thought. Here Levinas states that the recognition of exteriority (as in the "consciousness of" something) goes hand in hand with the recognition of an interiority conceiving this exteriority (the self is "self-conscious"). Thought, as the birth of consciousness and self-consciousness, represents an interplay between an interior being "welcoming every exteriority in function of its own inwardness, but capable of conceiving an exteriority as something foreign to the inward system ..." 14 What is to be noted here is that consciousness is inseparable from self-consciousness. This entails that the uncovering of exteriority (as the activity of consciousness) will always be intertwined with the activity of self-consciousness.

One might now ask, how does this uncovering of exteriority also lead to the dissimulation of radical exteriority itself, i.e., how does my consciousness of an exteriority lead to its collapse within an immanent perspective? To answer this question we must briefly note the character of the relation between consciousness and self-consciousness. How does "self"-consciousness come about? One way to answer this is to note that a thinking being does not exist in isolation. It lives within a world of facts, even if these facts

are not yet determined as facts. This world of facts becomes one of the means whereby the self can maintain a sense of its particularity, as when the self defines itself by differentiating itself from the world around it. By differentiating itself from the whole it takes its place within it -- it is a self within a world of others. There is, however, another means by which the self maintains its identity, and this procedure is more closely connected to the dissimulation we referred to a moment ago. In this second way the self maintains its identity by referring to itself, meaning it acquires its identity from within itself and not from its place within the whole. 15 As self-conscious, the self is never entirely absorbed by the whole. It is rather somewhat the reverse. Consciousness, as tied to self-consciousness, situates or defines the world as it becomes a part of this self-referential activity. Self-consciousness does not constitute the world. Even so, the world does not have sense apart from self-consciousness because in order for me to be conscious of the world, and thereby identify it, it must fit within a self-referential activity that defines me. We can call this the dissimulation of the world because the uncovering which consciousness accomplishes is matched by a covering over of an exteriority which cannot signify on its own. The world is dissimulated to the extent that it depends on the self for its meaning. The world is not its own ground -- it is always already grounded in self-reflection.

In speaking of the autarchy of the self, its self-grounding nature, we have a means by which to better understand what Levinas calls the I's identification of the world in terms of itself. Anamnesis suggests that the site of knowledge, the already known, is the self. The self identifies the world, has knowledge of it, to the extent that the world passes through the already known within itself. In a very important sense, the autonomous self is the site of mediation between an external world and internal knowledge. How are we to understand such mediation?

15 Ibid., pp. 355-56/28.
Levinas characterizes much of western philosophy in terms of mediation (TI, 34/44). This is to say that philosophy, to the extent that it is of this mediating sort, provides the means whereby an external being can be made to fit within the interior life of the thinking being. An external being, if it is thought, is thought in terms of concepts or categories which come from the thinker. Concepts and categories are the tools a philosopher uses to approach what would otherwise be completely foreign. "The foreign being, instead of maintaining itself in the impregnable fortress of its singularity, instead of facing, becomes a theme and an object. It fits under a concept already or dissolves into relations. It falls into the network of a priori ideas, which I bring to bear so as to capture it." 16

Clearly, philosophy would not be possible if some form of mediation did not occur. We need to be able to speak of things in terms of their fitting within a conceptual model. If everything were to remain separate, utterly foreign, then one could not speak at all (language is continually grouping disparate entities under a single term, as when it names all manner of vegetative life a "tree"). Aristotle, who understood mediation as a vexing problem, one of the most difficult yet also necessary aspects to philosophical work, concluded that if we are to know at all we must know in terms of unity and identity, in terms of the universal sharing of common attributes (Metaphysics 999a). The question for Levinas, then, is not whether or not one should dispense with mediation altogether. It is rather to ask if mediation suffices to give an adequate account of what is so mediated.

The recognition of the insufficiency of mediation permits us to say briefly something of Levinas's method. Levinas says that the development of his thought "owes everything" to the phenomenological method (TI, 14/28). Many of his essays begin with a restatement of Husserlian theses as they refer to various philosophical problems. The fact,

however, that Levinas begins with phenomenology does not mean that he ends there. Many
of his efforts, as Robert Bernasconi notes, aim to show the limits of philosophical moves
so as to introduce us to a new way of thinking. By suggesting the insufficiency or
inadequacy of mediation, phenomenology, etc., Levinas hopes to extend the world of
meaning. That Levinas is concerned with establishing the insufficiency of key
philosophical moves is suggested by his questioning of one of the cardinal theses of
phenomenology, intentionality: "Intentionality signifies an exteriority in immanence and the
immanence of all exteriority. However, does intentionality exhaust all the ways in which
thought is meaningful?" Phenomenology, Levinas would maintain, cannot encapsulate
or account for all that comes to pass in the "face to face" encounter, and thus it comes to a
point of exhaustion.

Levinas acknowledges that various moments within the history of philosophy,
Plato included, admit that mediation is not sufficient when it comes to knowing all of
reality. This insufficiency or exhaustion comes to pass with an acknowledgement of radical
exteriority. It is often identified as the Good (Plato), the One (Plotinus), or God
(Augustine, Anselm, Kierkegaard and others). What is to be noted here is that the thinker
comes to realize that his or her approach to radical exteriority, an approach made possible
by concepts and categories of the understanding, fails as an adequate approach. In trying to
approach this transcendent otherness, one finds the other slipping further away the closer
one thinks one approaches. One must, finally, acknowledge that one's understanding
cannot mediate this transcendence. Radical exteriority remains singular, "impregnable" by
my understanding.

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17 Robert Bernasconi. "Rereading Totality and Infinity," (in The Question of the
Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, ed. Arleen B. Dallery & Charles

18 Emmanuel Levinas. "Beyond Intentionality" in Philosophy in France Today,
Even though Levinas would admit that these moments of genuine transcendence exist within the history of philosophy, he nonetheless is critical of the western philosophical tradition for the extent to which it insists on the supremacy of mediation (to see the truth of this one need only consider how authors who speak of genuine transcendence are received by the main lines of the tradition — they are often disparagingly relegated to the status of being mystics or theologians). Much of this criticism, expressed in uncompromising terms in the Preface to Totality and Infinity, stems from what Levinas sees to be the conclusion of such a philosophy — power and injustice (TI, 37-8/46). Mediation leads to power and injustice because it forces the exterior to become a feature of an interior thinking being. This is to say that the exterior being must become something else, must become a part of a general series or conceptual scheme established by an autonomous being.

Levinas refers to this activity of mediation in terms of the essentially violent nature of philosophy itself (TI, 12-13/27). 19 By this violence Levinas does not mean overt abusive behavior laced with malicious intent (even though in extreme cases it may be said to take this form). Rather, he speaks of it as the seemingly innocent activity whereby a foreign reality is forced to play a role, assume a position, within a schema not derivable from itself. The violence of a philosophical gesture consists in its setting up the criteria whereby something is judged to be this or that. These criteria, which are established by an

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autonomous being, judge irrespective of the thing to be judged (*TI*, 6/21). The sole criterion for judgment is to be found within the life of a free thinking being. 20 In the name of generality or universality or intelligibility the thing's individuality is violated in an act that does not aim solely at comprehension -- comprehension is but the first phase. Levinas writes that the I completes its identification of the world only at the moment when it possesses that world. "To possess is, to be sure, to maintain the reality of this other one possessed, but to do so while suspending its independence." 21 To refuse the other its independence is to prohibit the possibility of it ever questioning the one who claims it as a possession. To have grasped (*greifen*) the other within a conceptual model (*Begriff*) is to have silenced it, to have secured it within the law of the one who freely thinks it.

A mediating philosophy is a philosophy of the a priori. This philosophy does not deny the a posterior. Instead, it casts the a posterior in terms of the a priori. How does it do this? Levinas describes this recasting of the exterior world in the following: "This mode of depriving the known being of its alterity can be accomplished only if it is aimed at through a third term, a neutral term, which itself is not a being; in it the shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deadened. This third term may appear as a concept thought" (*TI*, 32/42). The "third term" provides an interpretive key which allows us to unlock the meaning of the reality which lies before us. If external reality remained completely separate,  

20 We saw this posture operative in Plato's *Phaedo*. Immanuel Kant's Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York: St. Martin's, 1929) provides us with a powerful modern version of the same theme. Speaking of the conditions for the possibility of experience, Kant says the "understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being a priori. They find expression in a priori concepts to which all objects of experience necessarily conform, and with which they must agree" (Bxvii-xviii).

21 "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," p. 168/98. When we come to our discussion on language we will see once again how the practice of forcing an exterior being (i.e., interlocutor) to play a role in which it sees itself as foreign lies at the heart of Levinas's criticisms of certain types of language. Monologue and dialogue dissimulate the transcendence of the other.
foreign or transcendent, it would appear to us as a jumbled mess, wholly without order. Reason, however, prides itself on its order -- comprehension would signify as the capacity to provide an ordered account of what it is one claims to comprehend. Somehow, therefore, the disorder must be turned into order, become organized in terms of a coherent conceptual scheme. This conceptual scheme is what Levinas has in mind when he speaks of a third or neutral term.

There are many examples in the history of philosophy of such interpretive schemes (Hegel's Idea and Heidegger's Being are two very prominent recent examples Levinas often has in mind). What is of interest to us in this chapter, however, is Levinas's contention that the erection of these interpretive schemes corresponds with the freedom of an autonomous being. Levinas says the third, which makes mediation possible, is not itself a being, is not itself part of the world one would either comprehend or know. It is rather the a priori means by which comprehension can take place. I approach the world through the third. What, then, is the inspiration for this means? Since it cannot come from outside the thinking being, it must come from within. Again, one need not see the third of mediation as the effect of a capricious will. But since it comes from within, it finds itself in the enviable position of encountering nothing that could limit it. The autonomous being, who is the ultimate point of reference for all thirds which make for the comprehension of the world, remains identical with itself as it ventures in the world, confident that nothing it encounters will shock or overwhelm it, because every encounter is mediated through third terms established by itself. "Cognition is the deployment of this identity; it is freedom" (TI, 34/43).

The process whereby the self identifies the world in terms of itself has the effect of reducing the shock of unfamiliarity which otherwise might confront that self. Another way that Levinas describes self-identification is in terms of the activity of representation. When a thinker represents the world to him or herself, the thinker finds a world which has been
made intelligible by categories or a schema derivable from itself (remembering that third terms are not themselves in the world). The autonomous self projects upon the world the categories that will allow the self to make sense of that world (this projection determines mediation as a priori). The world will thus always be in correspondance with the interpretive schema held in place by the thinking being. This correspondance insures that the self does not encounter the radically unfamiliar. The object which is represented will already have been determined by the thought which presents it to the thinking being. "Representation is this very projection, inventing the goal that will be presented to the still groping acts as won a priori. The 'act' of representation discovers, properly speaking, nothing before itself" (TI, 130/125). Put in Husserlian terms, the noema always fits in a noesis and vice versa. Representation typifies the autonomy of a thinking being who frames the world in a priori terms. "The stand of the representing subject manifests its freedom with regard to all exteriority." 22

To speak of mediation in terms of the establishment of third terms which find their source or strength from within is to highlight the integrative power of an autonomous self. The relation with an external world is understandable in terms of myself: "in representation the I precisely loses its opposition to its object; the opposition fades, bringing out the identity of the I despite the multiplicity of its objects, that is, precisely the unalterable character of the I. To remain the same is to represent to oneself" (TI, 132/126). Like the slaveboy in the Meno, the one who would seek to know does not need to go outside of him or herself. "The relation with the other is here accomplished only through a third term which I find in myself. The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism. Philosophy is an egology" (TI, 35/44). With maieutics all the resources that one needs to know are within myself.

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22 To the Other, p. 159.
Levinas further describes the autonomous being as one who is essentially "at home" with him or herself (chez soi). The primary mode of an autonomous being is "dwelling," for as Levinas says, dwelling is "the very mode of maintaining oneself" (TI, 26/37). As one who dwells, the autonomous self certainly leaves his or her physical home on occasion. One may, like Ulysses, even venture great distances from the home. But what is of note here is that even as one so ventures, the adventures one has are characterized in terms of the home, in terms of the familiar place where I am sovereign, in control. What is characteristic of dwelling is that in a sense one never leaves the home, because wherever one is, and wherever one asserts one's autonomy, there we find a home. "The 'at home' is not a container but a site where I can, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, free. It is enough to walk, to do, in order to grasp anything, to take" (TI, 26/37). The home is the place where I can carry out my own designs, irrespective of the place in which I might find myself. One could say that the one who dwells does not feel him or herself to be accountable to the surroundings in which he or she dwells -- the world is as it is for me.

Levinas explicitly links the activity of dwelling with the recollective powers of anamnesis when he says the following: "Recollection and representation are produced concretely as habitation in a dwelling or a Home" (TI, 161/150), and "recollection, a work of separation, is concretized as existence in a dwelling, economic existence" (TI, 164/154). What does he mean by "concretization," and what does it have to do with recollection? The

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23 Levinas makes mention of Ulysses in the Preface to Totality and Infinity when he refers to his life as one that is always "on the way home," i.e., always within the orbit of the familiar, always within an autonomous framework as we have here described it (TI, 12/27). In his 1963 essay "La trace de l'autre" (reprinted in En découvrant l'existence avec Heidegger et Husserl, and then translated by Alphonso Lingis as "The Trace of the Other" in Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) Levinas contrasts the life of Ulysses with that of Abraham who does not return home, who ventures into the unfamiliar and thus finds himself within a heteronomy.
home, as we have already suggested, need not refer to a specific, physical site. It refers instead to a mode of existing which then makes possible a physical space in which I can claim things as my possession. The concrete world, the world of objective things, takes its bearings, has significance or meaning, to the extent that it falls within the plan of an autonomous being who identifies that world in terms of him or herself. The autonomous being "situates" the external world not in the sense of creating it, but in the sense of ordering it after one is already in it. This is important to remember because like our earlier discussion on the a priori nature of integration, the self who dwells in the world does not invent the world. Rather, he or she transforms the world by making it conform to a self-determined order which is imposed upon that world. "The idealist subject which constitutes a priori its object and even the site in which it is found does not strictly speaking constitute them a priori but precisely after the event, after having dwelt in them as a concrete being" (TI, 163/153). The concrete home or dwelling does not automatically lead to the integration of the world. Rather, a recollected, autonomous being makes possible a dwelling in which the concrete elements of the world can then be integrated. "Because the I exists recollected it takes refuge empirically in the home. Only from this recollection does the building take on the significance of being a dwelling" (TI, 164/154).

What we have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that the twin doctrines of anamnesis and maieutics greatly contribute to the entrenchment of a philosophical position we have described as autonomous. The slave-boy, as one who has knowledge of all things, though in latent or forgotten form, need not go beyond himself to discover truth. Truth is always within. As such, the thinking of the autonomous self will take on several characteristics: a natural familiarity for what is thought (because it is already in my possession), the integration and identification of what is thought in terms of itself, and the pre-eminence of mediation and representation as the philosophical mode of exploration. The movement to truth is a movement accomplished by myself. Others are not essential.
CHAPTER TWO

THE FACE AND HETERONOMY

In the first chapter we saw that a principle effect of the life of an autonomous thinking being was the assurance that nothing encountered within the world could stand opposed to it as radically other. The experiences of this being were such that they always took place within, were circumscribed by, familiarity -- the identification of the world, its very sense, depended on its coherence or adequation to an interpretive scheme formed by or reducible to myself. Autonomy, as the law of oneself, served to insure that all meaningful reality could be integrated within the life of a free being. Socratic maieutics entrenched this freedom of the thinking self by turning the prospective learner ever inward. Truth, as the myth of anamnesis made clear, is always already one's possession and thus within one's grasp, provided one does not tire of the inward search.

The path of autonomy, however, is only one path on the way to truth. According to Levinas there is a more genuine experience of truth, one which understands exteriority not as a feature of my self-reflective life but as the truly beyond. On this other path to truth the traveler discovers that he or she is not the ultimate origin or reference point for determining meaning within the world. In contradistinction to the autonomous self there is the radically other which places my freedom in question, submits my law to another law, i.e., the law of the other, heteronomy. The path of heteronomy questions the sufficiency of self integration, problematizes a naive identification of the world. Heteronomy raises the question of the legitimacy of the freedom of the thinking being.

The traditions of philosophy informed by anamnesis and maieutics ground this
freedom in the thinking being's natural familiarity with truth (the slaveboy always knew what he was seeking, was always in relation with it, even if he had temporarily forgotten it). The many movements the thinker might make, if done earnestly and with a genuine concern for truth, will naturally lead the thinker to truth. In other words, the thinker need not fear that he or she is completely on the wrong path, need not see his or her movements as demanding apology. This confidence in one's powers and freedom is reflected in the fact that the movements the thinker might make always lead this same thinker back to him or herself. The freedom of the thinker is grounded in a somewhat circular movement in which the thinker, because of his or her intimate relation to truth, is always already within the reach of truth. The autonomous being need not seek legitimation for his or her freedom because there is no other source from which this legitimation might be had. One could say that anamnesis leaves the thinker free to be him or herself, free to move within an orbit that always already circulates around truth.

The self-legitimization of autonomy, however, runs into a problem. Levinas described this problem in terms of the critical essence of knowing. We said in the first chapter that a thinker does not merely think; he or she thinks about something else or itself. Thinking entails transitivity, a recognition of otherness beyond the thinking being (even when thinking about oneself there is a necessary transitivity because the thought of myself does not equal myself). This otherness, in turn, requires a minimal amount of respect, for without it there would, properly speaking, be nothing to think about. In thinking, then, the thinking being exercises his or her spontaneity or freedom with respect to that otherness, and in so doing brings otherness within the sphere of intelligibility or comprehension. What we must notice about this comprehension, says Levinas, is an initial resistance by otherness to the thinking being. What appears to the thinker as other is first an obstacle which is then to be overcome in the free act of comprehension. The identification of the world presupposes a world that at first is not identified, a world that stands apart from
identification. The activity of overcoming otherness, therefore, is itself always open to
doubt or criticism -- there is always the possibility that one's identification is mistaken.
"For an obstacle to become a fact that requires a theoretical justification or a reason the
spontaneity of the action that surmounts it [i.e., overcomes it in comprehension] had to be
inhibited, that is, put into question ... Theory, in which truth arises, is the attitude of a
being that distrusts itself" (TI, 80-81/82). One can read the history of philosophy as the
series of attempts in which one philosopher challenges the legitimacy of another to have
"overcome" otherness in comprehension. Philosophy moves from one charge of naiveté to
another.

One might respond that this description of the naiveté of autonomy does not
necessarily take us beyond Socrates's discourse, for after all he was very aware of the
shortcomings of our attempts to know. Socrates is forever insisting that when we most
think we know something, we in fact do not. It would seem, then, that Socrates is fully
aware of the doubtfulness of all our comprehending acts, of the resistance of otherness to
complete identification. Even so, and despite the claim of Socratic ignorance, it must be
noted that the resources of anamnesis and maieutics do not seem to be of much help to
Socrates or us when it comes to putting us on the path to a genuine or critical knowing,
because if learning is recollection from within, then the possibility of an external criterion
which can challenge what has been recollected becomes difficult. An external criterion is
essential here because without it my claim to have identified the world could not be
evaluated. Put in more traditional terms, if my knowledge of the world is not to be deemed
arbitrary, dogmatic or a fabrication, it must provide evidence for itself, justify itself. My
knowledge must justify itself before what it claims to know, i.e., before the otherness yet
to be integrated or identified by the thinking being.

The question of the need and possibility of justification would not be possible were
it not the case that I need to justify myself to another. If I only justify my knowledge to
myself, then my knowledge can still be deemed arbitrary or dogmatic. But who is the other that I justify my knowledge to? As we will see, for Levinas the other who demands justification is preeminently the human other. I do not need to justify my knowledge of a rock or tree to the rock or tree itself. But can we not also expand the sense of the other to include life forms other than the human, forms which include animal and vegetative life? 1 Does not the world itself, apart from my identification and integration of it (i.e., the world as genuinely exterior), have an integrity which can be violated by my claims on it? What is more, does it not have the power to speak to us from out of its foreignness and mystery? 2 In any event, and however one understands the genuinely other, criticism of what I claim to know depends on a radical exteriority that challenges or puts into question my knowledge. But if this criticism is possible then one would need to add that I am capable of being taught, capable of finding myself answerable to an order beyond myself, a possibility denied by the anamnesis/maieutics thesis which makes it unlikely that I could be charged of naivety. How, then, are we to understand Socrates's insistence that those who claim to know have got it wrong?

One way would be to suggest that the philosophical traveler, though headed in the

1 In asking this question I depart from Levinas's stated intentions. For an interesting and fruitful attempt to pursue this line of questioning see John Llewelyn's book *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). We will not pursue further the possibility of the non-human face. While this would be a valuable question for us to pursue, it is a complicated one and must, therefore, be reserved for a separate study. In this dissertation our aim is to understand the structure of a thought which would make possible the teaching of myself -- we are not concerned to delineate all the possible concrete forms this teaching might take.

2 What I mean here has been described by Barry Lopez in his book *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986). He writes of walking through the land of the midnight sun, marveling at the fecundity and lucidity of life in such an otherwise desolate place. On these trips his gaze would be met by a return gaze "as resolute as iron" coming from any number of the different species of bird life. These encounters, along with the sense of bewilderment occasioned by being in such a mysterious place, caused him, quite inexplicably, to bow as he walked. Lopez inclined before a world of life which took hold of him, caused him to justify himself before a strange land.
right general direction, has somewhere taken a wrong turn. Ultimately, the traveler knows where it is he or she is going (the journey through recollection is always a journey home, a journey to the familiar). The efforts of Socrates, then, aim to help redirect the traveler on the right course, a course which the traveler will eventually recognize on his or her own to have been the right one all along. Maieutic questioning, as we have already seen, does not ask the traveler to take a new course entirely, but rather puts him or her in touch with the path that was always already there. The power of the question resides precisely in this confidence that even if I have for some reason gotten off the right path, I can get back on. My wanderings away from the right path are simply the result of a lapse on my part. Given enough time and preparation I will find my way within the right.

