

The Levinas Reader

Emmanuel Levinas

EDITED BY SEÁN HAND

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Ethics as First Philosophy

Published for the first time in *Justifications de l'éthique* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles), 1984, pp. 41–51, and specially translated for this volume, 'Ethics as First Philosophy' is a clear and powerful summary of Levinas's methodical and yet radical move away from Husserl's transcendental idealism and Heidegger's hermeneutics towards the ethical question of the meaning of being, presented in the face-to-face relation. Beginning with the phenomenological legacy which reveals knowledge as built on an intentionality in contact with concrete reality, Levinas quickly brings us to the point where we must recognize the closed and circular nature of this self-conscious awareness. Intentionality reduces wisdom to a notion of increasing self-consciousness, in which anything that is non-identical is absorbed by the identical. In this way, self-consciousness affirms itself as absolute being. But for Levinas the non-intentional subsists in duration itself, which cannot be controlled by will. This non-intentionality is an *unhappy consciousness* that exists without attributes or aims. As a result of the passivity of this *mauvaise conscience*, one affirms one's being by having to respond to one's *right* to be. This response means that responsibility for the Other preexists any self-consciousness, so that from the beginning of any face to face, the question of being involves the right to be. This is what Levinas means when he mentions the face of the Other: I do not grasp the other in order to dominate; I respond, instead, to the face's epiphany. As such, what is produced in a concrete form is the idea of infinity rather than totality. The relation is metaphysical, and precedes any ontological programme. Prior to a state-of-mind in which one finds oneself, therefore, the infinite vigilance we display with regard to the other, suspending all notion of totality, is that which founds and *justifies* being as the very being of being.

For a larger development of the various stages involved in this complex and challenging philosophy, see *Totality and Infinity*, especially section I.A.4: 'Metaphysics Precedes Ontology', and above all section III.B: 'Ethics and the Face'. Levinas answers questions on the phenomenology of the face in a recent interview published in *The Provocation of Levinas, Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 168–80.

I

The correlation between *knowledge*, understood as disinterested contemplation, and *being*, is, according to our philosophical tradition, the very site of intelligibility, the occurrence of meaning (*sens*). The comprehension of being – the semantics of this verb – would thus be the very possibility of or the occasion for wisdom and the wise and, as such, is *first philosophy*. The intellectual, and even spiritual life, of the West, through the priority it gives to knowledge identified with Spirit, demonstrates its fidelity to the first philosophy of Aristotle, whether one interprets the latter according to the ontology of book Γ of the *Metaphysics* or according to the theology or onto-theology of book Λ where the ultimate explanation of intelligibility in terms of the primary causality of God is a reference to a God defined by being *qua* being.

The correlation between knowledge and being, or the thematics of contemplation, indicates both a difference and a difference that is *overcome* in the *true*. Here the known is understood and so *appropriated* by knowledge, and as it were *freed* of its otherness. In the realm of truth, being, as the *other* of thought becomes the characteristic *property* of thought as knowledge. The ideal of rationality or of sense (*sens*) begins already to appear as the immanence of the real to reason; just as, in being, a privilege is granted to the *present*, which is presence to thought, of which the future and the past are modalities or modifications: re-presentations.

But in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will – a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own, of reducing to presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which *appropriates* and *grasps* the otherness of the known. A certain grasp: as an entity, being becomes the characteristic property of thought, as it is grasped by it and becomes known. Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension, refers back to an act of grasping. The metaphor should be taken literally: even before any technical application of knowledge, it expresses the principle rather than the result of the future technological and industrial order of which every civilisation bears at least the seed. The immanence of the known to the act of knowing is already the embodiment of seizure. This is not something applied like a form of magic to the 'impotent spirituality' of thinking, nor is it the guarantee of certain psycho-physiological conditions, but rather belongs to that unit of knowledge in which *Auffassen* (*understanding*) is also, and always has been, a *Fassen* (*gripping*). The mode of thought known as knowledge involves man's concrete existence in the world he inhabits, in which he moves and works and possesses. The most abstract lessons of science – as Husserl showed in

his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* – have their beginnings in the ‘world of life’ and refer to things within hand’s reach. It is to this hand that the idea of a ‘given world’ concretely refers. Things contain the promise of satisfaction – their concreteness puts them on a scale fit for a knowing form of thought. Thought as knowledge is already the labour of thought. A thought that assesses what is equal and adequate, and can give satisfaction. The rationality of beings stems from their presence and adequation. The operations of knowledge reestablish rationality behind the diachrony of *becoming* in which presence occurs or is foreseen. Knowledge is re-presentation, a return to presence, and nothing may remain *other* to it.

Thought is an activity, where something is appropriated by a knowledge that is independent, of course, of any finality exterior to it, an activity which is disinterested and self-sufficient and whose self-sufficiency, sovereignty, *bonne conscience*¹ and happy solitude are asserted by Aristotle. ‘The wise man can practise contemplation by himself’ says Book Ten of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.² This is a regal and as it were unconditioned activity, a sovereignty which is possible only as solitude, an unconditioned activity, even if limited for man by biological needs and by death. But it is a notion that allows a second one to be sustained, the notion of the pure *theoretic*, of its freedom, of the equivalence between wisdom and freedom, of that partial coincidence of the human domain with the divine life of which Aristotle speaks at the end of the seventh section of Book Ten of the *Ethics*. Here already the strange and contradictory concept of a *finite freedom* begins to take shape.