Levinas maintains that much of the criticism against naiveté to be found within the philosophical traditions is precisely of this sort. Error is the result of weakness, a mark of the temporary failure to maximize one's potential. Given enough time, the philosophical traveler will banish falsehood and bring truth to light. What is to be noted here is that the perception of weakness does not call for an examination of the freedom of the thinking being itself -- it rather asks that this freedom be strengthened and perhaps refocussed. Philosophical reason or theoretical consciousness, would, as Levinas suggests, be born out of the awareness of this weakness (TI, 81/83) -- philosophy progresses or "advances" to the extent that it overcomes previous failings. Error, however, need not only be seen as a sign of weakness. It may also come to be seen in terms of the thinker's inhibited freedom (perhaps I have come under the sway or yoke of sophistical doctrine, have been chained down by doxa): "if I could have freely chosen my own existence everything would be justified" (TI, 81/83). 3 Autonomy was born with the refusal to let anything stand opposed

3 Levinas writes in "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" that western philosophy originates along with the assertion of autonomy. He asks: "Was not philosophy born, on Greek soil, to dethrone opinion, in which all tyrannies lurk and threaten" (p. 166/92)? Opinion takes over the soul, poisons it, and thus makes it other than what it ought
to the thinking being as other and thus inhibit or limit it. If I could be fully free, I would naturally make my way to truth.

This description of weakness and unrestricted freedom, evident throughout much of the western philosophical tradition (maieutics is exemplary in its refusal to consider the possibility that the freedom of the thinking being may itself be questionable), does not, as Levinas would argue, get at the heart of the failure to find truth. What if the birth of criticism within philosophy were not a discovery of weakness, but rather a discovery of one's own unworthiness, a discovery of the illegitimacy of self-grounded freedom? What if the foundation of truth depended on the shame of an autonomous being (TI, 82/83)? In order for this question to be heard at all, the possibility of a heteronomous order must exist. My freedom can only be revealed to be illegitimate if that freedom is susceptible to criticism or question from a source beyond myself, a source radically other. How are we to make sense of such a heteronomous order or even envision its possibility, given the seeming success of autonomy at accomplishing the comprehension of the world?

Autonomy, as we recall, insures the comprehension of the world by (necessarily) mediating or integrating that world in terms that find their source or bearing within the free act of the thinking being. We must remember here that autonomy does not deny otherness altogether. It rather integrates it within itself, makes it a feature within the familiar. If we are to describe heteronomy, then, it would seem that we must be able to speak of an otherness which resists the claims of mediation or integration to be sufficient. Levinas, as we have already said, admits that there have been moments within the history of philosophy which bespeak this resistance. His own unique contribution, however, resides in his description of the human "face" as the absolutely other that can put into question the order of autonomy. A description of what Levinas means by the face is therefore essential to be. The mission of Socrates can, in a sense, be viewed as the medicinal art which will purify the soul, strengthen it, and thereby put it on the autonomous path to truth.
to our understanding of a heteronomous order.

The first thing that needs to be said about the face is that it is not an object or fact of my experience. This is to say that the face is not reducible to my perception of it (given that perception requires mediation via third terms). Within the order of autonomy there is otherness, but this otherness has been stripped of its radical alterity so that it can be made to be a feature of my familiar world -- one might look at the physical face of another and evaluate it as large/small, beautiful/ugly, etc., i.e., evaluate it in terms of anatomical considerations which have the effect of taking out its shocking element. The otherness of the face when viewed from the perspective of autonomy yields an object or fact which takes on meaning because it fits within a pre-established interpretive scheme.

It is Levinas's contention, however, that objects and facts do not suffice to put the freedom of the thinking being in question because as objects, as items within a framework of meaning defining them as this or that, they are invariably and inextricably connected to their having been mediated. Levinas would say that objects, as objects, cannot speak for themselves because they have already fallen within the correspondance of a noesis/noema structure. They are mute before a tribunal of reason which dictates the sense they might have. The question of the legitimacy of the self's freedom, therefore, cannot come from a mere consideration of the facts. "The first consciousness of my immorality [i.e., my illegitimate freedom] is not my subordination to facts, but to the Other (Autrui), to the Infinite" (TI, 82/83). Heteronomy is possible only because I find myself in a position of answerability to the human other (Autrui), to the infinite. We find here a restatement of

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4 We must keep in mind here that Levinas uses the term experience in two senses. The first, which is made possible by the various forms of mediation, reduces all experiences to the experiences of an autonomous will or reason (as in Kant's description of the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience as such). The second puts the claim of mediation in question by revealing its insufficiency before an exteriority radically other. When we refer to this second sort of experience we will generally preface it with the adjectives genuine, pure, or radical.
Socrates's position in the *Phaedrus* quoted earlier which said that other people, rather than trees and open air, teach me. 5

Why the move from the other (*autre*), the world of facts and objects, to the human Other (*Autrui*)? An answer to this question depends on the possibility and nature of the resistance necessary for thought to be put into question, i.e., become critical. The inadequacy of thought to have fully comprehended the world has, within traditional philosophy, been understood in terms of a lack on the part of the knower. Given more time the knower will fully encompass the other yet to be fully known. From within this perspective, the resistance to thought to have fully known is understood in terms of the limited capacity of the knower, or it comes from other knowers who may see the world differently. In other words, the charge of naiveté which might be laid against a knower comes from the perspective of a potential knower. I doubt myself that I have fully known, or others come to doubt the knowledge that I have. It is important to note that in each case what is claimed to have been known does not of itself cast doubt upon my or another's knowledge -- doubt is here dependent on my freedom or the freedom of another thinking being. The foundation of objective knowledge does not advance beyond the freedom of the knower because the other (as object or fact) is always determined by the knower. This is why Levinas says, "The knowing whose essence is critique cannot be reduced to objective cognition; it leads to the Other. To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom" (*TI*, 84/85 - my emphasis).

The otherness of autonomy, because it always falls within the integrative field of meaning established by the thinking being, is not sufficiently other to resist the movement of integration. This applies to human as well as non-human others, for humans can and do

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5 Levinas asks: "if things do not resist the ruses of thought, and confirm the philosophy of the Same, without ever putting into question the freedom of the I, is this also true of men? Are they given to me as things are? Do they not put into question my freedom" ("Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," p. 168/98)?
fall within an integrative framework, as when they are forced to submit to the power of another. But with the human there is also a dimension of radical otherness, of transcendence, which, though within an integrative or interpretive framework, nonetheless exceeds all such frameworks. While the otherness of objects or facts signifies to the extent that it is contained within an interpretive framework, the otherness of the Other, of the human face, signifies in its refusal to be contained (TI, 211/194). What is it about the face, as opposed to all other others, which permits us to speak of its refusal to be integrated?

Levinas describes the radical otherness of the Other's face in terms of the idea of the infinite. "The idea of infinity, the infinitely more contained in the less, is concretely produced in the form of a relation with the face. And the idea of infinity alone maintains the exteriority of the other with respect to the same, despite this relation" (TI, 213/196). The idea of the infinite does not come from "our a priori depths," is not reducible to a recollective movement. It does not suggest an exteriority which at some later time, once I have sufficient power or greater freedom, will succumb to integration. Nor is it something merely "added on" to mediating consciousness, for such an addition would, as various dialecticians have noted, 6 simply mediate what is "added" in terms of a larger whole. Instead, the idea of the infinite signifies as the interruption or questioning of consciousness itself. The "beyond" thought signifies in the breakdown of cognition, in the revelation of the insufficiency of the thinking being to think what he or she wants to think. As Levinas suggests, the idea of the infinite leads to the "collapse" of consciousness and the creation of

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6 Hegel's discourse on negative and real infinity serves to make precisely this point. See his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences: Part One -- Logic* (trans. William Wallace, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) §94-96. On the contemporary scene Derrida makes a similar point when he says in "Tympan" (in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), following Hegel ("Hegel again, always" p. xv), that the other is, for philosophy, always "its" other, meaning the other is always appropriated and reappropriated by the philosophical gesture itself.
a new modality of thought. 7

Levinas's discussion of the idea of the infinite finds its principle context in Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In these meditations Descartes undertakes to establish the firm basis upon which knowledge can be built. This basis is found in the certainty of a thinking being -- *cogito ergo sum*. One would think, given this formula and its place within the structure of the *Meditations* as a whole, that Descartes would be adding his voice to a tradition of philosophy we have so far described as autonomous. But this is not entirely accurate, for when we come to the *Third Meditation* we discover Descartes's attempt to account for the idea of infinity, perfection, i.e., God. Descartes states that he, as a finite being, could not have dreamt up or invented this idea. "It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite." 8 By saying that the idea does not proceed from himself but from the infinite itself, Descartes suggests that he cannot account for the idea, either in terms of its source or its legitimacy, by himself. As Levinas puts it: "It has been put (mise) into us. It is not a reminiscence." 9

Descartes is insistent upon the fact that even if his mind were to achieve

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7 "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," p. 169/99. We will refer to this modality of thought later when we speak of moral consciousness or conscience (*conscience morale*).


superhuman strength it could not come up with the idea on its own. 10 The issue here is not one of the thinker's lack, or even of the thinker's inhibited freedom. It is rather the fact of an idea which refuses from the start to be contained or mediated by the thinker who thinks it. 11 What Levinas finds instructive about Descartes's account is the structure of thought which it reveals. In thinking the infinite, thought "thinks more than it thinks (pense plus qu'elle ne pense)" (TI, 56/62). Thought thinks an excess or overflow which itself does not fall within a thought (understood as noesis or representation). Levinas does not understand by the idea of the infinite an object so immense that the mind cannot encapsulate it. Nor does he simply mean by it an idea which exceeds the best of all our efforts to think it -- it is not "added on" at the limit of our reasoning capacity. Rather, we must understand the radical otherness of this idea in terms of the distance that separates idea and ideatum. "The distance that separates ideatum and idea here constitutes the content of the ideatum itself" (TI, 41/49).

How are we to understand this distance? Levinas says that the distance characteristic of the idea of the infinite is not the same as the distance between a mental act and its object. 12 This distance can be overcome in the representation we might have of that object -- the distance is bridged as it is made present to the mind via third terms of the

10 Descartes entertains this possibility when he says "I see no reason why I should not be able to use this increased knowledge to acquire all the other perfections of God." But in the next paragraph, however, he states: "But all this is impossible. First, although it is true that there is a gradual increase in my knowledge, and that I have many potentialities which are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God..." (Meditations on First Philosophy, p. 32).

11 It is, as Robert Bernasconi correctly notes, not entirely true that Descrates eliminates all forms of mediation. He presupposes the notion of degrees of reality to prove the existence of God, and thus mediates God in terms of the concept reality. Levinas, however, wants to distance himself from this conceptual scheme, as well as from the overall attempt to prove God's existence. See Bernasconi's "The Silent Anarchic World of the Evil Genius," pp. 258-59.

understanding. The distance characteristic of the idea of the infinite, however, is unbridgable, so that even as one attempts to think it, the thought does not contain it, i.e., to have represented the infinite is to have denied its infinity. There is here a surpassing of thought which may, as at the end of the *Third Meditation*, prompt one to worship or perform genuinely liturgical acts. 13 "But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object is in reality to do more or better than think" (*TI*, 41/49). Descartes, for the moment, acknowledges the insufficiency of thought to grasp the infinite, and in so doing surpasses thought.

To speak of the surpassing of thought is to suggest that thought does not found itself. This, says Levinas, is one of the breakthroughs in Descartes's thought. "The ambiguity of Descartes's first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation" (*TI*, 40/48). The cogito cannot account for all ideas, is not sufficient unto itself. "The cogito in Descartes rests on the other who is God and who has put the idea of infinity in the soul, who had taught it, and has not, like the Platonic master, simply aroused the reminiscence of former visions" (*TI*, 85/86). It thus discovers itself to be answerable to an idea beyond itself, a heteronomous idea.

One might say at this point that our idea of the transcendent, because it is an idea that we have, is already compromised, already falls within the order of autonomy. This is certainly a possibility. Positive religions, for instance, must always be concerned that their thought of God does not become idolatrous. The absolute is always in danger of becoming the possession of one person or group of persons. To prevent this possibility Levinas says

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13 In his 1963 essay "La Trace de L'Autre" (reprinted in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* and translated by Alphonso Lingis in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) Levinas speaks of a liturgical act as one which goes out to the other "without return," i.e., without expectation of reward. We will have more to say about this completely gratuitous action when we speak of the ethical response which is characteristic of learning.
that we must pay closer attention to the structure of thought which produces the idea of the
infinite. This structure reveals that the radically other, the absolutely exterior, is absolute to
the extent that it "absolves" itself from the thought that thinks it (TI, 42/50). To understand
this absolution we must turn once again to the structure of a thought which is more or better
than thought.

In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas highlighted this structure in terms of
the non-adequation or disproportionality of the idea of the infinite. "The production
[Levinas means by this term the ambiguity between something coming to being and its
being brought to light] of the infinite entity is inseparable from the idea of infinity, for it is
precisely in the disproportion between the idea of infinity and the infinity of which it is the
idea that this exceeding of limits is produced. The idea of infinity is the mode of being, the
*infinition*, of infinity. Infinity does not first exist, and then reveal itself. Its infinition is
produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in me" (TI, 12/26). By stressing infinition
Levinas aims to make clear that central to the idea of the infinite is not the idea itself, which
might easily slip into a conception of objects and facts, but the gap which grows as thought
tries to extend to it. Stated otherwise, the thought of the transcendent becomes idolatrous, 14
becomes an expression of an autonomous being's will, to the extent that it focuses on the
infinite as an object or representation and neglects the infinition which is created in the
thinking being as it learns of the disproportionality between its thought and what the
thought is about. The sense of the infinite as an object, as representable, as integratable,
recedes as the thinking being comes upon the disproportion and non-adequation between
itself and what it seeks.

This disproportionate movement Levinas calls "transascendence" (TI, 24/35).

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14 Jean-Luc Marion has given a lucid and profound description of this idolatrous
movement in chapters 1&2 of *God Without Being* (trans. Thomas A. Carlson, Chicago:
Transcendence, in contradistinction to the transcendent, designates the "way of existing" of the exteriority under discussion. To speak of the transcendent itself suggests objectivity -- transcendence is a feature of whatever it is we are speaking about. To speak of transcascendence, however, is not to specify an objective content, but to highlight the mode of otherness as definitive of what it is we are speaking about. The otherness, the distance that separates knower from known as the "way" of the other's existing, becomes the content of the thought which thinks more than it thinks. This is how Levinas can say that the metaphysician, the one who thinks the beyond, cannot enter into correlation or form a totality with the infinite -- the relation the thinker has with the infinite is defined by the distance or gap that separates the knower from the known.

We can see that this description of the relation turns us away from a position which stresses the participation of the idea within my familiar world -- the infinite is not reducible to an order established by me because distance itself is forever unfamiliar. "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 ..." (TI, 31/41). What, then, maintains the relation if it is not my freedom? Levinas answers that it is desire. By desire he does not mean the expression of a lack which seeks fulfillment -- it is not nostalgia for what has been lost or forgotten, and thus would figure as a part of my distant past. Contrary to the myth of anamneshis, which was explicit in its statement of a prior kinship with things, "metaphysical desire does not rest upon any prior kinship. It is a desire that cannot be satisfied" (TI, 22/34). It cannot be satisfied because it is defined by the distance which characterizes the modality of the idea of the infinite. This distance, as we have already suggested, is not overcome or bridged by my thinking it (the overcoming of the other in thought would signal the satisfaction of thought). Rather, in the thought that is "better" than thought the distance increases as one comes to a revelation of otherness which resists comprehension. "A thought that thinks more than it thinks is Desire. Desire
'measures' the infinity [or infinity as we said earlier] of the infinite." 15

The relation with the radically other constituted by desire deepens otherness, keeps it from becoming a part of my familiar world, because it focusses on the distance which constitutes the other as such. The transcendent other is not an object which can fulfill my needs (this is how desire is often, and according to Levinas mistakenly, understood). It is rather the distance produced by a thought given over to the non-adequation between itself and what it would attempt to think. "A desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands the remoteness, the alterity and the exteriority of the other. For Desire this alterity, non-adequate to the idea, has a meaning. It is understood as the alterity of the Other and of the Most-High" (TI, 23/34). This "understanding," however, is not akin to Heideggerian "pre-understanding" because the latter borrows on familiarity -- Dasein is always already in the neighborhood of Being (Sein).

Our discussion on desire and distance with respect to the idea of the infinite has shown that thought, besides its characterization in terms of identification or integration, can be driven by the break-up of such identification or integration. The resistance to thought is not revealed here as a lack within thought itself, understood either as weakness or inhibited freedom. Instead, the resistance comes from the inordinateness of what is thought, the "height" which increases the more one thinks it. We have now to turn more specifically to the face as the concrete possibility for such an inordinate thought, for as Levinas says, the idea of the infinite "occurs in the relationship with the Other." 16

The face of another person does not automatically give rise to the idea of the infinite. We noted this already when we said that the Other may fall within the order established by an autonomous being -- he or she may submit or be forced to succumb to


16 Ibid., p. 172/108.
my powers or comprehension. But what is of equal importance, we cannot describe the resistance to thought characteristic of the idea of the infinite in terms of a battle the other might wage against my power. The other person may resist my power as when he or she takes up arms against my force. This resistance, as the resistance between opposing powers, is not the resistance Levinas has in mind.

If another person could resist me by his or her powers, the possibility would always exist that I could develop my power to an extent where I could in turn overcome his or her power. Resistance understood in terms of powers works from a conception of lack or weakness as we described it earlier. The presupposition here is that if I could develop my ability, strengthen my freedom, then I could overcome the other person, reduce him or her to a part within my world. Clearly this sort of resistance does not lead to a conception of radical otherness. Instead it gives me a picture of the other as an alter-ego, as someone who is like me.

The resistance which spawns the idea of the infinite, a resistance Levinas calls "ethical resistance," is not characterized by power but powerlessness. "The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenceless eye, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely other: the resistance of what has no resistance -- the ethical resistance" (*TII*, 217/199). Levinas is clear that the paralysis of my powers, my inability to achieve a conquest over the other person, is not the result of weakness on my part. The murder of the other person is always a possibility. The resistance to my power becomes "ethical" when it comes from a dimension not reducible to my designs. This dimension, which Levinas calls the face, is not the same as the anatomical features of the other person which may in fact be disposed of or destroyed. This would be to see the other as an object or a fact.
Levinas refers to the "nudity" of the other so as to distinguish it from a picture of otherness characterized by "objectivity" -- as naked, there is no definite feature of the other that one might grasp or take hold of. One does not "understand" the face if one grabs hold of one or another of its features. This would be to see the face as an object or fact of my experience. In speaking of the face as naked Levinas wants to give expression to the separation we have already seen with respect to the idea of the infinite. As naked (Levinas is not referring here to anatomical nudity, which is itself open to objectification) and destitute, the Other is disengaged from every form or representation we may have of him or her (TI, 72-73/74-75). This disengagement Levinas calls "denuding," the stripping away of all objective content. It serves as the formal parallel to Levinas's discussion on infinition which reveals that the movement of a thought which thinks more than it thinks does not fix upon identifiable contents. Instead its gaze is fixed upon the distance between the thinker and what the thinker would think. Distance, as the content of the idea of the infinite, does not permit us to hold onto anything. Herein stems the paralysis of my powers. The more I exert my power against this distance, this nudity, the more futile my power appears.

Levinas links the distance of the idea of the infinite to the face because the face opens a dimension beyond the realm of objectivity or representation. In the first chapter we noted that in representation the external world is made present to consciousness via the mediation of a third term. The world does not appear in itself, but as one or more objects which have sense because they correspond to an interpretive scheme established or grounded in an autonomous being. If we can speak of the nudity of the face, however, then we are speaking of a non-objective dimension, a dimension tied to distance rather than mediation. In order for this distance to be possible the face must signify not only in terms of my representation of it -- it must have a meaning by itself, signify kath auto as Levinas likes to say (TI, 72/74). The face does not depend on my comprehensive act in order for it to have meaning or sense: "it brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my Sinngebung and
thus independent of my initiative and my power" (TI, 44/51). "The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of the ideatum -- the adequate idea [i.e., my representation of it]. It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but kath hauto [sic]. It expresses itself" (TI, 43/50-51).

One should not confuse the signification of the face in terms of itself with the manifestation of the power of an alter-ego. This characterization would understand the other person as like me in all respects (i.e., an independent center of freedom), and thus comprehend (represent) him or her in terms that are familiar to me. The other person, in other words, would already be mediated by myself and thus not be radically other. In order for the other person to be radically other he or she must come to me from a dimension which exceeds my capacity at representation. Levinas points us to this excess in the Other's self-presentation. "The Other does not only appear in his face, as a phenomenon subject to the action and domination of a freedom; infinitely distant from the very relation he enters, he presents himself from the first as absolute ... The face with which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face" (TI, 237/215). It is with the possibility of a face presenting itself to me that we find the concrete form of the idea of the infinite.

The self-presentation of the face differs from its representation in that it points us to the insufficiency of mediation. To be sure, I can mediate the face and thus make it comprehensible, make it a part of my world. But this mediation does not exhaust the meaning of the face. Nor does it acknowledge the peculiar nature of the Other's self-presentation which, because absolute, "absolves" itself from my every effort to present it. Beyond the meaning I ascribe to the Other, there is another signification which stems from the Other kath hauto rather than me. The Other speaks to me apart from my needs or resources, and in so doing does not conform to my autonomous life. "Manifestation kath hauto consists in a being telling itself to us (l'être à se dire à nous) independently of every..."
position we would have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*" (*TI*, 60-61/65). The Other "speaks" to me, and in so doing inaugurates a signification which has its origin outside of me. This speech, which will be the basis for our fourth chapter, does not depend on me for its meaning. In the speech of the Other to me the Other expresses itself, attends to itself as Plato says in the *Phaedrus*. "In a face the expressed *attends* its expression, expresses its very expression, always remains master of the meaning it delivers." 17 Though I as an autonomous being may be able to account for all other things, the one thing I cannot account for is the Other's approach 18 to me in his or her speech. Though I may look at the Other, measure him or her, I discover that quite apart from my intentions or powers the Other has already looked at me, regarded me (*TI*, 86/86). The face introduces me to an order beyond myself, a heteronomous order. The Other, much like Descartes's discovery of the idea of the infinite within himself though not reducible to himself, points to another founding moment in the life of thought. The autonomous being does not rest within itself -- it is already given over to the Other.

We must now ask why the expression of the Other's face constitutes a moment in which the distance characteristic of the idea of the infinite becomes evident. Levinas writes: "The life of expression consists in undoing (*défaire*) the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated. The face speaks (*Le visage parle*). The manifestation of the face is already discourse (*discours*). He who manifests himself comes, according to Plato's expression, to his own assistance. He at each instant undoes the form he presents" (*TI*, 61/66). Distance is overcome or bridged the moment the other becomes


18 In his 1965 essay "Enigme et phénomène" (which appeared in *Esprit* and was later reprinted in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* and has been translated by Alphonso Lingis as "Phenomenon and Enigma" in *CPP*) Levinas writes "The relationship with the infinite is not a cognition but an approach, a neighboring with what signifies itself without revealing itself, what departs but not to dissimulate itself" (p. 216/73).
an object. In order, then, for the Other not to become an object, he or she must resist my comprehensive grasp, must "undo" the form by which I comprehend him or her. By undoing the form the Other points out the insufficiency of my claim to have grasped him or her. This undoing, which is to be understood in terms of infinition, denuding and non-adequation, takes form as the simple possibility that the Other can say "no" to me. This "no," however, is not the expression of a greater power. It is, rather, the silent retreat of one who has exceeded my comprehensive grasp. The more I attempt to encapsulate or contain the Other, the more I find that a distance is created between myself and that Other because of his or her unexpected approach, his or her exceptional "presence." The Other's approach is uncontainable in that its source is always beyond me. The Other's presence is always already defined by his or her absence or departure from the representation which would fix him or her firmly in place. The modality of the otherness of the Other resides precisely in its ability to attend to itself. The distance between myself and the Other does not derive from weakness on my part, but from the revelation of an inadequacy within autonomous thought to account for the Other's approach, his or her expression, his or her self-presentation. The radical experience Levinas here describes is common enough: even when we have spent a lifetime trying to know or comprehend someone we invariably come to the realization that our knowledge of the Other is inadequate and falls short of who the Other really is. The Other exceeds my knowledge not because I am not observant or astute enough, but because he or she is absolutely different from me, even if he or she is in relationship with me.

What our discussion on the possibility of heteronomous thought has revealed is that the freedom of the self finds itself in a questionable position when confronted by the radically other. An autonomous being discovers that it cannot account for every idea in terms of itself. Far from presupposing, as the twin doctrines of anamnesis/maieutics did, that I am always already in possession or in the neighborhood of truth, the self learns that it
must incline to an order beyond itself, learns that it must be taught by the Other who comes to me. This heteronomous order, this teaching, as we will see in the next chapter, does not take the form of the discovery of a new content, a new set of facts which I can then assimilate. Rather, it originates in the revelation of the injustice of my claims to have comprehended or otherwise integrated the world, and signifies in the life of responsibility to the Other. Before we proceed to the next chapter, however, we should conclude our discussion on heteronomy by describing a bit further the alteration in thought which gives rise to a thought which "thinks more than it thinks." In doing so we will unify our discussion on the face as the inauguration of a new order with the process of thought itself.

In "The Ego and the Totality" Levinas noted that the encounter with radical exteriority gave rise to a new way of conceiving consciousness (consciousness being the principal modality of thought) itself. Consciousness begins with the acknowledgment of an exteriority apart from the living being. Prior to this moment the living being simply lives from the world, does not see it as other in any significant sense. We should not think of this being as wholly without consciousness. Rather, he or she has a "consciousness without problems," which means the living being lives untroubled within the world, lives instinctually. 19 The moment the exterior world becomes a problem, meaning that I no longer simply live from it instinctually but must work or exercise my will over and against it, thought in its fully conscious form begins. With the birth of thought consciousness and self-consciousness come to light -- the world is not only exterior, but I as a thinking being stand opposed to it.

As already immersed in a world, my opposition to it cannot be complete. This is to say that I do not stand entirely apart from the world. The life of thought always assumes a relation with the world. We described this relation in the previous chapter as the

identification of the world in terms of myself. This chapter, however, has sought to demonstrate that this identification runs into problems. The world does not consist solely of beings or things which can be assimilated or integrated by me. As an autonomous being within the world I also run up against other beings who resist my autonomy, and in so doing reveal that I am not alone. To be alone is to recognize nothing truly external to myself. But with the acknowledgment of a genuine exteriority there follows the recognition of a plurality of selves, a society in which I as a self encounter other selves who are not simply a feature of my self-enclosed world. Myself and the other person do not, as Levinas frequently says, "make up a number." 20 Instead, he or she is free with respect to me.

The discovery of this freedom takes thought understood as consciousness one step further. If consciousness can be understood as the overcoming of the external world in comprehension or integration, and the freedom of the Other, his or her self-presentation as we have described it in this chapter, calls into question this comprehension, then thought is given over to another modality. This modality, which begins with the recognition of another's freedom with respect to me, i.e., with the recognition of a heteronomous order, Levinas calls moral consciousness or conscience. "The condition for thought is a conscience (conscience morale)." 21

One must be careful about how one reads this term conscience. Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, in his Genealogy of Morals described conscience in terms of the unnatural and unhealthy process whereby a vindictive and hateful self turns inward. Unable to vent his or her energies outward, in the realm of history and politics, the self becomes reactive, turns


its energies inward where they fester and contribute to the development of a sick soul. 22 This description of conscience has its point of departure and its conclusion in the self -- I am responsible for my own sense of guilt or self-mortification. The voice that speaks to me and informs me of my evil nature comes from within. To be sure, we may think that ultimately the voice comes from a higher being, perhaps even God. Nietzsche, however, argues that even this ultimate guarantor of good and evil is the fabrication of a soul turned inward, a manifestation of tormented energies.

When Levinas speaks of conscience he does not mean what Nietzsche meant. He does not attribute conscience to an inner (tormented) voice. Rather, conscience is born out of the ethical encounter in which the Other approaches me, speaks to me, and reveals the inadequacy of my claim to have known him or her. The voice of conscience, if one can speak this way, is the voice of the Other revealing to me the injustice of my will. Conscience, far from being one more mark of an interior, self-determined life, bears witness to the encounter with a radical exteriority. Levinas sums up much of what he means by conscience in the following: "Conscience welcomes the Other. It is the revelation of a resistance to my powers that does not counter them as a greater force, but calls in question the naive right of my powers, my glorious spontaneity as a living being. Morality begins when freedom, instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent. The search for the intelligible and the manifestation of the critical essence of knowing, the movement of a being back to what precedes its condition, begin together" (TI, 83/84).

It would also be a mistake to understand conscience as a form of paralysis in which, rather than rising up to a life of freedom, I am continually brought down to my knees. To an extent, Levinas's description of the encounter with heteronomy does signify

in terms of the curtailment of my will. The hostility of my freedom which would usurp the
world is brought to shame by the look of the Other at me. This curtailment, however,
must also be read in terms of the "investiture" of freedom, as the opening for a new life
inspired by the Other (we will return to this in the next chapter). The revelation of the
injustice of my claims prepares me for a life which I could not have determined by myself.
"The life of freedom discovering itself to be unjust, the life of freedom in heteronomy,
consists in an infinite movement of freedom putting itself [or, "having been put" -- se
mettre] ever more into question. This is how the very depth of inwardness is hollowed out
... In this movement my freedom does not have the last word; I never find my solitude
again -- or, one might say, moral consciousness (conscience morale) is essentially
unsatisfied, or again, is always Desire." 24

Conscience is more or better than thought (understood as consciousness) not
because it is somehow more recommendable than thought. This would be to see the
difference between conscience and consciousness as open to my choice. One does not
choose conscience over consciousness, for this would be to have already reduced
conscience to a part of my interior life. What we have tried to show in this chapter is that
heteronomy, the exceptional thought of the infinite, exceeds the modes of thinking
characterizable in terms of mediation, integration, representation, etc., and places them in
question. In saying this, Levinas is making the point that conscience, as the concrete form
of the infinition of the infinite, is more fundamental than consciousness. Representation
lives from the self-presentation of the Other (TI, 186/172), just as mediation presupposes


24 Ibid., pp. 176-77/117.
an initial resistance of what is yet to be mediated. Levinas describes the fundamental nature of conscience beautifully as "the systole of consciousness as such." Here we find a restatement of the view argued throughout this chapter that the autonomous self is not alone, that it is always already given over to the Other who calls it to thought.

The description of heteronomy that we have here provided has shown that the experience of truth is radicalized in the encounter with the Other. Radical experience, as the experience which does not correspond to the absorption or integration of the world in terms of a priori ideas, signifies in the overflowing of my ideas, as the critique of my naive appropriation of the world. We find here the beginnings of a new understanding of philosophy itself: "if the essence of philosophy consists in going back from all certainties toward a principle, if it lives from critique, the face of the Other would be the starting point of philosophy." In the next chapter we will develop the sense of this critique in terms of the teaching which is made possible by the approach of the Other.

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25 Bernasconi puts the matter as follows: "The represented, the present, as a fact, already belongs to the past prior to its representation." See his "Rereading Totality and Infinity," p. 31.

26 Ibid., p. 177/118.

27 Ibid., p. 178/119.
CHAPTER THREE
RECONCEIVING THE
TEACHING/LEARNING RELATIONSHIP

Our analyses of autonomy and heteronomy have yielded two differing conceptions of the experience of truth. In terms of autonomy, the self is already in possession of whatever it is he or she seeks to know, even if the self is not fully aware of it (he or she may have temporarily forgotten the truth). All that is needed for the full encounter with truth is that the intimacy or familiarity between the knower and what would be known be made explicit. Socratic maieutics, as typified in many of the Platonic dialogues, particularly the Meno, is the method through which this can happen. Through a process of question and answer the truth that was buried deep within me can be brought to the surface, to the full light of knowing.

Heteronomy questioned the sufficiency of this model. The self, when met by the face of another person, runs against an exteriority which cannot be accounted for in terms of its own resources. Rather than being familiar with what is to be known, the self discovers itself to be in a relation with a radical otherness and distance which is not bridgeable by itself, which cannot be accounted for or explained in terms of itself. Faced with this situation, the self now for the first time discovers itself to be responsible to an order beyond itself. The question which the Other poses to me does not find its answer in the recollective movement of my soul conversing with itself. Truth is somehow beyond the sphere of the powers of the autonomous self.
These two descriptions of the experience of truth afford us an opportunity in which to reconsider the nature of teaching and learning. The prospect of a heteronomous order makes possible a conception of teaching and learning which is not maieutic and recollective. Our discussion will focus on the following three questions: how does teaching occur? what is the character of a teacher? and, what is learned? It would seem that the order of autonomy would preclude the possibility of teaching altogether simply because as autonomous, I am a law unto myself. Other people would be superflous. But if we return to the example of the slaveboy in the *Meno* we can see that the model of autonomy does make use of another person -- learning as recollection takes place within the context of the questioning of another person. Socrates, as the paradigmatic spiritual midwife, leads the boy to a recovery of knowledge via elenchus. It would seem, then, that Socrates could justifiably be called a teacher. His presence makes it possible for the boy to know something that he might otherwise never have known. And yet, Socrates claims that after looking long and hard he has not found a single teacher among the people of Athens (89e). How are we to understand the difference between a midwife and a teacher since, it would seem, it is so easy to confuse the two? 1

We suggested in the first chapter that one of the defining features of a midwife is that he or she does not give the prospective learner anything that he or she did not already have (even if that possession lay buried beneath forgetfullness). Socrates asks questions. He does not have truth or knowledge ready-made which he can then pass on to others. In his *Apology* Socrates speaks eloquently of the limits of his task. Far from claiming wisdom for himself, he goes from person to person who would claim such wisdom to test whether

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1 This confusion continues to the present day. We call teachers those who "enable" their students to be the best they can be. A "successful" teacher is one who can create the conditions in which the student can stand independently on his or her own. Insofar as these descriptions of teaching sound remarkably Socratic, perhaps it would be wise if so-called teachers were to call themselves by their real names.
or not they do in fact know what they purport to know. By asking these questions Socrates admits that it may look as though he himself may have the answers. The fact of the matter, however, is that he does not (21b-23b). If Socrates can claim any wisdom for himself at all, it is the wisdom that he knows that he does not know.

Since Socrates does not have any knowledge of his own to impart to others, it is clear, then, that whatever the slaveboy learns cannot come from Socrates but must come from within. Even so, the boy's recollection of truth in some sense depends on Socrates or, if not Socrates, someone else who can ask the appropriate questions (we can presume from the dialogue that the slaveboy would not have come to a knowledge of various geometric truths all by himself). Even if a prospective learner retreats to a life of solitary contemplation, the path to truth is never solely in terms of itself -- the path is always guided and framed by the (remembered) questions of others, which may then become personal questions. The point we are trying to make here is that the path of learning typical of maieutics is essentially connected to the questioning of others. The autonomous being, though a law unto him or herself, is not a completely isolated being.

Having said this, however, we must be careful to note the character of the questioning the other provides. In the questioning characteristic of elenchus the learner is asked to give a response to certain matters, but the learner in him or herself is not answerable to the one giving the question. The learner is questioned but is itself not put into question. The autonomous learner receives the questions of the other person in such a way that they fall within an order determined by itself. This is to say that the learner must have the ears with which to hear, i.e., be open to hearing the question as interesting and worthwhile of one's attention. A question can fall upon deaf ears, as was the case in the questioning of Socrates to Meno. When Meno asks to be taught that there is no teaching (81e), he gives evidence to having not only misunderstood Socrates, but also, he shows that his own interior being is not prepared to handle the questioning which might lead him
to the recollection of truth -- i.e., he is not ready to learn. The interior order, which needs to be in place if elenchus is to bear fruit, was not present in Meno as it was in the slaveboy.

Our description of maieutics reveals that learning depends on one going within oneself to reclaim the truth that was always there. But what is equally as important, given that learning proceeds along a path of questioning, is that one be (self) prepared to receive the questions of another person such that they do in fact lead to this recollection. The sense of this is made evident by the common observation that one cannot force another to learn anything. He or she must be "ready," provide his or her own conditions, to learn. The process by which an autonomous being mediates the world can be said to depend on this prior condition of the learner being ready to learn. Socrates, or anyone else, could not impart this readiness to learn. It too must come from within. To be sure, another person may stimulate an interest in me and thus seem to be giving me something that was not previously there. But upon closer examination it becomes apparent that the interest was always there; it was simply latent. The other person, in other words, is the occasion for my self-discovery. And so, even though the learner might depend on others to ask the appropriate question, stimulate a hidden interest, his or her actual learning (as recollection) depends on a prior self-preparation to "hear" these questions or respond to particular stimuli. The structure of learning is thus very much like the structure we saw with respect to the possibility of knowledge itself. The learner does not deny exteriority, i.e., the presence of another person along the path to knowledge. But as autonomous, the role of the other is determined beforehand by the learner. One could say, learning is possible because of the resources or potential of the learner and his or her preparedness to hear or not hear the other. Learning, as defined by the maieutic tradition, is defined by the relation I have with myself.

The experience of heteronomy asks us to consider the relation with another person differently. The Other does not simply turn us inward and facilitate a process of self-
discovery. Nor is the Other encountered in terms established by myself -- the face comes to me from beyond myself. Heteronomy introduces the possibility that I am not only questioned by another, but that I am also put into question. As one put into question, my resources as well as my preparedness come under critique -- the Other resists my appropriation of him or her, and in so doing reveals the insufficiency of my appropriative gesture. In the difference between being questioned (as in maieutics) and being put into question (as in the Other's approach), we will find an opportunity in which to reconceive the very nature of teaching.

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes teaching in the following way:

The condition for theoretical truth and error is the word (*parole*) 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 (*discours*) is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics. It comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced. (*TI*, 43/51)

There are several things within this short passage that deserve our attention. Since we have already described in some detail how it is that the Other overflows the thought I would contain him or her with, as when we spoke of the infinition of the infinite, we will focus principally on the nature of the welcome or reception of the Other as the condition for teaching. After clarifying the nature of teaching and the teacher we will turn to the sense of learning which develops out of this reception, a sense Levinas describes as the investiture of my freedom in my responsibility to the Other. We will turn to a discussion on conversation or discourse in the following two chapters.

In the previous chapter we outlined the structure of a thought that thinks more than it thinks in terms of the face which approaches me. What was vital about this description
was the discovery that thought itself could not contain or account for the idea of the infinite. The infinitive of the infinite, which was the very content of the idea, signified in the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of my thought to think it. The face was the concrete expression of this possibility in the sense that the Other approaches me, looks at me and speaks to me. His or her approach cannot finally be determined by me, cannot be made to figure solely as a feature of my self-reflective life. To be sure, I may attempt to reign in the Other, as when I claim to comprehend him or her. But this comprehension must face the resistance of the Other who silently refuses it. The Other can say "no" to me, and insofar as he or she does, my claim to know has been revealed to be insufficient, even unjust.

The reception or welcome Levinas speaks of when he considers the nature of teaching does not refer us to comprehension as we have just described it. Nor is this reception to be clarified in terms of my preparedness for the Other. The reason for this is that comprehension and preparedness understand the Other's approach in terms of the autonomous self, in terms of the Other's adequation to the thought which thinks him or her. Teaching cannot occur within either of these frameworks because in each case the Other has been reduced to a feature of my life -- either I "know" the Other and thus do not need to learn anything from him or her, or I am not yet ready for the Other and thus cannot learn anything from him or her (if I were ready, then the Other would give me what I already had within myself in a state of potency). Teaching, if it is not to be confused with maieutics, must entail a movement in which my knowledge and my state of preparedness are exceeded. In other words, teaching introduces me to the completely new, to that which is beyond myself.

We can speak of the approach of the Other as a revelation of the new. What is it for something to be new? In a 1980 essay entitled "The Old and the New" Levinas noted that we are easily mistaken in calling something new. Our error resides in the fact that we do not fully appreciate how consciousness, because of its mediating work, dissimulates
newness. "Rationality is the encompassing of the new: an attitude taken in its regard, the negation of the difference which at first seemed to separate it from the old. To think the new is to raise it to the True. Assimilating and encompassing thought goes beyond everything peremptory. Time is not a succession of novelties which are made old and aged, but a history where everything comes and goes into a time progressively constituting the truth." 2 In this passage Levinas discusses the problem of newness within the context of time. The sequence of time is not simply the progression of one new event following another. Rather, each event assumes a position within a sequence or order that is preestablished and makes possible the assimilation of that event. Without this assimilation the event would be meaningless, could not become part of a history. Levinas refers to this possibility whereby each event assumes a position within a narrative or chronological structure the "synchrony" of time.

The synchrony of time which assures that each event falls within a determined order parallels the discussion of anamnesis we offered in the first chapter. 3 Synchrony mediates each supposedly new event within an order by situating it with respect to other events -- each moment assumes significance in the light of these other moments. In like manner, consciousness, as in the power of representation, mediates exteriority in (third) terms that are established by myself. "Intelligibility and representation are equivalent notions; an exteriority surrendering in clarity and without immodesty its whole being to thought, that is, totally present without in principle anything shocking thought, without thought ever feeling itself to be indiscreet. Clarity is the disappearance of what could shock" (TI,


3 "Reminiscence and imagination secure the synchrony and unity of what, in experience bound to time, was doomed to the difference between the old and the new. The new as modern is the fully arranged state of the self and world" (*Ibid.*, p. 125). We have described this "arrangement" as an arrangement characteristic of autonomy.
Synchrony, because it is time that is ordered, does not prohibit progression. It does, however, deny the possibility of an event that is entirely shocking or new because the new, if it were entirely new, would interrupt the order which constitutes synchrony. It simply would not fit in with other meaningful events and thus be beyond the pale of meaning. This would not be the mild interruption which could again find its place within a chronology. Instead, the sense of chronology itself would become questionable with the advent of the utterly new. The new would signify as, what we will later describe, a "supreme anachronism."

How, then, are we to speak of the new, particularly since we have suggested that teaching occurs in the reception of the new? We must begin by noting that the model of maieutics, which turns the prospective learner inwards, understands reception as either a retrieval of old knowledge that was buried deep within, or a mediation of the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. Whatever comes to the mind of the knower comes to it via a representation in which the noema already corresponds to the noesis. The encounter with exteriority is not an encounter with newness because whatever it is that is encountered is already filtered through the structures of consciousness which make it possible for us to have an experience of it. In other words, the new, the moment it comes in contact with an autonomous will, is already reconstituted such that it can become part of an intelligible world. "To represent is not only to render present 'anew' (à nouveau); it is to reduce to the present an actual perception which flows on. To represent is not to reduce a past fact to an actual image but to reduce to the instantaneousness of thought everything that seems independent of it; it is in this that representation is constitutive" (TI, 133/127).

In order for the new to signify as new a "thought would be necessary that would no longer be constructed as a relation linking the thinker to the thought, or in this thought a relation without correlatives would be necessary, a thought not compelled by the rigorous correspondance between noesis and noema, not compelled by the adequation of the visible
to the aim to which it would respond in the intuition of truth; a thought would be necessary where the very metaphors of vision and aim would no longer be legitimate." 4 The nature of representation, however, is that it does not aim beyond itself in any radical sense because its aim at exteriority is always an aim through terms established by itself. "Representation is this very projection, inventing the goal that will be presented to the still groping acts won a priori. The 'act' of representation discovers, properly speaking, nothing before itself" (TI, 130/125) In order for the new to signify the thinking being must be capable of thinking the idea of the infinite, or expressed more concretely, be capable of welcoming the Other.

How are we to understand this welcome? It is clear that the reception or welcome of otherness can take varying forms. I can, for instance, receive the other in terms of a pre-understanding of what the other represents. This, as we have already said, is not the sort of reception Levinas has in mind when he speaks of teaching, because reception in terms of a pre-understanding does not receive the other itself (kath hauto) -- it receives a mediated other, which is to say a familiar other. Teaching takes us beyond the old, beyond the familiar. This is why Levinas says "The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me..." (TI, 71/73). What is received is not received in terms of anything else. To welcome the Other is not to mediate the Other.

We can better understand the unmediated approach of the Other if we speak of this approach as revelation. By revelation Levinas does not mean the data of positive religions. This, first of all, would not accord with his statements about the idea of the infinite, whose content is not something which first exists and then is revealed, but rather is the infinition of the infinite, the revelation of the disproportion between the thought and what the thought purports to be about. Revelation, as with the face, is not to be understood in terms of

4 Ibid., p. 134.
objectivity (TI, 41/49). Similarly, revelation is not disclosure for in disclosing something one places it within a framework of meaning. "To disclose by science and by art is essentially to clothe the elements with signification, to go beyond perception. To disclose a thing is to clarify it by forms: to find for it a place in the whole by apperceiving its function or its beauty" (TI, 72/74). The face of the Other is not clothed but naked. As naked it resists the clarification or comprehension which would hold it within a projected and thus alien framework.

If we are to think of revelation as it relates to teaching it must be in terms of the "epiphany" of the Other's face. This epiphany is not a manifestation of otherness in terms of a representation of it. It is rather the self-presentation of the Other who attends to his or her own presentation without my help -- the Other comes to me without reference to my autonomous life. "Ideas instruct me coming from the master who presents them to me: who puts them in question; the objectification and theme upon which objective knowledge opens already rest on teaching ... The object is presented (s'offre) when we have welcomed an interlocutor" (TI, 66/69). A teacher is one whose "presence," understood now in the very particular sense of excess or the overflowing of representation, is essential to the possibility of teaching, because it is his or her presence which constitutes a resistance to or interruption of the will of an autonomous being. If the other person were only an occasion for my self-discovery, then his or her presence would not be vital -- I could just as easily discover latent truth from a representation of the other. But for Levinas the Other is not an object: "the first teaching of the teacher is his very presence as teacher from which representation comes" (TI, 102/100). The self-presentation of the teacher is quite different from the questioning of the midwife in that maieutic questioning understands the other person who questions me in terms of myself, in terms of my resources or readiness, whereas teaching understands the Other who teaches me in terms of the exceeding of my resources and readiness, in terms of his or her unexpected and unaccountable approach. In
other words, the self-presentation of the Other makes possible the introduction of the new.

With these remarks about revelation and the welcome of the Other we can begin to see why teaching signifies not as the questioning of a self but as the self's being put into question. The prerequisite for welcoming another is not that we be prepared for his or her approach, for in that preparation we do not welcome the Other in itself. It is rather that our very preparations be susceptible to the demands or the critique that the Other might place upon me. In other words, I cannot welcome the Other as truly other until the consciousness by which I would pre-determine him or her has been interrupted or shown to be inadequate. True reception depends on the revelation of the insufficiency of my attempts to have known or otherwise comprehended the Other. In welcoming the Other "the exercise of my freedom is called into question" (TI, 103/100). This is also to say that in the encounter with a face the autonomous being comes to be ashamed of its naïveté.

To describe teaching in the way that we just have is to realize that "primordial teaching" (TI, 92/92) is not first and foremost the transmission of a content. In order for a content, in the sense of an object or piece of information, to be received it must first be understood as a content, i.e., come within the sphere of representation. Teaching as revelation, however, "constitutes a veritable inversion" of objectifying consciousness (TI, 63/67). Teaching is made possible by a more radical experience of the Other which is contentless, i.e., utterly foreign. "This voice coming from another shore teaches transcendence itself. Teaching signifies the whole infinity of exteriority. And the whole infinity of exteriority is not first produced to then teach: teaching is its very production. The first teaching teaches this very height, tantamount to its exteriority, the ethical" (TI, 185-86/171).

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5 Levinas makes this point even more strongly when he says of Totality and Infinity that "the difference between objectivity and transcendence will serve as the general guideline for all the analyses of this work" (TI, 41/49 - Levinas's emphasis).
In order to understand the "production" of teaching we must place it alongside the "production" of the infinite we have already described. Just as the infinite was not produced as some identifiable content, so too teaching is not produced as a content which can then be handed over to another. We must, rather, think of this teaching as the revelation of an inadequacy within thought, a revelation which then makes possible my being put into question. I am put into question, i.e., my freedom becomes questionable, to the extent that the Other reveals the insufficiency or injustice of my resources and preparation. Teaching teaches height or transcendence itself -- it does not teach me something about the transcendent. Teaching inaugurates a movement to the radically exterior, the utterly new, in that it reveals the insufficiency of my every attempt to make a move to the beyond on my own. If I am to encounter the new and thus truly learn, I need the Other to teach me for it is the "presence" of the Other which can put me into question (we will return to the nature of this presence when we take up the question of proximity and learning).

In his 1965 essay "Phenomenon and Enigma" Levinas spoke appreciatively of Soren Kierkegaard as unique among contemporary thinkers in that he too caught sight of an experience of truth which is not reducible to the immanence of autonomy. The importance of his philosophical work, as Levinas here saw it, resided chiefly in the realization of "the formal idea of a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth, a meaning paling in a meaning, a meaning thus already past and driven out, breaking up the undephasable simultaneity of phenomena." 6 Like Levinas, Kierkegaard understood that the transformation of the experience of truth (from autonomy to heteronomy) depended upon a radical conception of teaching, a conception not reducible to the maieutic tradition which has so heavily influenced western traditions in philosophy. By drawing Kierkegaard

into the discussion at this point we will see, perhaps more starkly, the radical nature of the inversion of consciousness that comes about in primordial teaching. Our intention is not to suggest that Levinas and Kierkegaard share similar views on all philosophical issues. 7 But we will argue that each describes the "logic" of teaching and learning in remarkably similar ways because of a similar preoccupation with transcendence.

We find Kierkegaard's most detailed discussion on the problematic of teaching in his text *Philosophical Fragments*, published under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Like Levinas, Kierkegaard's central concern hinges on the sufficiency of the maieutic model with respect to the experience of truth. If maieutics is to be put into question then we will have to admit, says Climacus, that the learner does not have the truth within him or herself, not even in the form of ignorance (ignorance would leave unquestioned the learner's potential to know). Instead, the learner is in a position of "untruth" with respect to what he or she needs to know, that he or she is even in a position of "sin" (the learner as prideful refuses to accept a condition for the reception of truth beyond him or herself). 8 Not only does the prospective learner not have the resources within him or herself to attain truth, he or she is incapable of becoming ready for the reception of truth on his or her own terms. If reception is to take place at all, the one bringing truth, i.e., the teacher, will need to provide the conditions for it, "for if the learner were himself the condition for

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7 Their understanding of ethics and the nature of subjectivity is a case in point. Kierkegaard understands the highest relation possible between humans to be the Socratic relation, whereas Levinas argues that the face to face encounter, when understood in a particular way, already takes us beyond the Socratic. The revelation of transcendence does not come at the "teleological suspension of the ethical" (as in *Fear and Trembling*), but in an understanding of "ethical metaphysics." Nor does Levinas share Kierkegaard's view on how resistance to the totalizing move of philosophy is possible. "It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other (Autre)" (*TI*, 30/40).

understanding the truth, then he merely needs to recollect ..." 9 By placing the possibility of reception of truth with the teacher who brings it we see a parallel with Levinas who also describes the possibility of a reception taking place in terms of the self-presentation of the teacher. Reception does not depend on my resources or my readiness to receive. Kierkegaard is as suspicious of mediation as is Levinas.

Consciousness, as the activity of mediation, has tremendous difficulty with this conception of teaching. This is not to say that consciousness denies the possibility of exteriority altogether, that it may run up against something unknown. It may, in fact, run up against what it considers to be a paradox. But as Kierkegaard notes, this is only a relative or temporary paradox. With a relative paradox one is met by something which is odd or does not fit in with what I expect. With further reflection, however, and the passage of time, it becomes evident that what at first appeared out of the ordinary really wasn't. Eventually what is unfamiliar finds its place within a larger framework of familiarity. Consciousness assumes that given enough time, that which is exterior, a problem for comprehension, will eventually finds its place within the familiar.

Teaching, as Kierkegaard understands it, does not present consciousness with a relative paradox but with an absolute paradox. With an absolute paradox understanding comes to a halt, reaches a point of exhaustion. Here no amount of reflection or time will be able to encompass the paradox within a larger net of meaning. Because of this, the frustration the paradox causes for the understanding finds no end. The understanding has come upon an absolute difference between itself and the teacher which it cannot bridge. "Adhering to the understanding, the difference has so confused the understanding that it

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does not know itself and quite consistently confuses itself with the difference."

The temptation now exists for the understanding to conceive this difference in a particular way, to find a place for this difference in terms of a meaningful whole, i.e., to understand the difference as a difference between two poles. But this cannot be done. The understanding does not artificially construct the absolute paradox. It is the other way around. As Stephen Evans puts it, "it is the paradox that sets the terms of the encounter." Because the understanding is confronted by the absolutely different the possibility exists that the understanding will recognize the insufficiency of its attempts to bridge this distance. It is not the understanding which measures the paradox but the paradox which measures the understanding. This puts the understanding in a position in which it is no longer sovereign. And as no longer sovereign, the understanding finds itself for the first time in a questionable position. What is to be noted about this description of an absolute paradox is that its possibility depends on the teacher not the learner. Climacus writes: "if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself ... if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god [i.e., the teacher] ..." One could say, in more Levinasian terms, that the absolute paradox attends to itself.

Kierkegaard describes the radical nature of this sort of teaching by noting that the understanding, when confronted by the absolute paradox, will take offense. Rather than acknowledge the insufficiency of its powers, the understanding falls within an "acoustical

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12 *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 46.
illusion" in which it understands itself as the creator of the paradox. The absolute paradox, understood from this perspective, would signal the passion of a thought which attempts to think the unthinkable. The offense to the understanding would thus be self-inflicted. But Kierkegaard insists that this description of the illusion has got it wrong. The offense is not the product of a projective thought, the effort of the understanding to exceed a self-defined limit. Instead "the offense comes into existence with the paradox; if it comes into existence, here again we have the moment, around which everything indeed revolves... Through the moment, the learner becomes untruth; the person who knew himself becomes confused about himself and instead of self-knowledge he acquires the consciousness of sin etc..." 13

We have introduced the Kierkegaardian themes of sin, absolute paradox, offense and acoustical illusion to highlight the difficulty involved for an autonomous being to conceive a teaching which is not reducible to maieutics. For Levinas and Kierkegaard the approach to truth depends on the acknowledgment of the hubris of autonomy and the realization of its pervasiveness. Consciousness tricks itself into thinking that it can comprehend all of reality; it treats the unknown or unfamiliar as only temporarily unknown. Teaching, however, begins with the realization that a transformation, even conversion, of the learner must take place if a reception of the completely new is to take place. Climacus puts it as follows: "Inasmuch as he was untruth, he was continually in the process of departing from the truth; as a result of receiving the condition in the moment, his course took the opposite direction, or he was turned around. Let us call this change conversion..." 14 Levinas puts it this way: "The conversion of the soul to exteriority, to the absolutely other, to Infinity, is not deducible from the very identity of the soul, for it is not commensurate with the soul" (TI, 56/61). This conversion, as both thinkers have seen, goes hand in hand

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13 Ibid., p. 51.

14 Ibid., p. 18.
with the bewilderment of consciousness, the interruption of an autonomous will. Stated more basically, teaching depends on the possibility that I as a knower can be put into question.

Having described in some detail the nature of teaching we can now turn to a description of the teacher, for once teaching is no longer understood as the transmission of a content the perception of the teacher changes. A teacher is not principally someone who gives me information. If that were all that a teacher was then he or she would be dispensable (I could just as easily get the information from another source like a book). For both Levinas and Kierkegaard the teacher is indispensable. I depend on him or her to present me with a possibility that I otherwise could not envision -- without the Other's approach I could not learn. What is more, the Other who teaches is not simply one from the general species called humanity, and thus is exactly like me. He or she is the particular Other, the one who does not form a series or number with me. This particularity of the Other Levinas terms his or her mastery (maîtrise) or height (hauteur). In using this terminology Levinas seeks to indicate the transcendence of the Other. 15

In speaking of the height of the Other Levinas does not mean that the Other is a representative from some Hinterwelt. The Other does not come to me from a heavenly shore. He has in mind, rather, the passage in Plato's Republic which speaks of the soul's knowledge as a movement or look upward to the beyond (529b). The beyond is not a place identifiable in space and time. In looking to the beyond one looks to the Invisible, to the metaphysical (TI, 23/35). In speaking of the teacher's height Levinas aims to reinforce the

15 Kierkegaard indicated the transcendence of the teacher by calling him "the god" (Philosophical Fragments, p. 15). The difference in title given to the teacher signals a fundamental difference in the overall thought of Levinas and Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard would deny that the human other could teach me in the radical sense because the highest relation between humans is the Socratic. Only God, particularly the Christian conception of God, can teach. Levinas does not equate the teacher with God. It is rather through the teaching of the human other that the voice of the transcendent God can be heard at all.
conception that teaching is not reducible to myself and my self-reflective or self-recollective life. The teacher as "beyond" me introduces me to what I could not have prepared for myself.

In like manner, the mastery of the Other needs to be understood in an uncommon way. When we think of a master we often think of a taskmaster who demands service from us. What is more, such a master can enforce this demand with his or her power. This common view is not what Levinas has in mind. We know this already because in the teaching encounter with another person I am not met by a greater force. If the Other's mastery were simply a feature of his or her power, then I could not learn -- the Other would be an alter-ego against whom I could test my own powers, i.e., the Other would signify in terms of the surplus or lack of power in myself. The Other is instead masterful in his or her refusal to be assimilated to my power-plays. As master, the Other attends to him or herself, presents him or herself, apart from whatever I might think of him or her (TI, 66/69-70). The Other is master because he or she does not depend on my Sinngebung to have sense or meaning.

By highlighting the height and mastery of the teacher Levinas aims to make clear that I and the Other are not on the same plane, are not equals. In the face to face encounter the relation between myself and the Other is characterized by asymmetry rather than symmetry. Levinas calls this relation the "ethical relation." One of the difficulties involved in understanding the ethical relation is that we ordinarly conceive relations as taking place via pre-arranged contract or pre-determined commonality -- I and another are in relation because we agree to it or find some reason or need to be in relation. In other words, the relation between myself and the Other is always mediated by something else. We have suggested, however, that a teacher, if he or she is truly to be a teacher and not just a midwife, is not mediated. If the relation between myself and the Other as truly other is to be possible at all, then the sense of relation must be altered. Levinas gives us a sense for the
strangeness of this relation when he calls the ethical relation a "relation without relation" (relation sans relation) (TI, 79/80).

As we might guess, the strangeness of the ethical relation stems from the transcendence or height of the Other with whom I am in relation with. "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..." (TI, 31/41). If the reality (not understood as an object or noema) I am in relation with is infinitely distant from me, what keeps me in relation? Levinas answers that it will not be a predetermined framework that accomplishes this but rather the speech of the Other to me: "language accomplishes a relation such that the terms are not limitrophe within this relation, such that the other, despite the relationship with the same, remains transcendent to the same" (TI, 28/39). The Other as teacher surpasses my every effort to mediate him or her. This constitutes his or her height and mastery. But in this surpassing of myself, made possible by the Other's look or speech to me, a claim is put upon me. For the first time in my otherwise autonomous life I need to give answer for myself to the Other. It is the call of the Other to me and my response to the Other that accomplishes the ethical relation. How can I justify the claims I would make about reality when the Other who confronts me questions my every justification? The Other, by putting my naive spontaneity in question, does not turn me inward but outward in responsibility to what is beyond me. To have received or welcomed the Other is to have recognized the insufficiency, even injustice, of my claims to have comprehended the world.

Our discussion on teaching, as the putting into question of my power, and the teacher, as one who stands beyond me and is master, has now prepared us to look more closely at the nature of learning. We must begin, again, by noting that the learning Levinas has in mind does not concern itself principally with the gathering of information. For this sort of activity another is not vital. Learning has a much more radical sense, one associated
with the inversion of consciousness we referred to earlier. Kierkegaard saw this inversion as so radical that he referred to it as the "rebirth" of the learner, the learner's coming to new life. 16

If teaching is the putting into question of my power or freedom, it would seem, then, that learning would signify as the cessation of my power or freedom. Faced with this possibility, the question becomes, what am I to do? Can I do anything at all? It is possible to understand Levinas's discussion on teaching in purely negative terms, meaning that the Other, because of his or her transcendence, would always reveal the insufficiency of an attempt to know or comprehend the world and thus induce a condition of paralysis. The freedom that is made to feel ashamed of itself may just as well cease from exercising its freedom altogether. The "lesson" of teaching would thereby conclude with the death of the autonomous being. This reading of the teaching/learning relationship, however, only goes part of the way. The interruption of my powers does not necessarily entail their cessation. Far from simply closing off my freedom, the Other makes possible the investiture of my freedom. "The presence of the Other, a privileged heteronomy, does not clash with freedom but invests it" (TI, 88/88). 17 To be interrupted is also to be redirected. The Other invests my freedom by putting it on a new path. Stated otherwise, the putting into question of the autonomous being leads to his or her transformation into an inspired being, into a being now given over and responsible to an order beyond itself. "To recognize the Other is to give" (TI, 73/75). One could say that with the introduction of a heteronomous order the hubris of an autonomous being is turned to humility.

In order to understand this invested freedom we must contrast it with the freedom

16 Ibid., pp. 18-19.

17 In "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite" Levinas puts it in a similar way. "Existence is not condemned to freedom, but judged and invested as a freedom" (p. 176/117).
characteristic of an autonomous being. When we speak of an autonomous being as free we are suggesting that he or she is not responsible or answerable to anyone else. He or she moves at will, oblivious to the concerns of the world around it. The autonomous being lives from itself, from its needs and wants. This conception of freedom, says Levinas, is an impoverished conception -- it does not take us beyond animality. "Freedom consists in knowing that freedom is in peril" (TI, 23/35). The height of humanity is to know that one is not simply driven by needs and wants, but that one is also given over to a metaphysical existence. To be truly free is to be capable of a desire for the truly beyond, a desire which comes about not as the result of my need but in the approach of the Other to me.

In order to understand the nature of desire we must return to the peculiar nature of the presence of the Other who teaches me. Because the Other approaches me not as a content but as the overflowing of the representation which would present him or her as a content, it is impossible to say that metaphysical desire is a desire for some-thing. In the Other's approach there is no-thing that I can lay hold of as the identifying mark of that Other. In a sense, then, the Other is never present -- the Other is enigmatic. An enigma is not a problem which at some later point admits of a solution. Nor is it simply the irrational or the absurd, for this would be to define it in terms of a measure of rationality. An enigma makes its "presence" felt without there being any means by which to identify the cause or origin of this presence. The enigmatic represents a disturbance or interruption which is invisible to thought. "The alterity that disturbs order cannot be reduced to the difference visible to the gaze that compares and therefore synchronizes the same and the other. Alterity occurs as a divergency and a past which no memory could resurrect as present. And yet disturbance is possible only through an intervention. A stranger is then needed, one who has come, to be sure, but left before having come, ab-solute in his manifestation." 18

We have encountered some of these themes before when we spoke of a synchronous order being interrupted such that the very idea of order is brought into question. We have also noted that the absolute signifies in its absolution or departure from the framework that would hold it in place (remembering the denuding and undoing of the face). What we must now attempt to understand is the "supreme anachronism" of a past which was never present. Levinas argues that we must understand an enigma as the overwhelming of consciousness, of the taking of consciousness by surprise. The Other surprises consciousness because it does not conform to what was expected -- the Other refuses to fit in with my expectations. To the extent that this Other does not fit in with my expectations, he or she is not really present (presence, as in a represented presence, the presence of objects, signifies in the adequation between my thought and what I think about). "In the meanwhile (entretemps) the event expected turns into the past without being lived through, without being equaled, in any present." 19 The Other came and went without having fit in with my world. My only sense that the Other might have come is the sense that my world has been disturbed by something of which I am not entirely sure. 20 That consciousness has been overwhelmed is not to be denied. The radically other is confirmed, says Levinas, in the measure that it is hunted after, in the measure that we wish to know what or if something happened. This hunt, however, is not a hunt after some-thing because no-thing was ever there in the first place. The hunt is for the truly beyond, for what has, properly speaking, never been there. Metaphysical desire is this movement to the beyond.

The interruption of the Other is, therefore, not a cessation of my being but rather its animation as desire for the beyond. To be sure, one can deny that consciousness was ever

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19 Ibid., p. 211/68.

20 Levinas writes of this disturbance as follows: "disturbance disturbs order without troubling it seriously. It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. It insinuates itself, withdraws before entering" (Ibid., p. 208/66).
overwhelmed, and thus live in a world of total presence, i.e., a world in which everything is adequate to the idea that I have of it. But this would be to close off an experience more radical than the experience characteristic of autonomy. What is more, the Other will not directly challenge it's denial, for a direct challenge would only be possible if it were to enter the world of mediation and adequation. In order, then, for the enigma to signify at all, the subject, which is "enigma's partner," must harken to the departure of a "presence" that was, in fact, never there. 21

One might object at this point that by requiring the subject to harken to an absence we have repeated the mistake which would understand learning as a feature of my readiness to learn. This objection, however, fails. The crucial difference between having the ears to hear and harkening is that in the former my hearing is a feature of my potential or my capacity to prepare myself to hear. Harkening to an enigma denies this possibility. There is nothing that I can do which will prepare me for an enigma. The enigma "comes to pass," as it were, inspite of my preparation, while I was busy doing something else. The enigmatic is not equal to a "consciousness of" the enigmatic. No amount of cognition will lead me to the enigmatic because the enigmatic "is beyond not finite cognition, but all cognition." 22 To think the enigmatic is to receive the Other or think more than one thinks.

In his later texts Levinas focusses much more on the nature of subjectivity beset by the interruption or teaching of the Other. Totality and Infinity centered primarily on the possibility that the order of the Same be brought into question by the Other. Hence its many references to non-maieutic teaching. Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence, on the other hand, is more directed to an understanding of the transformation of subjectivity in the face of the Other. It is to be expected, then, that this later text will have a great deal to say

21 Ibid., p. 213/70.

22 Ibid., p. 214/71.
about the nature of learning. To it we now turn.

Levinas describes learning in conjunction with three principle themes: the proximity of the Other, the inspiration of the Other in me, and my responsibility or substitution for the Other. Proximity is not a simple nearness between myself and another. Because the Other is transcendent with respect to me we are not limitrophe. Instead, proximity signifies as the overwhelming of consciousness, an overwhelming we have just described as enigmatic. In this overwhelming of consciousness contact or intervention has taken place, but it is not the sort of contact of which we can confidently speak. If the Other were an object, then we could speak of him or her in more definite terms. In proximity I am met by an utter singularity, so singular and masterful that it cannot be determined with respect to anything else, i.e., the Other is indeterminable, will not submit to my experience of him or her.

Since I cannot comprehend the Other, finding instead that the Other puts all such efforts at comprehension in question, I discover that the very sense of myself is altered. I cannot rest content in the confidence of my freedom to appropriate the Other. Instead I find myself disoriented, bewildered. "Proximity is not a state, a repose, but, a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest" (OB, 131/82). The bewilderment of consciousness has not only the effect of making me unsure of myself. It also takes away the capacity I once had to maintain myself in the world. A feature of the autonomous being was his or her ability to stand within the world and appropriate it in terms of itself. This was the precondition for its dwelling in the world. In proximity, however, the means by which this dwelling would be secured have been stripped away. It is as though I am in desert without markers to guide me. My journey through the world comes to resemble the nomadic existence of Abraham, an "exodus without end." 23 Proximity institutes a condition of homelessness unlike the homelessness of romanticism that presupposed an eventual return to a home from which

we are but temporarily estranged. I have no place to firmly stand, no place to call my home. The sense of personal identity, which was guaranteed through my integration of the world, slips away. What is more, I cannot even define myself with respect to the Other because the Other has left no defining mark. Just as the Other is not one piece of a larger framework, so I am no longer such a piece. In proximity I and the Other cease to be objects.

We can see from this that teaching inaugurates a crisis in self-understanding. But again, we must be careful about how we understand this "crisis." It does not represent a direct assault upon my identity, for if that were all it were I could attempt to meet it with my own power. The crisis stems, rather, from my powerlessness, my vulnerability before the Other. As an example of this crisis Levinas frequently mentions the episode of the young boy Samuel who, after hearing a voice which comes from he knows not where, simply answers "Here I am" (*Me voici*). In this utterance we do not find the confidence of one sure of what he or she can or cannot do. As vulnerable, Samuel does not know what is expected of him; he does not even know if something is expected of him. He cannot turn to himself for help in this matter. Nor can he turn to someone else. He stands alone, naked one might say. In the midst of this destitution and bewilderment the phrase "Here I am" signifies an exposure to the Other which somehow has made its way into my being. Shorn of the resources in which he might take comfort or pride, Samuel finds himself at the disposal of a call beyond himself. "Here I am" inaugurates a new sense of identity, one characterized by the Other's assignation of me. This assignation does not announce itself in direct or thematizable form. Its "presence" is felt only to the extent that my life bears witness to it in the response that I give (*OB*, 229/146).

In order for the assignation of the Other to be possible the self must be capable of receiving or welcoming the utterly excessive. This reception is not the passivity of one who absorbs or orders an exteriority according to its own will. It is instead an "extreme passivity" in which I do not even have the time to "collect myself" in preparation for the
Other. If I were to try to hold on to my identity it would mean that I had not truly met the Other. "To take hold of oneself for a present of welcome is already to take one's distance, and miss the neighbor" (OB, 140/88). The Other teaches me before I am or ever hope to be ready to receive this teaching. "The consciousness is affected, then, before forming an image of what is coming to it, affected in spite of itself. In these traits we recognize a persecution; being called into question prior to questioning, responsibility over and beyond the logos of response" (OB, 162/102). The boy Samuel was responsible even before he could thematize his response, i.e., his responsibility did not begin with "Here I am," but before.

The life of learning begins with the possibility of a heteronomous order which calls me to responsibility. I do not choose which order I will follow, nor do I choose to be responsible for the order. In learning I do not weigh the pros and cons of one alternative as opposed to another. Instead I find myself opened up to the beyond by the Other. As an example of this learning Levinas frequently mentions the experience of the Jews before Mount Sinai -- they assumed the commands of the law without knowing them. Their response did not stem from their preparedness to receive it or their potential to fulfill it. The law had, as it were, taken hold of them despite themselves. Inspiration, as the claiming of my life by the Other, involves me in a new life which I could not have prepared for myself. The Other in me, "under my skin," animates my life, leads me to a life of responsibility.

It would be a mistake to understand learning as a form of alienation or oppression. If we are to understand Levinas's talk about the persecution of the Other, about the self being held hostage by the Other, we must first be clear about the concept of the self the talk of alienation and oppression presupposes. Levinas would argue that alienation and oppression make sense to the extent that one accepts a view of the self as autonomous and self-determining. But is not this conception susceptible to criticism? Has not my freedom already come under the eyes of the Other? Levinas would suggest that the face of another
person already challenges the view of autonomy. There is, however, another misconception operative in the charge of alienation or oppression. The Other who animates or inspires me does not do so as an outside power which takes me by force. The Other is not a tyrant. This would be to see the Other as an alter-ego engaged in a battle for selfhood. The Other inspires me not by forcing my life in this or that direction, but rather by loosening the grip of identity which the self maintains with respect to itself. Once the self is opened to the beyond itself, the Other, rather than being a burden or impediment to my freedom, gives my freedom direction. Theodore de Boer describes this new freedom as follows: "By no longer gravitating around myself, one becomes so independent that he can carry the 'weight of the world'." 24 The world is light for one who does not need to integrate it in terms of him or herself.

The inspiration of the Other in me gives me a new identity, one defined not by self-integration but by my responsibility to the Other. Again, we must be careful not to understand this inspiration as the response to a voice or directive which we understand "as" a clear voice or directive. This would be to forget the enigmatic character of the Other's approach to me. It is, rather, as though the Other sneaks into me by stealth, catches and leaves me unawares, and in my bewilderment puts me on a new path. The only way that I can know that the Other has "intervened" is that my interior being has been altered. The Other does not teach me from some outside site. As inspired, I am taught as though the voice of the Other were my own voice. Levinas says the infinite, as beyond all thematization, "concerns me and circumscribes me and orders me by my own voice" (OB, 230/147). This is not to say that I accuse myself, fall into an acoustical illusion as Kierkegaard described it. In saying that the Other orders me by my own voice Levinas is not suggesting that I am the agent of the order. The order sticks to me apart from my

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assumption of it -- I cannot escape it, not even by denying it. This makes it seem "as though" it came from me. Robert Gibbs puts it as follows: "Levinas' recourse to the subjunctive mood (AS THOUGH) preserves the origin of this accusation in the approach of an other, not in my own agency, but it also signals the path to substitution -- that I must become my own accuser, my own persecutor." 25 The Other does not accuse me directly by making various charges against me. It is rather that in my response to the Other I bear witness to my own injustice. In this sense I accuse myself, even though this self-accusation is made possible by the Other's approach. The enigmatic signifies only to the extent that I bear witness to it with my life. The voice of the Other is heard in my response to the beyond myself. To bear witness to the enigmatic, however, is not to prove or authenticate its existence. The enigmatic remains enigmatic.

Our discussion on proximity and inspiration has now prepared us for the fulfilment of teaching in all its concretion -- the life of responsibility to the Other. To have received the Other, to have welcomed the teacher, is to have been opened to a life for the Other. "Morality is the enigma's way ... The response to the enigma's summons is the generosity of sacrifice outside the known and the unknown, without calculation, for going on to infinity." 26 Inspiration arouses respiration, the movement of the self to the Other (OB, 183/116). Teaching, as we have said all along, does not end as a negative movement, but as the surplus of my identity in the ethical exposure to another.

Levinas describes this responsibility in terms of my substitution for the Other. In substitution we find the most radical description of the self who has been taught. As substituted for the Other my life no longer centers around myself but is given wholly to the


Other -- I do not define myself but find that the Other has hollowed me out. In my responsibility for the Other I am made utterly unique, not because of a content I may claim for myself but because of the call of the Other which has singled me out. I cannot pass this responsibility off to another -- it is mine alone not because I choose it but because the Other has chosen me. Nor can I preach it to someone else, for there is nothing to preach, no content, no information, no command. In substitution I am first undone, meaning that the center of gravity for my being is shaken such that I cannot determine myself. The Other approaches me and disengages me from myself *(OB, 218/139)*. The movement of substitution cannot be understood as an altruistic act in which an agent, out of the goodness of his or her will, relinquishes its freedom *(OB, 177/111-12)*. Substitution occurs before one is an agent, before one could make a commitment to the Other, before one could intend to do something for the Other *(OB, 228/146)*. Substitution prohibits us from deciding the question of agency. My going out to the Other does not reflect my decision to do so, nor does it reflect a response to a direct summons of a clearly defined Other. It is, says Levinas, a "glorious" movement in which the infinite has been given witness to *(OB, 229/146)*. In the life of response I bear witness to a teaching which redirects my life to the Other.

Our description of this extreme responsibility makes an impossible demand upon us when viewed in practical terms. There is not enough that I can do for even one person, let alone all the others who might come my way. I cannot even take responsibility for myself since I am already given over to the Other. Given the impossibility of literal substitution it would be wise to read Levinas here not as giving a practical blueprint for particular acts (there is no clear message), but as pointing us to the metaphysical conditions for understanding the self. The self is not autonomous. He or she is already given over to heteronomy. Were it not for this metaphysical description of the self as already under the gaze of the Other, I could not learn. Learning, were it not for the Other, would be just as
Socrates said -- recollection. And philosophical exploration, were it not for the possibility of primordial teaching, would remain in a false world.

What Levinas's discussion on teaching has revealed is the prejudicial nature of maieutics. In closing itself off from the entirely new, maieutics becomes not only naive and uncritical but also dogmatic. What we have tried to suggest is that this tradition puts severe limits on those who venture on the path to truth. It does this by precluding the possibility of a life beyond myself, the reception of the utterly new. Furthermore, our conception of truth, if it is not to be a fabrication, must be susceptible to criticism. This susceptibility, we have shown, depends on the putting into question of the autonomous framework which insures all our conceptions. "A being receiving the idea of infinity, receiving since it cannot derive it from itself, is a being taught in a non-maieutic fashion, a being whose very existing consists in this incessant reception of teaching, in this overflowing of self ... To think is to have the idea of infinity, or to be taught. Rational thought refers to this teaching" (OB, 223/204).
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCOURS AND PRIMORDIAL TEACHING

In the previous chapter we noted that teaching is inextricably connected to the speech of the Other to me. Levinas writes: "speech is teaching (la parole est enseignement)" (TI, 100/98). Teaching, as the putting into question of my freedom, depended on the word of the Other coming to me and revealing the insufficiency and injustice of my freedom. What is the nature of this speech, this word of the Other, that teaches? This chapter will address this question by examining what Levinas calls discourse or conversation (discours). ¹

The inauguration of a heteronomous order, made possible by the approach of the Other, required us to re-examine the nature of teaching and learning in terms other than the models of anamnesis and maieutics. In like manner, the advent of the Other entails a reconsideration of the nature of language as more than a system of signs or totality of meaning. In order to appreciate Levinas's comments about language we must understand them in terms of the transcendence revealed in the face of another person. The sense of language, as it might traditionally be understood, is transformed in the ethical relation because I and the Other do not stand on the same plane. The word of the Other, therefore, cannot come to me from within the system or totality of words in which I move. When the Other speaks to me his or her speech comes from beyond. When responding to the word of

¹ Throughout this text I will consistently translate the term discours as either conversation or discourse. This will be important to keep in mind as we differentiate it from other species of communication such as a monologue or dialogue.
the Other I am participating in a discourse which is "the experience of something absolutely foreign..." (TI, 71/73).

Our explication of Levinas's contribution to an understanding of language will proceed in two parts. First, we must be clear about how a traditional conception of language might preclude the possibility of an experience with the absolutely foreign. As we will see, language, when understood in a certain way, operates as a world of meaning. Linguistic signs, beyond any ostensive role they might play, form a structure of signification in which the the world, if it is to have significance, must take part. That which would resist the linguistic system would fall beyond the pale of meaning. This conception precludes an encounter with the Other. Second, we must attempt to understand the nature of the Other's word that signifies beyond the signification of a system of signs, for without this excessive signification there could be no encounter with the new, i.e., no teaching. We will develop this excessive signification in terms of the address of the Other to me, his or her self-presentation or expression. This more radical conception of language, we will see, takes us beyond a communication in which I and another feel ourselves to be parts of an anonymous structure (as in Heidegger where I and another reiterate the saying of Being), 2 "lending our lips" to a speech that is not our own.

Put in very basic terms, language is the medium through which an ascent to truth is possible -- philosophical exploration could not take place apart from language. What is it about language that makes it essential for this task? If we return to another Platonic

2 In Heidegger's thought Dasein is always already in a fundamental relation with Being, i.e., belongs (gehört) to Being. Another principle feature of Dasein is that it finds itself to be always already within a language. It does not merely speak this language, it also listens (hörte) to it. Listening is as constitutive of language as is speaking, perhaps even more so, since speaking is a "saying again" (nach sagen) after language. Our speech is determined by our listening to language. "Sprechen ist zugleich Hören" (Martin Heidegger. Unterwegs Zur Sprache, Pfullingen: Neske, 8th ed., 1986, p. 254). For a helpful commentary on Heidegger's understanding of language see Robert Bernasconi's The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1985).
dialogue, this time the *Phaedo*, we find Socrates describing how the need for language in his philosophy came about. Here he notes how when he first tried to grasp reality, he thought he could do so directly through the senses. He discovered, however, that a direct approach would be blinding -- he would not be able to see anything at all. Socrates came to the realization that if he was to see at all, he needed to see through the means of something else. Socrates's "second sailing" corresponds with this discovery. "I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in discussions (*logos*) and investigate the truth of things by means of words" (99e - translation by G.M.A. Grube). Language, here described as a discussion by means of words, would therefore be the condition for the intelligibility of things. It is, in other words, only through language that we can come to have knowledge of something. Language, by mediating the world, makes it possible that I can approach the world and see something there, i.e., not be blinded.

How is language able to do this? In the first chapter we saw that one of the principle tasks of mediation is that it reconstitute whatever is encountered. The world is not encountered in itself or on its own terms but in terms of some third thing which stands between the knower and the thing known. Language proceeds in a similar fashion in that it gathers up reality and transforms it so that it can signify. The world is known through a language which is positioned between myself and the world. But as standing between myself and the world it already alters the world (if it did not alter the world it would be as though nothing was there), as when it groups things together according to certain patterns (as in the names we give for a group of things). John Sallis describes this simple yet all important function as follows: "As soon as we speak we already are engaged in collecting manys into ones, in carrying through with a certain degree of explicitness that collecting that is already pre-delineated in the speech which we take up in our speaking -- pre-delineated, for example, by the way in which a name (*onomà*) can be, in an initially simple
sense, the name of many things and, hence, the one into which many things are gathered up." 3 We can begin to understand the gathering and transforming of the world through language by first examining its ostensive role (there is a second part which we will shortly describe in terms of a world of meaning, and a third which we will describe in terms of the ontological significance of language).

When we name something we provide it with an identifying mark. The name is what allows us to speak of something when it is absent -- we know that when we utter a particular name, the object that corresponds to it will come to mind. This allows the thinker to carry on a conversation with him or herself (remembering that this is how Socrates characterized thought). The correspondance of a word with a thing, however, is not a one to one correspondance. Though I may use only one word, this word can stand to identify many things, even if they are not exactly alike. For instance, I use the word "flower" to designate many particular instances of vegetative life. Each of these particular manifestations of what I call a flower can be drastically different: they can be of different shape, size, color, smell, etc. But what is to be noted here is that the same word gathers together a plethora of things.

The gathering characteristic of ostension serves several useful purposes, the most important being that I can now speak about my experience of the world without having to invent a new word for each item in the universe. Language economizes my relation with the world. Ostension also allows me to speak in the midst of a changing world, for even if an item changes over time, I can still call it by the same name if the change is not too drastic (I call myself by the same name even though I am constantly changing). In this first sense, then, language mediates the world by gathering it up into identifiable parts. The names of things stand between the things and us.

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Language also has a social dimension, for I do not use language solely to converse with myself. Language is the tool I use to communicate with somebody else. In this communication I and another share a world. In order for myself and another to have a meaningful dialogue we must first be in agreement over the sense of the terms that we use. This means that if I am talking about a flower, the other person to whom I am speaking must have the same object in mind when he or she hears that name (he or she should not be thinking about what I would call a cat). To the extent that we share the same set of terms we can understand each other. Misunderstanding enters in the moment I and the other no longer share the same system of signs.

Ludwig Wittgenstein brought out this aspect of language in his *Philosophical Investigations*. The words I and another use have sense because they are operative within a "form of life," a context or meaningful whole. As I learn to use a language I do not merely learn the ostensive definitions of things, I also learn the social practice that goes along with the utterance. The sense of a "language game" is that it highlights that speaking is an activity that takes place within a context. 4 There are socially agreed upon rules that accompany language use, and these rules must be learned if one is to use the language properly. If one is to learn to speak, one must learn the context of that speech. There are conventions in place which circumscribe the limits of meaning. 5 What is more, these conventions, as well as the system of signs they determine, are in place before I enter into them -- I am born into a fully formed language.


5 These conventions, as P.F. Strawson suggests, do not only apply to the utterance of a word but even the circumstance in which a word is uttered. This means that even if we say something at an inappropriate time or unexpectedly, the context will usually insure that it registers as meaningful. See his "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts," in *The Philosophy of Language* (ed. J.R. Searle, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 26.
What is to be noted about this second feature of language is that meaning is not arbitrarily established. Meaning is a social event. It is not simply the result of an ostensive tag I may or may not ascribe to something in the world. I cannot, in other words, say whatever I want and expect it to be meaningful. Words by themselves do not mediate the world. Between myself and the world there is a social matrix which determines the sense words have, defines the field of a meaningful utterance. The sense of my speech depends on its coherence to a socially agreed upon system of signs or context of meaning which is predetermined before I speak.

There is one more aspect to language which we will call its ontological significance. The words that I use do more than simply define things. They also bring whatever it is I am speaking about to being. This is not to say that a word is responsible for the thing itself, that it creates the thing. But it is to suggest that in my speaking the reality of things comes to manifestation. "This means that speaking is an essential means by which we are able to come closer to the things themselves in their truth, that it belongs to the means by which man is able to make the things themselves manifest. Logos is no mere expression of what is already manifest but has to do with the original unfolding of the things into manifestness." 6 If I could not speak about something, one could see how it would be true that in a certain sense the thing itself does not exist. The world is real, comes into reality, to the extent that I can speak about it. If I could not speak about something, it would cease to be real. Language in this third sense mediates the world by providing the conditions in which it can be real to me and my society.

We can summarize our findings on language by noting that language mediates the world by gathering it up within a network of signs or words. This network or matrix, in turn, is not arbitrarily determined. Clear limits and conventions are in place to insure that

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6 Being and Logos, p. 170.
the network comprises a coherent and meaningful whole. To the extent, then, that the world conforms to a language it is meaningful. But to the extent that the world does not fit within such a context, it is meaningless. One might even dare to say that it does not exist. Should we not be silent about that which we cannot speak?

Levinas is sharply critical of a conception of language as we have just described it because meaning is reduced to an immanent perspective, tied to a framework of meaning which exists over and against the world. If something were not to cohere with the framework of meaning as dictated by the system of signs or the conventions of its usage, it would be meaningless. Language comes to resemble the model of autonomy in that language, or the form of life which invests language with meaning, is not accountable to the world it would gather up. The world is, in a way, helpless and mute before the language which would bring it to reality. "The function of language would amount to suppressing 'the other,' who breaks this coherence and is hence essentially irrational" (TI, 70/73). What is problematic about a conception of language as the condition for the gathering up of the world into a meaningful whole is that it has no regard for that which might resist such gathering in the first place. As we might expect, in Levinas's view, language would have no regard for the face of another person.

In two essays written in the 1950s Levinas described how language, because it is the ubiquitous medium through which meaning is possible, has come to be perceived by many as an anonymous and oppressive structure which prohibits the person from speaking for him or herself. Humans feel themselves to be nothing more than the mouthpieces of an anonymous utterance of Spirit, Being, or History. "We can no longer believe in words, for we can no longer speak. It is not that freedom of speech still remains out of reach for most of the world, or that men use words to tell lies. We can no longer speak, because no one can begin his discourse without immediately bearing witness to something other than what
is said." This becomes apparent when we consider our earlier remarks about language as framing a world of meaning, forming a coherent whole. The moment one speaks one must already have taken one's position within the framework, if what one says is to be meaningful. It is not I who speak any longer, but language (or a tradition of meaning) which speaks through my lips. Structuralist analysis, for instance, reinforces the view which would understand language as the whole through which meaning is possible. According to Ferdinand de Saussure language is a system of signs in which each sign is inextricably connected to other signs, even if that connection be founded in the sign's difference from other signs around it -- signs signify only to the extent that they are within the system. 

The effect of language would thus be to suffocate its participants. Language comes to feel like a prison in which each of its participants is serving a life sentence. Levinas writes: "We have a closed language, and a civilization composed of aphasiacs ... By being coherent, speech has lost its speech." If the word that I speak is to truly become a word that I speak, and not the word of a language which speaks through me, then the system or totality which language is must be susceptible of being exceeded. "The only believable word is the one that can lift itself out of its eternal contest and return to the human lips that speak it, in order to fly from man to man and judge history, instead of remaining a

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7 Emmanuel Levinas. "Liberté de parole," in Difficile liberté (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), p. 289. This 1957 essay was translated by Seán Hand as "Freedom of Speech," as part of Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 206. In the 1959 essay "Monothéisme et langage," also included in Difficile liberté, (translated as "Monotheism and Language") Levinas makes a similar point: "We can no longer speak, for no one can begin his discourse without immediately bearing witness to something other than what he says" (p. 251/180).

8 Ferdinand de Saussure. Course in General Linguistics (trans. Roy Harris, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1983).

symptom or a ruse. This is the word of a discourse that begins absolutely in the person in possession of it, and moves towards another who is absolutely separate. It is a masterful word ... a prophetic word.” 10 Before we turn to a closer examination of the possibility of such a masterful and prophetic word, we should examine one other aspect of language, namely its manner of communication, for another description of how otherness is dissimulated.

One does not need to turn to contemporary analyses to see how language can become the means whereby otherness, particularly the radical otherness of the face, is excluded or reconstituted. Levinas finds in the practice of rhetoric a prime example of a communication which disregards the Other. The rhetorician is trained in the art of speech. To be a persuasive orator is to "know" one's audience, which means to understand their place, before one speaks to them, in terms of the place you want them to arrive at at the end of the oration. Through persuasion, and sometimes manipulation, the orator tries to reposition his or her audience. Rhetoric "approaches the other not to face him, but obliquely -- not, to be sure, as a thing, since rhetoric remains conversation, and across all its 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, 67/70). The orator does not truly face the Other because he or she understands the Other in pre-established terms, i.e., does not welcome the Other in his or her own terms -- I understand the Other in terms of the outcome I wish to achieve. The Other's integrity is violated because he or she is made to feature as part of a program that I as orator wish to accomplish. One could say that rhetoric, or any other form of communication which does not welcome the Other, does not let the

10 Ibid., p. 290/207. Compare also: "For language can be spoken only if the interlocutor is the commencement of his discourse, if, consequently, he remains beyond the system, if he is not on the same plane as myself” (TI, 104/101).
In that rhetoric understands the Other in terms of a predetermined plan it shares many of the same features we saw in our discussion of autonomy. More particularly, rhetoric borrows on a central presupposition of anamnesis, namely an intimacy or familiarity with that we are related to. In the *Phaedrus*, where he speaks about rhetoric, Socrates notes that the aspirant to oratory must know the natures of the people he is speaking to (273d-e). This assumes that a person is capable of knowing his or her audience even before it is approached. The orator presupposes a commonality between him or herself and the one receiving the speech. This commonality can be understood as a shared human essence or a common participation in a shared pool of ideas or universal thought (*TI*, 69/72). The speech of the orator is effective because both the orator and his or her audience are sharing in the same pool. With this assumed commonality, then, the orator can shift the other's place within the pool, bring the other to a different place within universal thought.

The orator, in a sense, acts like a midwife who brings his or her pupil (listener) to a new realization of his or her possibilities. The orator, if he or she is to be effective, must know beforehand what the possibilities of his or her audience are. By knowing these possibilities the orator can then set a clear course for the destination he or she wants to arrive at. Rhetoric moves the other along a plane already established by universal thought. It does not carry another beyond his or her possibilities. The words the rhetorician employs are the outward expression of universal thought in which the orator and the listener already participate. Each particular thing, each particular person, has meaning to the extent that it participates in the whole (without this participation rhetoric would be unsuccessful). The whole speaks through the sign and the sign refers to the whole.

As we have already suggested, Levinas is suspicious of an understanding of language which would limit it to a "maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings"
He distrusts an understanding of language which would not allow for the Other to refuse his or her predetermined place. Is it not possible that I can be "master" of my word, or as Plato put it, attend to my own speech? In order for this to be a possibility we will need to consider the possibility that "it is not the mediation of the sign that forms signification, but signification (whose primordial event is the face to face) that makes the sign function possible" (TI, 226/206). In order to understand how Levinas envisions this possibility we must turn now to the second part of this chapter, namely the discourse inaugurated by the word of the Other. As we proceed we will need to keep in mind that "not every discourse is a relation with exteriority" (TI, 66/70). As in our discussion on teaching, the transformation of an understanding of language will refer to the transcendence revealed in the face of the Other.

Our examination of the possibility of reconceiving language as discourse will center on a commentary of the following lines: "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 dissimulated. The face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse. He who manifests himself comes, according to Plato's expression, to his own assistance. He at each instant undoes the form he presents" (TI, 61/66). To understand this passage we will focus on two principle themes: the presence of the face as its expression, and the Other coming to its own assistance in the undoing of the form that would thematize it. A discussion of these themes will then enable us to draw out the ramifications for language discourse entails.

What is expressed in language? Common sense would have it that language is the means whereby bits of the world are passed on from one to the other. Language is here primarily understood in its ostensive role -- when I speak to you I communicate a thought I have, I transport a content to you. My speaking to you about a flower is, in a sense, to give you a flower. Even when viewed less ostensively, as when the words I speak represent a
socially determined pattern, I am still passing on a content, namely my culture's traditions. While no one would deny that this is in fact what language does, Levinas questions if that is all we can say about language. Is it not possible that there is a more fundamental element to language which is here overlooked? Levinas thinks this more fundamental element is the approach of the Other who communicates to me.

Besides the communication which I receive from another, i.e., his or her thematization of the world, I also receive the Other. The first word that comes to me is not a word about the world, but the word of the Other. This word itself, which Levinas calls a masterful and prophetic word, is not thematizable because it comes to me as transcendent with respect to all systems or totalities. The Other does not form one part of a series of others which I can appropriate or comprehend -- I and the Other are not on the same plane, do not form a number. As our discussion on teaching made clear, the Other who comes to me teaches me because he or she is utterly foreign, does not feature as a part of my world. The Other is masterful because it does not depend on me for its meaning -- it is not only for me, it is also in itself. Because the Other comes to me from beyond, the sense of his or her approach will not be understandable in terms of the world of meaning in which I live. In fact, the Other who approaches me takes me by complete surprise, leaves me unprepared. In an important sense, the approach of the Other inaugurates a signification over and above the signification characteristic of a system of signs. In the encounter with another I am met by a signification that is without context, that is not enclosed by the context in which it finds itself (TI, 8/23).

How are we to describe this excessive signification? "Manifestation kath hauto (sic) consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, expressing itself" (TI, 60-61/65). Those familiar with Wittgenstein's private language argument might sat that a statement like this amounts to nonsense. A person cannot speak without or beyond a system of language because this would amount to the
Other inventing a private language, a language not shared by anyone else. A private language, however, as Wittgenstein argued, is in principle unintelligible because in order for a language to be intelligible it must submit to publicly accepted rules for its use. Meaning, as we might remember, is not simply a feature of my ostensive practice. It is grounded in the rules of a society, the practice of a form of life. In order for another person to speak a language which makes sense, his or her speech must conform to rules that I have understood or agreed upon. But is the signification beyond context made possible by the Other's approach a private language? Levinas thinks it is not. The word of the Other does not signify as a separate and self-enclosed system of signs which stands in opposition to the system of signs in which I move.

The speech of another to me is not a private language because his or her speech has little to do with privacy or secrecy. A signification without context does not aim to point us to a language game which no one else could play. We might better understand the sense of this excessive signification if we recall that it is masterful, meaning that it does not rely solely on the rules of signification. This mastery signifies as the Other "addressing" him or herself to me. This feature of the Other's address, so obvious yet also so neglected, is not understandable only in terms of the rules for address. To be sure, we do have such rules, as when we tell people when a linguistic act is or is not appropriate. But as Peperzak notes, any of the rules for address that we might have in place are inapt when we actually face another person. In the approach of another, unexpected and beyond my control, I encounter a newness or foreignness which exceeds my preparation for understanding him or her. It is this excessive moment which suggests a signification beyond the signification of a system of signs, a context of meaning.

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In order to understand this excessive signification we must be able to separate two kinds of signification, the signification of the signified and the signification of the signifier. Levinas writes: "He who signals himself by a sign qua signifying that sign is not the signified of the sign -- but delivers the sign and gives it" (TI, 93/92). The Other who gives the sign to me is the signifier. What is given to me is the signified. The problem for understanding an excessive signification is that we easily interpret the signifier as itself a signified. We described this in the previous chapters when we noted that it is likely that we will receive the Other in terms of a pre-understanding of what the Other is, in terms of his or her significance for me. To the extent that we do so, we have already made the Other a signified within a pre-established world of meaning. In other words, the signifier is always already a signified, one who fits within my world. But to welcome a face is not to welcome something that is a feature of my world. The face exceeds my Sinngebung in that its approach is beyond my world of meaning. This realization allows Levinas to say: "The signifier, he who gives a sign, is not signified" (TI, 198/182), or stated otherwise, the Other is transcendent with respect to me.

At this point we can venture to make an observation about the difference between a discourse or conversation and a dialogue. A dialogue would represent a communication in which I talk to another, but this other is not Other. This is to say that a dialogue would dissimulate the Other's approach and thereby understand him or her as a signified. In a dialogue I and another exchange themes. These themes can challenge and question me, but they do not thereby put me into question. In order for a dialogue to become a radical conversation the Other would need to be welcomed as a signifier, as one who can teach me. Discourse, as the radical experience of the completely foreign, differs from monologue or
dialogue in that the latter are forays within the familiar. 12

The signifier introduces a signification which is a surplus to the signified (TI, 98/97). The way to understand this is in terms of the self-presentation of the Other which exceeds every representation I might have of him or her. When the Other speaks to me he or she presents him or herself. "To present oneself by signifying is to speak" (TI, 61/66). Even though the Other may present a theme to me, a signified, and thus coincides with this theme, he or she is not to be identified with this theme. The theme, or content, does not say everything there is to say about the the one who gives the theme -- the approach of the Other cannot itself be thematized because it exceeds my powers or my preparation. In the approach of the Other there is not only disclosed to me some content or information about the world. There is also a moment of revelation. In the approach of the Other, his or her masterful and prophetic speech, I have been met by a signifier who has presented (an enigmatic) something to me, something which exceeds all my powers to know. In being disturbed by a presence that withdrew itself before it could be comprehended my world has been put into question. Hence the teaching quality of all speech (TI, 98/96).

If all we can focus on is the thematization, the signified, then we have dissimulated the radical otherness of the Other. By centering on thematization we prohibit the Other from speaking (TI, 60/65). Others, in this case, become nothing more than the mouthpieces of anonymous thematization. But if we can allow for the possibility of another not signifying solely in terms of a signified, i.e., if we can welcome the expression of the Other which

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12 Heidegger writes in Being and Time (trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962) that "Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-state-of-mind and a co-understanding. In discourse Being-with becomes 'explicitly' shared; that is to say, it is already, but it is unshared as something that has not been taken hold of and appropriated" (p. 205). Heinrich Ott has interpreted this to mean that people could not understand one another in a dialogue were it not for the fact that they already share a world that is ultimately familiar. See his "Hermeneutic and Personal Structure of Language" in On Heidegger and Language (ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 185.
overflows the thought I have of him or her, then we have also suggested the possibility of
an excessive signification. We have, in other words, come upon the masterful word which
begins absolutely in the one who presents it. "What presents itself as independent of every
subjective movement is the interlocutor, whose way consists in starting from himself,
foreign and yet presenting himself to me" (TI, 63/67).

What our discussion on the expression or self-presentation of the Other has
revealed is that language is not first and foremost a system of signs or world of meaning in
which I and the Other "lend our lips." Language presupposes interlocutors who come
across an infinite distance and speak to me, address me. "The interlocutor cannot be
deduced, for the relationship between him and me is presupposed by every proof" (TI,
93/92). Language, in other words, presupposes a discourse with another in which I and the
Other are not on the same plane. Beyond rhetoric, there is a discourse which Plato
described as a discourse with the gods (Phaedrus 273e-274a).

To see the possibility of a signification of the signifier, i.e., an excessive
signification, is to realize that the conception of language that undergirded the Socratic
doctrine of maieutics needs to be revised. When Socrates speaks to the slaveboy, as in the
Meno, he does not simply turn the boy inward. If that were all that he did, then Socrates
would only be a signified. As an interlocutor Socrates exceeds what is said, and thus he is
not only a midwife but also a teacher in the radical sense of the term. "Socrates' daemon
intervenes in the maieutic art itself, which, however, refers to what is common to men"
(TI, 68/71). The slaveboy encountered an interlocutor as well as a midwife. In other
words, autonomy, as typified in the model of maieutics, is already handed over to
heteronomy.

Having described the possibility a signification of the signifier in terms of his or her
expression or self-presentation, we must now turn to the relation between the signifier and
the signified. How is it possible that the signifier resists being made into a signified?
Levinas writes: "The signifier, he who emits the sign, faces, despite the interposition of the sign, without proposing himself as a theme. He can, to be sure, speak of himself [i.e., speak of himself as a theme] -- but then he would announce himself as a signified and consequently as a sign in his turn" (TI, 97-98/96). The Other who speaks to me provides me with a content that I can then integrate -- what he or she says can become a theme that links up with other themes that I possess. But the Other does not in him or herself necessarily become a theme because he or she "faces" me. What is to be noted about this "facing" is that it depends not on me but on the Other. The face is heteronomous, transcendent. The transcendence of the signifier is possible to the extent that he or she "attends" to his or her speech, his or her self-presentation.

In our discussion on the face in the second chapter we saw that the face resists my representation of it not by meeting me with a greater force but by refusing my comprehensive grasp. The Other refuses me by being uncontainable, by overflowing the thought which would think it. It does so by "undoing" the form that would hold it firmly in place. The absolute exteriority of the face, its transcendence, consisted in its "absolving" itself from the relation in which it presents itself (TI, 42/50). The signification of the signifier signifies in a similar way. Language is "a relation in which the terms absolve themselves from the relation, remain absolute within the relation" (TI, 59/64). The Other's attendance to his or her speech will have everything to do with his or her undoing of the signification that would thematize it or turn it into a signified. One can see here why Levinas maintains that the ethical relation, an "unrelating relation (rapport sans rapport - TI,

13 In "The Trace of the Other" Levinas unites the radical presence of the face with discourse as follows: "The other who manifests himself in the face as it were breaks through his own plastic essence, like someone who opens a window on which his figure is outlined. His presence consists in divesting (se dévêtir) himself of the form which, however, manifests him ... The manifestation of a face is the first discourse. To speak is before all this way of coming from behind one's appearance, behind one's form -- an opening in the openness" (pp. 194/351-52).
"is accomplished as discourse.

When the Other faces me he or she is master. The magisterial character of the word of the Other resides in the Other's attendance to his or her own word. In saying this Levinas borrows from Plato who gave preeminence to the spoken over the written word. In the *Phaedrus* Plato put the difference between the written and the spoken word as follows: with written words "they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever" (275d). The problem with the written word is that it cannot come to its own assistance. It needs its author to come along and somehow defend or explain it. In other words, the written word is not masterful -- it depends on something else, sometimes, to provide its meaning. The spoken word, however, can come to its own aid immediately. As one speaking, I can attempt to explain myself without the aid of someone or something else.

When we come to the signification of the signifier, however, we run into difficulty if we appropriate Plato's insight on assistance directly. The difficulty centers on the nature of the assistance of the Other. Does the Other assist or attend to itself by offering more themes (signifieds) in its defense? There are two problems connected to this interpretation. First, it assumes that the word of the Other is to be understood principally as a theme, something which we have tried to argue against. The signifier, to be sure, can signify as a theme, but this signification dissimulates an excessive signification which is not reducible to a theme, namely the signification of the self-presentation of a face. Second, to understand assistance in terms of further thematization misunderstands the nature of the Other's expression. "The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated" (*TI*, 61/66). The assistance which the Other brings to his or her word is thus a peculiar kind of assistance -- its offering is at the same time a withholding. It does not entail the kind of further explanation that might be
characteristic of a speaker defending his or her position.

Even if the Other's assistance does not amount to further thematization, the fact that another can offer such a thematization is indicative for Levinas's purposes. To offer a further thematization means that the thematization depends on someone giving it: "Thematization cannot serve to found thematization ..." (*TI*, 85/86). Beneath the thematization there is an interlocutor who is hidden by the pretension of thematization itself. Beneath thematization there is an "upsurge" of an interlocutor: "The word that bears on the Other as a theme seems to contain the Other. But already it is said to the Other who, as interlocutor, has quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said (*le dit*)" (*TI*, 212/195). In order for the interlocutor to become manifest, the form in which he or she is hidden must be undone (*défaire*). In other words, the Other's expression must be able to put in question the thematization which dissimulates it. But to do this, the expression cannot rely on the thematization -- it must come to its own assistance.

In suggesting that an expression undoes the form in which it is represented we come to an important feature of language itself. At the close of the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas remarked: "it belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword or the exegesis, in unsaying the said (*à dédire le dit*), in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights" (*TI*, 16/30). Language cannot be understood solely in terms of a system of signifieds, in terms of a pre-established world of meaning. Signification lives from the presentation of a signified from a signifier, even if the signifier itself is not reducible to a signified: "the interlocutor has given a sign, but has declined (*s'est dérobé*) every interpretation ..." (*TI*, 91-92/91). The signifier exceeds the signified by undoing it, by "quitting the theme" that would comprehend it.

The word of the Other points to the inadequacy of thematization. At the same time it suggests that thematization, the world of objectivity and information, depends on the Other
for its meaning. Meaning is not first and foremost grounded in a system of signifieds. How is this possible, given what we said at the start of this chapter? According to Levinas, in order to even consider a theme it must first be presented or posited. The Other in his or her word proposes a world to me. What is proposed has its meaning, i.e., the world has sense in terms of my world of sense. But as proposed it does not have its own reality, meaning it cannot account for its own presence. "The world is said and hence can be a theme, can be proposed. The entry of beings into a proposition constitutes the original event of their taking on significance ... Speech is thus the origin of all signification -- of tools and all human works -- for through it the referential system from which every signification arises receives the very principle of its functioning, its key" (*TI*, 100/98). Language does not exist as an anonymous structure that stands apart from me. Language is founded in the Other's speech to me. The Other's approach, his or her address to me, is the key to the (enigmatic) origin of signification.

Having discussed in some detail the nature of language in terms of the Other's address, his or her presentation of a world, we can now begin to reflect in a more general way on the transformation of a conception of language made possible by these analyses. To begin, language is not principally to be understood as a system in which I and another merely "lend our lips." Beyond the system of signs that I and another use to speak (thematically) to each other there is the approach of another who is not on the same plane as myself. Language is a relation between the same and the other (*TI*, 28/39), a contact across a distance in which the distance is not overcome. The Other who speaks to me is not, as a result, integrated within my world. In language the Other remains separate, signifies in terms of him or herself, attends to his or her own expression. This is how we are to understand that discourse is a relation with the completely foreign.

It is only if we conceive language in terms of the transcendence of the Other that we can speak of a genuine plurality of interlocutors. Without this transcendence I and a number
of Others would all be features of the Same, features of a universal thought. "Language, far from presupposing universality and generality, first makes them possible. Language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality" (II, 70/73). To understand this is to realize that the philosophical quest, itself maintained by language, can no longer be understood as a solitary quest.

That the Other is not simply a signifier who has been appropriated as a signified means that we can redress the injustice characteristic of rhetorical language. The Other does not simply feature within a system of signs, a universal thought, but carries an excessive signification. In discourse I welcome the Other as other, meaning that I let him or her be (II, 67/71). I do not face the Other obliquely, so as to manipulate him or her in terms of my own world. Justice, as Levinas says, would coincide with the overcoming of rhetoric (II, 69/72). Peace would be produced as the aptitude of another to speak to me and I to him or her apart from the ruse of universal thought (II, 8/23).

Because the word of the Other is also the word of one who teaches, we can now understand why Levinas says that speech is already teaching. In the encounter with another I am met by a speech which juts through the theme that he or she offers to me, a speech that stands apart from my expectations and resources. It is not the theme itself which teaches (even though what he or she presents may be quite interesting and informative) but the masterful word which questions my freedom. "The calling in question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the Other in the face, we call language. The height from which language comes we designate with the term teaching" (II, 185/171). 14 Language understood in this sense is revelatory: "Revelation is discourse" (II, 75/77). Far from

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14 Compare also: "Language conditions thought -- not language in its physical materiality, but language as an attitude of the same with regard to the Other irreducible to the representation of the Other, irreducible to an intention of thought, irreducible to a consciousness of ..., since relating to what no consciousness can contain, relating to the infinity of the Other. Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question" (II, 224/204).
being a closed system in which meaning is always pre-determined, discourse presents me the utterly new.

As one called into question by the word of the Other, the word that I would offer is also to be seen in a different light. In a genuine discourse or conversation with another I recognize the right of another over me. This is what it means to welcome another, i.e., to be taught. Since the Other has a claim upon me, I must, in some way, justify myself before the Other (remembering that for an autonomous being the question of justification could not even arise). This leads Levinas to say that there is an apologetic moment in discourse which cannot be undone. "Apology, in which the I at the same time asserts itself and inclines before the transcendent, belongs to the essence of conversation" (TI, 29/40). What is to be noted, however, is that this inclination before the Other would not be possible if I and the Other were on the same plane. The Other calls me out of myself rather than turns me inward -- the Other enables me to leave myself so that I can embark on an existence I could not have prepared for myself.

The transcendence of the Other's word also allows us to better understand the learning that takes place as a result of discourse. Discourse draws me out of a closed or immanent world, presents me with new possibilities. This self-transcendence, however, depended on my being taught by the Other, i.e., being put into question. Being put into question is not simply a negative movement. Discourse puts an end to the boredom and paralysis which might result if my freedom were not invested by the Other's word: "the idea of infinity in consciousness is an overflowing of a consciousness whose incarnation offers new powers to a soul no longer (sic) paralytic -- powers of welcome, of gift, of full hands, of hospitality" (TI, 224/205). Discourse does not end in my bewilderment, even if it does begin there.

In speaking to the Other I offer a world to the Other. This means that the world is no longer my possession, no longer one of the spoils of my freedom. The world becomes
common between myself and another not because I and the Other share in a common world (from the perspective of autonomy the world is not shared, it is my world), but rather because the Other's word to me has transformed my relation to the world from possession to generosity. Conversation accomplishes a relation such that a world can, for the first time, be common, be susceptible of being said (TI, 42-43/50). "Language does not refer to the generality of concepts, but lays the foundation for a possession in common. It abolishes the inalienable property of enjoyment. The world in discourse is no longer what it is in separation [i.e., in autonomy], in the being at home with oneself where everything is given to me; it is what I give: the communicable, the thought, the universal" (TI, 74/76). In discourse commonality is not presupposed. It is created.

All this is to say that discourse or conversation founds objectivity. It is not a pre-formed world which then allows us to have a conversation. If this were the case, that I and another were assuming roles within a pre-determined world, then we could not have a conversation. We would instead be the faceless participants of an anonymous monologue. The objective world takes on meaning as it is posited to one another, as it is "proposed" between poles of possession. The character of a proposition is that it is addressed to another and thus cannot simply be a part of a totality of meaning. That something is established as an object in a proposition would therefore depend on a moment which is prior to the objectivity characteristic of a system of sense. Without this moment of positing or giving the object would lose its orientation or sense.

Levinas is aware that language, even if it may presuppose this positing, does not conclude with the presentation of the Other to me. The excessive signification of the word of the Other does not signify as a theme itself but as the possibility for a theme. And yet thematization is an inextricable part of language. If language did not thematize there would be nothing to talk about. But we must observe, says Levinas, that the thematization cannot stand alone. Like the written word, the theme sits in an equivocal state. Socrates says "once
a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it" (Phaedrus 275d-e). The theme, when left to itself, can give birth to equivocation, even anarchy, were it not for the one presenting it and attending to it. This is why Levinas says that "Speech introduces a principle into this anarchy" (TI, 100/98).

Levinas is not saying that languages do not have systems of reference that determine a thing's significance. He is saying, however, that the possibility for this signification (as a theme), the "principle of its functioning," depends on a prior signification, namely the excessive signification of the word of the Other. "If the face to face founds language, if the face brings the first signification, establishes signification itself in being, then language does not only serve reason, but is reason" (TI, 228/207). Discourse, as the relation with the transcendent Other, would be the condition for the creation of meaning.
CHAPTER FIVE

LE DIRE ET LE DIT: RECONCEIVING LANGUAGE

Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence deepened the analyses on language begun by Levinas in the 1950s and Totality and Infinity. These earlier texts argued that with the revelation of transcendence a conception of language rooted in an understanding of its systematicity or wholeness was no longer sufficient. In the approach of the Other I am presented with a signification which signifies beyond the signification made possible by a system of signs or a context of meaning. Levinas described this excessive signification as discourse, the radical experience in which I am met by an interlocutor, taught by the completely new and foreign.

The later texts, while building upon this earlier formulation, developed the transformation of language made possible by the approach of the Other in terms of my response to the Other. If Totality and Infinity stressed the interruption and the putting into question of a consciousness which would have claimed to have comprehended all others, Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence stressed the extrication, even extradition, of an autonomous self in the life lived for the Other. In the life of responsibility a new signification is born -- the signification of my exposure to the Other. My speaking to another entails more than the transmission of themes.

In order to understand the development of Levinas's thoughts on language it would
be worthwhile to turn to his 1967 text "Language and Proximity." ¹ This text, which falls roughly at the midpoint between his two great works, marks a clear transition point. Whereas *Totality and Infinity* spoke of discourse, signification without context, revelation and expression, "Language and Proximity" introduces terms that will figure more prominently in *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, namely kerygma, proximity and obsession, language without words, and the "saying" (*le Dire*) which is not a "said" (*le Dit*). It would be a mistake, however, to understand this transition in terms of a turning or reversal (*Kehre*) within Levinas's thought. ² We might better understand this development as following an exploration from a different vantage point. Levinas does not contradict, or even dispense with, his earlier texts. In fact, one cannot understand these later texts without first grasping what has gone before. Stated simply, one cannot speak of radical responsibility for the Other if the Other has not first taught me, put me and my sensibilities in question.

"Language and Proximity" begins with a restatement of what we have already seen in earlier texts. Signs confer identity upon a world because they situate or order a temporal dispersion of events in terms of a system. It is as the world is unified or synchronized that meaning can be conferred upon it. The identity of the world would resemble a narrative in which each moment signifies or has significance because of its relation to a history of events around it. Events do not signify in terms of themselves. They are, rather, moments in the unfolding of History, Being or Spirit. The synopsis of events centers around their possibility for becoming a theme within a language. The claim of language, much like the

¹ Emmanuel Levinas. "Langage et proximité," was published in *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* and was translated by Alphonso Lingis in *Collected Philosophical Papers*. In the Foreword to the 2nd edition Levinas notes that "Language and Proximity" represents a development of theses argued for in *Totality and Infinity*.

claim of consciousness, is that everything, including the non-thematized and the "still ineffable," can be reduced to a theme. Nothing, in other words, can escape the thematizing grasp of language: "language can be interpreted as the manifestation of truth, as the way being takes to show itself. Logos as speech is entirely one with logos as rationality." 

When Levinas describes language in terms of its thematizing ability he at the same time indicates that the primary function of language is not ostension, the substituting of a sign for a thing, but the ascription of meaning. The world is not simply encountered. For it to have meaning it must fall within a horizon of intentionality. In perceiving the world I do not perceive a this or a that. But I do perceive this "as" that. The "as" refers to the thinker's intentionality, to the thinker's bestowing meaning or sense to what is intended. Understanding, therefore, does not refer directly to the object in itself but its meaning, its Sinngebung: "a being is manifest as a being on the basis of its meaning." 4 What we are describing here, though in somewhat different terms, we have already seen with respect to the life of the autonomous thinking being. As autonomous I do not approach the world directly but obliquely. The world becomes meaningful, worthy of my attention or labor, to the extent that it falls within a horizon of familiarity, i.e., a horizon of pre-established conditions for a thing's intelligibility. The world has meaning because I take it to have meaning.

In the earlier texts Levinas spoke of the activity of representation as the possibility for something coming within my familiar world -- the world is presented to consciousness via third terms established by itself. In "Language and Proximity" Levinas describes this same possibility in terms of the kerygmatic character of intentionality. A kerygma is a proclamation in which the world is identified or understood in pre-established terms. It has

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4 Ibid., p. 218/110.
the character of preaching, which has as its aim the communication of a message which will allow us to understand the world in a certain way, understand the world "as" something (a religious narrative transforms one's entire vision of the world by providing a new world of meaning). A kerygma thus approaches the world with a pre-formed meaning. "The setting forth of meaning -- which experience cannot equal, even if it can invite it to recommence -- must first name beings, proclaim them as this or that. In this setting forth all experience and all ulterior affirmation will take place. The a priority of the a priori is a kerygma ..." ⁵ The kerygmatic word, as the word of identification or Sinngebung, allows us to posit or proclaim the world "as" this or that, allows it to have significance or meaning. Things do not signify in themselves but only as they have been claimed by the synoptic understanding to have an identity. The implications of this for understanding language are as follows: "Language is not meaningful because it would come out of some play of meaningless signs; it is meaningful because it is a kerygmatic proclamation which identifies this as that." ⁶ Language confers sense upon the world, is a Sinngebung, because it is the means whereby the world comes to view -- an unidentified world would be invisible. The kerygmatic character of language makes it possible for the world to have meaning because it is through language, a system or horizon of intelligibility, that the world signifies.

As we might expect, Levinas asks if the kerygmatic word is sufficient for understanding linguistic events. Does the proclamation of identity, whereby I approach the world with meaning in hand, account for all experience of the world? Levinas thinks kerygma does not exhaust all meaning because beyond my identification of the world there is the more radical experience of my proximity to an interlocutor. This experience is not of the sort in which I and the Other are already defined, in which I can firmly say when, how,
or why the Other has approached me. It is rather the experience of teaching, the radical experience of finding myself put into question. If one can speak of contact with the Other, as Levinas does, then we must also say it is an enigmatic contact in which I am too late to firmly grasp the contact that has occurred. In other words, in contact with the Other there is a signification which exceeds my grasp, exceeds the signification made possible by a kerygma. It is as though the approach of the Other puts into question the preacher who claims authority for him or herself, and calls him or her to a further accountability. 7

In the previous chapter we described this excessive signification in terms of the Other's self-presentation, his or her address to me. The Other exceeds my kerygma because he or she attends to its own speech. The later texts, however, develop this excessive signification in terms of my response to the Other: there is more to a proclamation (as one form that my response can take) than the content of the proclamation itself. "The meaning of a kerygma," as Peperzak notes, "depends on its being proclaimed and addressed by a Voice." 8 My orientation to the Other as a proclamation of identity, a Sinngebung, is at the same time an overture to the Other which itself does not fall within a pre-established horizon of meaning. Even when I speak to someone with the aim of thematizing him or her, my speech itself, understood as the movement toward the Other, does not amount to being part of the thematization. Levinas says that in this speech "the intentional has become ethical." I and the Other, rather than falling within a pre-established system of meaning, have entered into a relation wherein the Other has put a claim upon me which is itself not understandable in terms of my expectations or abilities, and wherein my response to that

7 The Hebrew scriptures provide ample illustration of this phenomenon. Prophets are those who call into question the word of the priests, those who otherwise are the representatives of God. In so doing they reveal the idolatry of religion and point to an order beyond religion -- prophetic responsibility.

claim is not understandable in terms of my intentional activity. My overture to the Other becomes ethical because beyond the theme I might offer I present my self. Though I may approach the Other with the intention to understand or assimilate, the encounter with the Other reveals a singularity or height which cannot be encapsulated or represented. This radical experience of the Other as one which reveals the insufficiency of my intentionality gives rise to what Levinas calls "the original language." Original language bespeaks the reversal of a subjectivity sure of itself in its overture to the Other. "The precise point at which this mutation of the intentional into the ethical occurs, and occurs continually, at which the approach breaks through consciousness, is the human skin and face. Contact is tenderness and responsibility." ⁹ To meet a human face is to welcome a teacher who turns my world inside out. What was previously for me and my enjoyment is now for the Other. To meet the Other "face to face" is to be beyond the point of excuses or explanations.

Clearly if we are to speak of this original language we must be able to distinguish between a speech characterizable as thematization (excuses, explanations) and a speech, itself unthematizable, inspired by contact with the Other (hospitality, substitution). Contact, as enigmatic, does not allow us to thematize because in order for us to thematize something it must have taken its place within a horizon or system of meaning. But as we remember from the third chapter, the encounter with the Other is enigmatic to the extent that he or she has entered my world without registering within that world -- the Other has departed before I had time to represent him or her as part of my world. This constitutes the Other's height and mastery, his or her singularity. The speech, then, which is not reducible to a theme, must entail a signification other than that characterized by kerygma. It must even entail a

language "without words or propositions, pure communication." Levinas calls this original language "ethical language."

Ethical language is not the language which speaks of theoretical approaches to ethical problems. It does not, for instance, try to delineate how I and the Other might fit within a moral universe, how I and the Other might maximize overall goodness. If this were what ethical language was then I would have already subsumed the Other within a world of meaning. The Other, as we have maintained throughout, is radically other to the extent that he or she exceeds my world, exceeds a horizon of sense. In the face of the Other I find my world put into question, i.e., I find myself taught. From out of this teaching I learn that there is an order beyond myself which demands that I give answer for my life. To paraphrase Pascal, the one who is taught must respond to the question, by what right have I taken someone else's place under the sun? Because the Other who teaches me comes to me from beyond my world I cannot define him or in definite terms. The Other is enigmatic. And to the extent that he or she is enigmatic this creates in me an inversion of consciousness. Rather than me defining the world in terms of myself or in terms of an enclosed horizon of meaning, I discover that the Other, through his or her transcendence, breaks the horizon and opens me up to the utterly new. This has a disquieting effect on consciousness because the world, which previously might have been secured by familiarity, is now unfamiliar. In the encounter with another I do not meet someone who instils further confidence in myself. Rather, and to the extent that he or she is enigmatic, I find my confidence put in question. Before the Other I cannot remain comfortable with myself. As we previously noted, proximity and contact is not a state of restfulness but restlessness.

It is this restlessness which allows us to speak of the original language as ethical

language. As restless I am now disengaged from my private world, extradited from my comfortable dwelling, and made to respond or give answer to the Other who comes to me. My going out to the Other is not the result of my decision to do so, is not the mark of a refined moral sensibility. It is rather the effect of my being opened by the desire (or "obsession" as Levinas calls it in later essays) created in me by the Other. In this going out nothing is said or thematized. There is, as Levinas says, only the contact itself. "Nothing will be uttered but this very contact, this alliance and this complicity, which is precisely a complicity or alliance 'for nothing,' without content ..." 11 In the encounter with another, in the non-thematizable speech offered to the Other, I am engaged in a plot which exceeds my expectations, hopes and abilities. I have entered a heteronomous world.

One can quite rightly ask if it still makes sense to speak of this ethical language as a language at all since it does not depend on thematization or a system of signs. Levinas insists on calling it language, however, because language, understood in its more common sense, lives from ethical language. If language did not presuppose the contact with the Other we have just described then there would be no need for a system of signs by which one might address somebody at all. Ethical language, far from being the denial of language, is "the very essence of language prior to every particular language." 12 Language, rather than beginning with the universal, the proclamation of identity among a diverse assortment, proceeds from the encounter with transcendent particularity.

Levinas's description of ethical language yields a conception of the self quite unlike the one characterized by autonomy. Rather than taking comfort in my ability to maintain myself within a world or home, heteronomy signifies in my being turned inside out by the Other. Levinas describes this condition as being held hostage by the Other. Again, we


should not understand this hostage situation as an expression of the Other's power over me. It is rather that the Other, because of his or her height, has revealed the insufficiency of my power with respect to him or her. I cannot turn to myself for aid or support in the ethical encounter. I have instead found that all the resources by which I might maintain myself have been put into question by the approach of the Other. The Other accuses me of the insufficiency, even injustice, of my designs. Because I cannot turn to myself I must turn to the Other who accuses me. In this accusation I am now responsible to an order beyond myself. "The I, the non-interchangable par excellence, is, in a world without play, what in a permanent sacrifice substitutes itself for others and transcends the world. But this is the source of speaking, for it is the essence of communication." 13 The speaking which is not reducible to a theme, which transcends the world, Levinas calls substitution. As substituted for the Other I am wholly given over to what transcends myself and my world. The essence of communication would be this self-transcending movement in which I speak to an utter singularity, not as a kerygmatic or proclaimed identity, but as a neighbor who has called me to responsibility.

"Language and Proximity" argued for a signification which exceeded the signification characterizable in terms of thematization. Language does not consist solely of a content that is said to the Other. There is also the overture to the Other made possible by the Other calling me to responsibility. This movement Levinas calls the "saying" of language. The first word of language does not designate the world as this or that, does not establish themes for discussion. "The first word says only the saying itself before every

13 Ibid., p. 234/124.
being and every thought in which being is aimed at *(se mire)* and reflected." 14 Whereas *Totality and Infinity* described an excessive signification in terms of the Other presenting and attending to his or her own speech, "Language and Proximity" described excessive signification in terms of my (*"delirius") going out to the Other as a substitution for the Other. These two descriptions of an excessive signification are not at odds with one another. They do instead develop the theme of transcendence and language from differing perspectives.

*Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* continued on a larger scale the analyses begun in "Language and Proximity." As in earlier texts, Levinas is preoccupied with transcendence and its possibility. Here the discussion is framed in terms of the "beyond being," the "otherwise than being:" can the otherwise or the beyond signify? This question is difficult to the extent that philosophy is "disclosure of being, and being's essence is truth and philosophy. Being's essence is the temporalization of time, the diastasis of the identical and its recapture or reminiscence, the unity of apperception" (*OB*, 53/29). As the temporalization of time philosophy is the ordering of events in terms of a synchronous whole. As a disclosure of being philosophy gives meaning to things, clothes them with sense and significance. As a result, no moment or thing can stand alone or signify in terms of itself. Reality signifies to the extent that it participates in being's move, is part of its diastasis and recapture.

The propensity of philosophers to think in terms of unity, of diastasis and return, makes it extremely difficult for them to hear the otherwise, to hear that which is not only a different part, and so somehow connected to a larger framework, but that which is beyond all frameworks altogether (*OB*, 13/3). Yet this is precisely the task Levinas sets for

14 *Ibid.*, p. 236/126 - translation altered. By translating *se mire* as "aimed at" rather than "sighted" we draw the parallel with the aim of representation which, as Levinas previously noted, aims at nothing beyond itself.
philosophy. The "boldness" of philosophy would consist in loosening the grip of being, in pointing to the insufficiency of the conjunction operative in diastasis and return. Philosophy would be the enterprise which would show every ontology to be an imperialist move, every unity a forced and derivative unity.

Levinas develops the "otherwise than being," the excessive signification which is not containable within being's move, in terms of the distinction between the saying and the said. Philosophy, as we have already suggested, is the language of the said, which means it is the language of thematization, kerygma, representation, etc. The said gathers the items of experience into a unity which then allows us to understand each item in terms of this gathering. Meaning is possible to the extent that it conforms to what Kant called the unity of apperception. The saying, however, would signify at the point of the said's exhaustion, at the point where the insufficiency of thematization is revealed. When the said fails or is shown to be necessarily inadequate, then one cannot offer new themes, for what has been put into question is the very possibility of thematization itself.

This raises, of course, a host of problems for Levinas. How is one to articulate the saying when it signifies at the moment of the insufficiency of articulation? To thematize it would already be to distort and dissimulate it. Given what we already know about revelation and transcendence we should not expect that the saying can be made to stand alone in some pure form. The transcendent is not an object which is then revealed. Nor is the saying a signification which signifies apart from the said, and thus looks like a discourse which stands over and against a competing discourse. The saying always occurs within the said even if it is not finally reducible to a said. As we will come to see, the saying signifies in the revelation of the non-adequation between a statement (said) and its condition (saying). In order to understand this possibility we will examine three aspects of the saying/said distinction. First we will briefly discuss the nature and significance of the said. Second we will show how the insufficiency of the said is revealed in the reduction to
the saying. This reduction will point us to a diachronous moment within language which, on a formal level, bears remarkable similarities with the tradition of skepticism within philosophy. And third, we will delineate how the saying signifies in the sincerity of a life lived for the Other.

The kerygmatic character of language indicated that words do far more than provide us with an ostensive definition of things or affix labels to objects. In addition to the nominal character of language there is also a verbal element. Through the utterance of a word the thing comes to be, comes to have meaning. The verbalness of a word would therefore be connected to a tradition of apophansis, which means the letting-be-seen of things (OB, 72/41). Words, as Heidegger noted in his text on Stefan George's poem Das Wort, point us to the being of a thing, the "bethinging of the thing (die Bedingnis des Dinges)." 15 Levinas describes the nominal and verbal character of language as follows: "Language is thus not reducible to a system of signs doubling up beings and relations; that conception would be incumbent on us if words were nouns. Language seems rather to be an excrescence of the verb. And qua verb it already bears sensible life -- temporalization and being's essence" (OB, 61/35). Things "are" to the extent that they conform to a temporal order, to the extent that they participate in the diastasis and return of being's move. In order for a thing or event to have meaning it must fall within a kerygmatic language which identifies it "as" this or that.

Levinas would have us ask where this proclamation or kerygma comes from. Should we think of it in terms of the saying of Being (Heidegger) or some primordial Urdoxa (Husserl) (OB, 62-3/35-6)? Or does not every proclamation depend on something which as yet is not identified? The insufficiency, even injustice, of the kerygmatic word is revealed in the fact that in order for something to be proclaimed as this or that it must first

15 Unterwegs zur Sprache, p. 233.
have been in itself apart from proclamation. Even if one would argue that we cannot speak of the thing itself, that we can only speak meaningfully of something as it conforms to the conditions of meaningful experience (an intentional horizon of intelligibility), this does not entail that the thing is solely dependent on those conditions for any meaning whatsoever. The mastery of the face, as we already saw, consisted precisely in its self-presentation, in its ability to attend to its own meaning. Stated simply, the kerygmatic word does not exhaust all meaning. If it did, then I could not be taught.

If language were restricted to its kerygmatic character then one would, like Meno, never be able to seek out anything new. All interaction with the world, understood in terms of its identification, would be restricted to the already known. Language, rather than identifying things as it encountered them, would have already proclaimed them as this or that before they were encountered. Thematization, like representation, precludes the possibility of an excessive signification. "Before all receptivity an already said before languages exposes or, in all the sense of the term, signifies (proposes and orders) experience, giving to historical languages spoken by peoples a locus, enabling them to orient or polarize the diversity of the thematized as they choose" (OB, 63/36).

What we can see here is that the said is not simply the arrangement or grouping of words found in the use of any of the historical languages. Rather, the said makes possible this and every grouping. The essence of thematization would not consist in the a posteriori ordering of a world of items or events but in the approach to the world which predetermines the world in a priori terms. It is the a priori nature of language which allows Levinas to call the said an "already said." "It is through the already said that words, elements of a historically constituted vocabulary, will come to function as signs and acquire a usage, and bring about the proliferation of all the possibilities of vocabulary" (OB, 65/37). The grouping of words in a language is not arbitrary or accidental. They conform to a predetermined order or schematism, a keryigma. The said, when understood as the
possibility for the thematizing of the world, turns out to be the locus of this order. Within the said everything finds its place, is meaningful to the extent that it fits within an a priori order.

Levinas has no intention of denigrating thematization or denying its inevitability. Like mediation, thematization is necessary if we are to speak coherently. But as before, we find Levinas questioning the sufficiency of thematization, its claim to be the originary source of meaning. Is it the case that thematization founds itself, or must not thematization itself be justified by what it thematizes? To ask this question is to realize that the said is derivative or depends upon a more originary signification which in some way exceeds its thematization and is the condition for thematization. The difficulty is that we become tricked by the ubiquity of the said into believing that the said is all there is. Because thematization is inevitable we begin to think that thematization is self-justified. Given the inevitability and ubiquity of the said how is the excess to signify?

Levinas argues that the saying and the said always appear together. If we are to point to the saying it will be through the said because the saying moves within the said: "pre-original saying does move into a language, in which saying and said are correlative with one another, and the saying is subordinated to its theme" (OB, 17/6). As correlative to the said the saying always appears alongside the said, though in a subordinate position. This subordination takes the form of reigning in or containing, and thereby dissimulating, that which exceeds the theme -- thematization depends on everything fitting within an established order. The moment something or someone would resist this order, dispute the legitimacy of the theme, then we find an instance of the break-up of order and the possibility that an excessive signification (one beyond thematization) might make itself

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16 We are here drawing a formal parallel to Levinas's question concerning manifestation. "Is it certain that manifestation founds all that manifests itself? And must it not itself be justified by what manifests itself" (OB, 108-9/67)?
known. The order of the said, in other words, is unstable because it is always susceptible to an excessive moment which resists being ordered as a theme.

"Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this outside of being, this exception to being, as though being's other were an event of being ... it is in the said that both this exception and the birth of cognition show themselves" (OB, 18/6). The difficulty here is that the otherwise than being, because of the ubiquity of being, can be made to look as though it were a part of being's move. The saying, in other words, can be made to look as though it were simply a weak or unruly said -- given enough time it will eventually fall within the order of thematization. Understood this way, the said is not at all revealed to be questionable in itself. In order for the saying to signify otherwise than as a said, the said must be revealed to be indiscretionary with respect to that which exceeds it. The task of philosophy, as Levinas sees it, is to note this indiscretion, acknowledge the insufficiency of a theme to exhaust all signification (OB, 243/156). Even philosophical texts, themselves the productions of the said, must acknowledge that they are not final because thematization is not the final word (OB, 264/170). The saying, the excess to the said, always wells up within the said and calls for re-understanding, re-interpretation -- perpetual exegesis.

Levinas is aware that to speak of or articulate the excess, when articulation is already thematic, introduces a "methodological problem" which cannot be avoided. In "Language and Proximity" Levinas suggested that even if the said is not sufficient for articulating the saying it can nonetheless point us to the moment in which the said comes to exhaustion. The said can show that it finds itself in an (absolute) paradox, even if it does not know what to do with it. 17 If the saying is to signify it will be in terms of the said finding itself at a loss. The said, much like consciousness's encounter with the enigmatic,

17 "Phenomenology can follow the reverting of thematization into ethics in the description of the face. Ethical language alone succeeds in being equal to the paradox in which phenomenology is abruptly thrown..." ("Language and Proximity," p. 234/124). We will say more about this ethical language shortly as the sincerity of saying.
will not be able to articulate the saying in any certain terms because the saying is beyond articulation. But it will be able to bear witness to its insufficiency.

That an excessive signification "registers" in the witness born of it is very important for our understanding of the signification itself. If the excess could be accounted for in terms of an integrative order then it would not truly be excessive. To be a witness, however, suggests that I give testimony to an encounter which exceeds my capacity to know. And as a witness, I become the means whereby the encounter comes to light -- I speak for what otherwise cannot speak for itself. My speaking, however, does not find its origin in me. To give testimony is to be faithful to what has transpired beyond me. 18 As Levinas puts it, "It is by the voice of the witness that the glory of the Infinite is glorified" (OB, 229/146).

The nature of the witness itself is also indicative because in giving my testimony I do not state themes which clearly identify what I am bearing witness to. The Other is enigmatic, and thus would resist such identification. To give testimony, then, is not to give a said. "Of itself, saying is witness..." (OB, 231/147) The witness is attested in the "Here I am," which indicates an intrusion into my life without that intrusion being thematizable. In my response to the Other I participate in an order that orders me to the Other without that order itself being shown to me (OB, 220/140). "I find the order in my response itself, which, as a sign given to the neighbor, as a "here I am," brings me out of invisibility, out of the shadows in which my responsibility could have been evaded. This saying belongs to the very glory of which it bears witness" (OB, 234/150). My witness will therefore point to the interruption of my world by a heteronomous call, will point to my being taught. To be a witness is to testify with my own being to the insufficiency of my being. My witness to the

18 Gabriel Marcel has described the basis for testimony as the fidelity to a grace received. See his essay "Testimony and Existentialism," in The Philosophy of Existentialism (trans. Manya Harari, Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1984), pp. 91-103.
call of the Other, like the Jews before Mount Sinai, has nothing to do with my worthiness or ability to resume that call. I assume the call without my being able to weigh pros and cons.

Levinas points us to the saying that is within the said by performing a "reduction." What the reduction does is navigate the movement from being to the otherwise than being. In this respect Levinas's description of the reduction will be quite unlike Husserl's reductions which have as their purpose the establishment of a "science of essences." Husserlian reduction brackets or removes all contingent or psychological aspects of a thing so that it can be seen in its true reality. 19 The saying, however, is not an essence. What Levinas hopes to accomplish through his reduction is point to the limits of essence, because essence is intrinsically tied to being and the possibility of meaning (OB, 13-16/3-5). In order to do this Levinas must show the illegitimacy of the said's claim to have ordered or identified all of reality. How is this possible? Levinas will answer this question by analysing the conditions for a said.

"The contradiction which the signification of the beyond being -- which evidently is not -- should compromise is inoperative without a second time, without reflection on the condition of the statement that states this signification. In this reflection, that is, only after the event, contradiction appears: it does not break out between two simultaneous statements, but between a statement and its conditions, as though they were in the same time" (OB, 76/44). The condition for the utterance of a theme or said is not itself a said, but the response (saying) to the Other's call. The said entails its own time, namely the time of gathering and ordering the world in terms of a synchronous whole. But this time presupposes an anachronous or pre-original time, a time in which things are not yet ordered. In other words, the said presupposes a non-synchronous experience which is "out

of time or in two times" (OB, 76/44). The task of philosophical reflection is to point us to this pre-original time which turns out to be the condition for the possibility of all thematization. Levinas does not think this will be easy because the nature of thematization is to make it look as though both times were the same -- as soon as we thematize we absorb anachrony within synchrony and thus seem to deny two times. If thematization can be made to see that it does not provide its own conditions, then we will also be able to point to a pre-originary saying without stating it as a theme.

How will it be possible for the said to acknowledge that it is not itself the condition for the statements it offers? Levinas suggests that the reduction to the saying will take the form of an "endless critique" of the said (OB, 76/44). Genuine critique, however, depends on the possibility that the said can be put into question by what itself is not a said (teaching is not maieutics). The said, if it is to be interrupted and thereby shown a time "out of time," will need to see that it does not found or energize itself. The said lives from a more original word, i.e., the saying. This more original word is born in the encounter with another person. "It is the ethical interruption of essence that energizes the reduction" (OB, 76/44, see also OB, 281/183). The ethical encounter with the Other will reveal the non-adequation between the said and its condition by showing that my speaking to the Other is first and foremost a response to a claim put upon me by the Other, a response which itself does not depend on the theme that I might offer to the Other. The response is not born out of my autonomous will but out of its bewilderment and inversion. As one who is taught I find the resources and preparation by which I might respond to the Other wholly inadequate. The theme I offer is insufficient. My response, therefore, cannot be limited to the thematization I do in fact offer. The saying, as the condition for my offering themes, is itself inspired by the Other who puts thematization in question. "Language and Proximity" described this response as an ethical language which, though perhaps without words, goes out to the Other.
Levinas affords us another means by which to understand this movement "between times" by drawing a formal parallel with the tradition of skepticism. Skepticism, or so Levinas will argue, escapes the synchrony of philosophy and thereby points to "another time." One would think that philosophy should have dispensed with skepticism long ago because it refutes itself. A form of the argument against skepticism runs as follows: in order for skepticism to question the truth of philosophical claims it must itself lay hold of a secret relation to truth. If it does not it speaks nonsense. Skepticism would be guilty of making the contradictory claim "It is true that there is no truth." When understood this way the force of skepticism should long ago have been depleted. But this has not occurred. Skepticism always come back, remains a "legitimate (sic) child (enfant légitime - Lingis mistranslates this as "illegitimate child")" (OB, 281/183) of philosophy. Why would Levinas find this instructive for his purposes?

Bernasconi has argued that the significance of skepticism for Levinas resides in the fact that it "provides a potent illustration of a signification which signifies beyond synchrony." Skepticism is significant enough for philosophers to pay it some attention even if it has been declared to be insignificant or meaningless. Levinas writes: "To conceive the otherwise than being requires, perhaps, as much audacity as skepticism shows, when it does not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of statement while venturing to realize this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility" (OB, 20/7 - cf. also 260/167). If someone utters the statement "It is true that there is no truth," this, from a logical point of view, is a contradiction, an impossible statement. It should be meaningless. But it is not. The statement, though meaningless in one sense, carries a force behind it which is enough to unsettle its hearer. Skepticism thus reveals two times or two orders: the order of logic in which the statement carries no weight, and another (anarchic?) "order" in which the

statement does have weight. This second "order" exceeds logic because its force remains despite the principle of non-contradiction. The skeptical statement reveals a diachronous or anachronous moment within the synchrony of logic -- it signifies without conforming to the logic of synchrony. What is to be noticed here is that the only way we have for speaking about the skeptical statement is in terms of logical coherence (if we dispense with logic we dispense with coherent speech). As we hear the skeptical utterance we thus hear the insufficiency of logic in logical terms (we can understand the words of the skeptic as contradictory and at the same time as somewhat persuasive or at least troubling). Skepticism bears witness "to reasons reason does not know." In other words, the unreasonableness of skepticism is somehow reasonable, points to another sort of reason than the reason of logic. Skepticism exceeds its thematic signification.

The force of the skeptical statement does not reside in what is said (the content), for the said is refuted because of its internal contradiction. But skepticism, as Levinas notes, is "insensitive to the refutation," continues to "traverse the rationality or logic of knowledge" (OB, 260/167-68). The force of the skeptical statement must therefore reside in its saying, in its being offered to me. The significance of skepticism does not reside so much in the truth of its claims, whether implicit or explicit 21 (they can both be shown to be contradictory), but in a signification which is enough to give me pause. Skepticism signifies within philosophy by using a theme to put thematization in question. It does not falsify the theme, show it to be untrue, because in order for it to do this it would need to have access to a higher truth. Skepticism does not counter thematization with a better thematization. But what the skeptic says signifies to the extent that it has an effect on the listener, even if the precise reason for its disturbing effect cannot be given. The "implicit

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21 Peperzak is correct to note that the difference between an implicit and an explicit thesis is not a difference in time -- both fall within a synchronous order. See his essay "Presentation," p. 55.
affirmation contained in saying" is not itself a said, a thesis. 22 The saying of the skeptic, which continues throughout the history of philosophy, cannot be synchronized with what is itself said for the said has long ago been refuted. The saying and the said, as the condition for a theme and the conditioned (the theme), cannot be connected. "It is as though skepticism were sensitive to the difference between my exposure without reserve to the other, which is saying, and the exposition or statement of the said in its equilibrium and justice" (OB, 260/168).

Levinas finds in this treatment of skepticism an example of a discourse which points to the non-adequation between what is said (the theme) and the saying (the condition for a theme). As a said, skepticism should have been banished from the philosophical table long ago -- its thesis is contradictory. As a saying, however, skepticism returns, carrying an excessive signification which gives the philosopher pause -- despite its contradictory thesis skepticism still merits acknowledgment. As skepticism reveals that philosophy (synchrony, logic, order, etc.) is not self-sufficient, so the ethical encounter reveals that the said is not self-sufficient because it evades an excessive signification which does not conform to the framework of thematization (the Other's approach, as well as my response, is not thematizable). Skepticism does not deny philosophy by making it appear contradictory, i.e., it does not wage a philosophical battle in which one thesis does battle with another. Nor does the saying deny the said. But what skepticism and the saying do is point to an order which is incommensurate with the order of philosophy and the said.

22 Peperzak suggests that the saying of skepticism turns into a said because of "the absolutist thesis in which this said is contained" (Ibid., p. 56). To be sure, the skeptical statement is a thesis, one that is perpetually refuted. But its force, which is enigmatic, does not depend on the thesis itself. Skepticism continues to trouble philosophy because it exceeds thematization and points to an order beyond thematization, i.e., the saying. Admittedly, it is very difficult to think the "affirmation" of skepticism in non-thematic terms, just as it is difficult to think the transcendent in non-objective terms. But according to Levinas this is what must be done if we are to avoid the collapse of the saying into the said, the collapse of God into an idol.
Skepticism, like the saying, puts the ubiquitous character of philosophy in question.

The effect of skepticism within philosophy is to give the philosopher pause. Its force resides in its interruption of "business as usual." One of the key elements of the reduction to the saying will therefore be this interruptive movement. The reduction, as Levinas puts it, would consist in an "incessant unsaying of the said (dédit du Dit)" (OB, 278/181). We saw in Totality and Infinity that the undoing and the unsaying were always intimately tied to the approach of another's face which puts into question the designs I might have with respect to it. The kerygma by which I might identify or integrate the Other is revealed to be insufficient and inadequate. And so, since I can no longer go as planned, I find that my plans are re-directed as I respond to the Other. It is the Other, now, who inspires me, "invests my freedom." The ethical encounter with the Other interrupts my kerygmatic life and leads me to a life of responsibility. Levinas calls the life of response "ethical language."

It is tempting to understand this responsibility in terms of my willingness to give this or that because of some perceived need. I respond because I know what it is that needs to be done. To understand responsibility this way, however, would be to misrepresent what Levinas means. Responsibility grows out of my being taught by the Other, my being placed within a heteronomous order. It is not something I choose for myself. I could not choose it because I am called to responsibility by what is essentially enigmatic -- the one who calls me has left before I have had the time to organize myself with respect to him or her. The Other concerns me without entering into conjunction with my intentional world. Levinas describes the movement whereby I go out to another who concerns me without my being able to pinpoint the nature of this concern "illeity" (OB, 27-8/12). As I go to the Other in response I cannot dominate or control him or her with my freedom because for me to control the Other I would need to have grasped him or her. The enigmatic character of the Other's approach prohibits this.
What is the nature of my response to the Other, given that it does not derive from my choice or my plans but from the interruption of them? First we will need to understand that my response will proceed from a subject who has, in some sense, undergone a conversion (OB, 27/12), a transformation in which the nucleus of the ego has been undone (OB, 221/141). The Other who faces me is not only different than me. He or she is absolutely different, meaning that the Other absolves itself from every characterization by which I might want to distinguish myself from him or her. It is this absolute difference which entails that I cannot be indifferent to him or her (if the Other were simply different, then I could ignore him or her at my will, excuse myself from a difference I can understand). Absolute difference renders indifference difficult because the absolute unsettles me, leaves me in a state of confusion or bewilderment (I cannot excuse myself as easily before a difference which puts my understanding in question). My response to the Other will therefore be characterized by "non-indifference," a concern for the Other which is quite unlike Heideggerian Sorge, which assumes a familiar world. 23

Saying, as my responsibility to the Other, does not build upon my preparation. The movement of saying begins "in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability" (OB, 82/48). Saying is first and foremost my exposure to the Other. It does not consist of the themes that I might offer to another for this would make it a species of the said. Saying begins with my being taught, my being shown the inadequacy of all themes that would comprehend myself and the Other. The ethical encounter, besides revealing the height of the Other, leaves me defenseless and vulnerable. I cannot take comfort in self-knowledge. I cannot even assume a posture of generosity, as when I think that I am responding to the Other out of the goodness of my own heart, because the Other exposes these intentions to

be laced with self-interest. As one completely vulnerable I find that I do not sacrifice myself but am sacrificed (OB, 85/49-50).

To speak of the saying in terms of exposure and sacrifice sounds shocking and violent. Why does Levinas use such harsh and seemingly barbaric terms? Today we much prefer to think of the encounter between two persons on a model of dialogue and reciprocity. In polite conversation there is no assignation -- I can always leave the conversation when I find myself getting uncomfortable, as can the other. There is, in other words, no teaching that happens here. As a result, the possibility for sincerity to the Other is also forfeited. We all leave the conversation intact, basically the same (OB, 227/145).

What Levinas wants to point us to, however, is an encounter that is life-changing. To the extent that I can be carried outside of myself (the difficulty inherent in this possibility is so great that Levinas describes it as a persecution of myself) is also the extent to which I can live responsibly. Responsibility does not assume a self-fortified life but a life which has been opened to the claim of the Other.

Saying is the one-for-the-Other made possible by the transcendent approach of the Other. Before the Other I am powerless and speechless, meaning that I cannot determine the Other in terms of something else, determine him or her as a theme. Out of this bewilderment the best that I can do is say "Here I am," not with the confidence of one who is sure of how and where one is, but with the sincerity of one who has no where else to turn except the Other. The saying would thus signify in the exhalation of the self, the passive outpouring of myself. Levinas describes this passivity in particularly graphic terms in the following: "It is a vulnerability and a paining exhausting themselves like a hemorrhage, denuding even the aspect that its nudity takes on, exposing its very exposedness, expressing itself, speaking, uncovering even the projection that the very form of identity confers upon it. It is the passivity of being-for-another, which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat" (OB, 116/72). The self becomes in this
description an incessant effusion, an exposure to the Other which resists every attempt to limit that outpouring by a self- or other-imposed identity. No kerygma can capture this movement.

In the saying nothing is said. No theme is uttered, no command conveyed. All there is is signifying itself, the overture to the Other. To be sure, the saying always makes its appearance within a said, within a theme or command. But the saying is not reducible to this said -- it is incommensurate with the said in that the said is inadequate to comprehend it. In the response to the Other I cannot hide behind the theme I might offer. I cannot make excuses. Levinas describes this pure or excessive signifyingness as "Saying saying saying itself (Dire disant le dire même), without thematizing it, but exposing it again. Saying is thus to make signs of this very signifyingness of the exposure; it is to expose the exposure instead of remaining in it as an act of exposing. It is to exhaust oneself in exposing oneself (c'est s'épuiser à s'exposer - or "to be exhausted in being exposed"), to make signs by making oneself a sign, without resting in one's every figure as a sign" (OB, 223/143). The saying signifies not as a theme but as exposure. Saying makes a sign out of the exposure. This sign is excessive because it does not conform to the kerygmatic word which would allow me to identify the world and my place within it. Saying exposes the exposure which is made possible by the Other who comes to me and calls me to responsibility. One can turn this exposure into a theme, as when one expresses the relation before the Other in terms of guilt or hatred or love. But this thematization comes after, and depends upon, my first having been called out of myself.

What Levinas's treatment of the saying/said distinction has revealed is that language cannot be reduced to its thematic and kerygmatic content. The ethical encounter with another person in which I am taught, the radical experience of proximity, inaugurates an excessive signification, a movement to the Other born out of the Other's call to me. "What shows itself thematically in the synchrony of the said in fact lets itself be unsaid as a
difference of what cannot be assembled, signifying as the one-for-the-other, from me to the other" (*OB*, 242/155). Language moves from the thematization of a content to its interruption in the revelation of its inadequacy to account for my response-ability to the Other. It proceeds from a signifyingness which, at the start, is not a thematization but the exhalation of the self before another who calls me to responsibility. This back and forth movement between the said and the saying is extremely difficult to sort out for, as Peperzak notes, it is not only the saying which is difficult to clarify but also the said. 24 The two are simultaneous and interpenetrate one another, yet incommensurable. Can one think this incommensurability and this interpenetration? Perhaps not with the resources philosophy has adopted from certain aspects of the tradition. But it is the merit of Levinas's work to have drawn our attention to a signification which exceeds the bounds of sense heretofore imagined.

Levinas's discussion of the saying/said distinction has allowed us to catch sight of a structure within language which departs from a model of synchrony or systematicity. It has done this by pointing us to the non-adequation between the condition for a thematic statement (the saying) and the thematic statement itself (the said). Like the idea of the infinite, which inaugurated a thought which thinks more than it thinks, so the radical experience of proximity, in which I am taught and redirected, inaugurates a speech which speaks more than it speaks.

POSTFACE: WISDOM IN THE SERVICE OF LOVE

Throughout this dissertation we have suggested that the ethical relation with another person transforms the way we conceive philosophical exploration. The ascent to truth is not adequately conceived when it is understood in terms of the solitary self going within him or herself to rediscover and recollect truth that was always there. This is so for two reasons. First, this characterization assumes that the truth is always within my grasp or possession, that it is always within the neighborhood of my being. It does not consider the possibility that the philosophical journey may entail a movement to a "yonder" or a "beyond," as Plato put it. Second, this view understands other people as no more than maieutic aids or enablers to my self-reflective life. It does not consider the possibility that beyond the other person being my midwife, he or she may actually be my teacher, the one who redirects my self-directed life to truth that I could not otherwise know.

We described the model of philosophical exploration which assumes the self-sufficiency of the philosophical traveler in terms of the traveler's autonomy. As a law unto him or herself the traveler is not accountable or answerable to anyone or anything other than itself. The autonomous being does not need to depart from him or herself to arrive at truth because, as the myth of anamnesis made clear, truth is always within. All I need is to turn inward, go deep within myself, to uncover the truth that was always there. To be sure, the truth does not equal myself (the slave-boy in the Meno who recollects the truth of a geometric problem does not principally discover a truth about himself). But what is noteworthy for our purposes, and what confirms our hypothesis about autonomy, is that this geometric truth was always already within the boy's grasp, was always understandable.
in terms set by the boy. Learning this truth did not require a fundamental transformation in
the learner at all. From within the perspective of anamnesis all truth is familiar, does not
come as a shock to my being.

The model of maieutics expanded the conception of autonomy by reinforcing the
view that I do not need to go outside of myself to learn the truth. Other people, to the extent
that they may or may not participate in my journey to truth, are at most the facilitators to my
quest. Socrates does not give the slave-boy anything that he did not already possess in
latent or forgotten form. Even the questioning Socrates engages in serves no other purpose
than to direct the boy inward. Elenchus is a further elaboration on the model of autonomy
in that it presupposes that when asked a question the answer is somehow a part of my life,
is derivable from the resources I have within my being. Again, this is not to suggest that
the answer is equal to myself. But it is to say that every answer will be an answer only to
the extent that it conforms to a criterion of intelligibility or meaning established by me -- in
order for the question to "take hold" with me it must first make sense to me, i.e., conform
to my world of meaning. The world makes sense to the extent that it fits within my world,
or can be made to fit within my world.

Levinas's description of the ethical relation represents a fundamental challenge to
this characterization of the philosophical journey to truth. The Other whom I meet is not
simply a midwife, an enabler of my own potential. The Other presents me with a teaching
that is not reducible to my self-reflective or self-recollective life. In meeting the face of
another I come to the acknowledgment of the inadequacy of all my efforts to finally
comprehend the Other because the Other is transcendent with respect to me. I cannot
encompass the Other with my thought because his or her approach surprises me, exceeds
my preparation and my resources. To be sure, I can thematize the Other's approach, have a
conscious representation of it, but as Levinas frequently notes, the Other's approach is not
equal to my consciousness of that approach. The Other comes to me from beyond, attends
to his or her own presentation or speech, and as such, no amount of anamnesis could prepare me for his or her approach, his or her teaching. Consciousness, as it were, is thus made aware of its insufficiency, and is thereby pointed to an excessive thought, i.e., the idea of the infinite. The model of autonomy, in the face of the ethical relation, is therefore not sufficient for an understanding of the philosophical ascent to truth. The face inaugurates a heteronomous order, an order which finds its inspiration beyond me.

If the model of autonomy, as described in the doctrine of maieutics, has the effect of turning me inward, the model of heteronomy has the effect of turning me outward. As one who has come to the acknowledgment of a transcendent claim upon my life I find myself in the position of having to respond to the Other who teaches me. The Other puts me in a position wherein I have to give justification for my life and my claims. The Other, by resisting comprehensive or all-encompassing grasp, asks me whether or not the knowledge I have of the world is not naive or dogmatic. Levinas would ask, is not all critical knowing (anarchically) founded in a relation in which I am brought to shame? Faced with a primordial teaching that has the effect of putting me into question I now find that I cannot rely on myself for truth. I am, instead, exposed to the claim the Other has upon me, and thus redirected by the Other who comes to me. My life, as a life opened to the teaching of the Other, consists in my going out to the Other, offering myself in substitution to him or her. And so learning, rather than being a recollective, inward turning gesture, as Socrates once suggested, turns out to entail the radical exhalation of oneself in the life of responsibility to the Other.

We can now begin to see in clearer terms how philosophical exploration is transformed by a description of primordial teaching and heteronomy. Thought is not reducible to an interior monologue of the soul conversing with itself. Nor is it characterizable solely in terms of the dialogue in which I and another ask questions which have the effect of turning us inward to a truth always within our possession. The Other, in
addition to asking me questions and facilitating an inward journey, speaks to me from his or her own voice. This masterful speech of the Other, which understands the Other as a genuine interlocutor and not just a midwife, puts me into question and calls me to a discourse or radical conversation. My conversation with the Other, as a conversation with the utterly new, takes me beyond myself, introduces me to vistas I could not imagine on my own.

What Levinas here describes is presupposed by every conversation, even if the effect of conversation, when understood in a maieutic way, would be to dissimulate the Other's transcendence. To philosophize is not only to carry on a monologue with oneself or to have others participate in my reflective life. When I speak my philosophical theses I am at once responding and addressing myself to another who speaks to me. This manner of response and address is easily overlooked by a philosopher's penchant to focus only on the thesis. But if we note the address itself, what Levinas calls the saying, then we can begin to see that the production of philosophical theses depends on the otherness of someone whom I can speak to. Philosophical discourse is thus not adequately understood as a solitary endeavor (noting too that elenchic dialogue does not take us beyond the solitary). It depends, rather, on the ethical relation with the Other, a relation which inspires me and calls me to life and thought.

In the ethical relation philosophical exploration is transformed from being a solitary quest to being a journey made possible by the teaching of the Other, his or her speech to me. Without the Other putting me into question my philosophical pronouncements would be locked within naiveté or dogmatism. Levinas suggests that the bold new task of philosophy would be to note the indiscretions and inadequacies of a thought which falsely claims to have identified and comprehended the world. But in order for it to do this philosophers must learn to be receptive to and welcome genuine teachers. The path to truth is created out of the "face to face" encounter with another.
Levinas's description of the ethical relation allows us to draw one other significant conclusion with respect to the nature of philosophy itself. If philosophy is inspired and maintained by the discourse with the Other, a discourse which entails the hearkening and responding to the Other, then the traditional formulation of philosophy as the "love of wisdom" can be reformulated as "the wisdom of love at the service of love." The philosopher's most important calling stems from his or her responsibility to other people. Philosophical theses or saids are not reducible to their thematic character. The condition for all such saids is that they be addressed to the Other. The said, in other words, points back to a saying which Levinas describes as sincerity to the Other. If the effect of the Other's teaching is to unsay the said, it is also to resay the saying in the life of responsibility to the Other.

Philosophy is called upon to conceive ambivalence, to conceive it in several times. Even if it is called to thought by justice, it still synchronizes in the said the diachrony of the difference between the one and the other, and remains the servant of the saying that signifies the difference between the one and the other as the one for the other, as non-indifference to the other. Philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love. (*OB*, 252-3/162 - my emphasis)
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The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

July 23, 1993  
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