Throughout the whole history of Western philosophy, *contemplation* or *knowledge* and the *freedom of knowledge* are inspiration for the mind (*l’esprit*). Knowing is the psyche or pneumatic force of thought, even in the act of *feeling* or *willing*. It is to be found in the concept of *consciousness* at the dawn of the modern age with the interpretation of the concept of *cogito* given by Descartes in his Second Meditation. Husserl, returning to a medieval tradition, then, describes it as intentionality, which is understood as ‘consciousness of something’, and so is inseparable from its ‘intentional object’ This structure has a noetic-noematic composition in which representation or objectivization is the incontestable model. The whole of human lived experience, in the period up to and above all including the present, has been expressed in terms of experience, that is, has been converted into accepted doctrine, teachings, sciences. Relationships with neighbours, with social groups, with God equally represent collective and religious *experiences*.

Modernity will subsequently be distinguished by the attempt to develop from the identification and appropriation of being by knowledge toward the

identification of being *and* knowledge. The passage from the *cogito* to the *sum* leads to that point where the free activity of knowledge, an activity alien to any external goal, will also find itself on the side of what is known. This free activity of knowledge will also come to constitute the mystery of being *qua* being, whatever is known by knowledge (*le connu du savoir*). The *Wisdom of first philosophy* is reduced to self-consciousness. Identical and non-identical are identified. The labour of thought wins out over the otherness of things and men. Since Hegel, any goal considered alien to the disinterested acquisition of knowledge has been subordinated to the freedom of knowledge as a science (*savoir*); and within this freedom, *being* itself is from that point understood as *the active affirming of that same being*, as *the strength and strain of being*. Modern man persists in his being as a sovereign who is merely concerned to maintain the *powers of his sovereignty*. Everything that is possible is permitted. In this way the experience of Nature and Society would gradually get the better of any exteriority. A miracle of modern Western freedom unhindered by any memory or remorse, and opening onto a 'glittering future' where everything can be rectified. Only by death is this freedom thwarted. The obstacle of death is insurmountable, inexorable and fundamentally incomprehensible. The recognition of finitude will of course characterize a new test for ontology. But finitude and death will not have called into question the *bonne conscience* with which the freedom of knowledge operates. They will simply have put a check on its powers.

II

In this essay we wish to ask whether thought understood as knowledge, since the ontology of the first philosophy, has exhausted the possible modes of meaning for thought, and whether, beyond knowledge and its hold on being, a more urgent form does not emerge, that of wisdom. We propose to begin with the notion of intentionality, as it figures in Husserlian phenomenology, which is one of the culminating points in Western philosophy. The equivalence of thought and knowledge in relation to being is here formulated by Husserl in the most direct manner. Whilst successfully isolating the idea of an originary, non-theoretical intentionality from the active emotional life of consciousness, he continues to base his theory on *representation*, the objectivizing act, adopting Brentano's thesis at this point, in spite of all the precautions he takes in his new formulation of this thesis. Now, within consciousness – which is consciousness of something – knowledge is, by the same token, a relation to an *other* of consciousness and almost the aim or the will of that other which is an *object*.

Husserl, inviting us to question the intentionality of consciousness, wants us also to ask 'worauf sie eigentlich hinauswill' (*What are you getting at?*), an intention or wish which, incidentally, would justify calling the units of consciousness acts. At the same time, knowledge, within the intuition of truth, is described as a 'filling out' that gratifies a longing for the being as object, given and received in the original, *present* in a representation. It is a hold on being which equals a constitution of that being. This Transcendental Reduction suspends all independence in the world other than that of consciousness itself, and causes the world to be rediscovered as *noema*. As a result, it leads – or ought to lead – to full self-consciousness affirming itself as absolute being, and confirming itself as an *I* that, through all possible 'differences', is identified as master of its own nature as well as of the universe and able to illuminate the darkest recesses of resistance to its powers. As Merleau-Ponty in particular has shown, the *I* that constitutes the world comes up against a sphere in which it is by its very flesh implicated; it is implicated in what it otherwise would have constituted and so is implicated in the world. But it is present in the world as it is present in its own body, an intimate incarnation which no longer purely and simply displays the exteriority of an object.³

But this reduced consciousness – which, in reflecting upon itself, rediscovers and masters its own acts of perception and science as objects in the world, thereby affirming itself as self-consciousness and absolute being – also remains a non-intentional consciousness of itself, as though it were a surplus somehow devoid of any wilful aim. A non-intentional consciousness operating, if one may put it like this, unknowingly as knowledge, as a non-objectivizing knowledge. As such it accompanies all the intentional processes of consciousness and of the *ego* (*moi*) which, in that consciousness, 'acts' and 'wills' and has 'intentions'. Consciousness of consciousness, indirect, implicit and aimless, without any initiative that might refer back to an ego; passive like time passing and ageing me without my intervening (*sans moi*). A 'non-intentional' consciousness to be distinguished from philosophical reflection, or the internal perception to which, indeed, non-intentional consciousness might easily offer itself as an internal object and for which it might substitute itself by making explicit the implicit messages it bears. The intentional consciousness of reflection, in taking as its object the transcendental ego, along with its mental acts and states, may also thematize and grasp supposedly implicit modes of non-intentional lived experience. It is invited to do this by philosophy in its fundamental project which consists in enlightening the inevitable transcendental naivety of a consciousness forgetful of its horizon, of its implicit content and even of the time it lives through.

Consequently one is forced, no doubt too quickly, to consider in philoso-

phy all this immediate consciousness merely as a still confused representation to be duly brought to 'light' The obscure context of whatever is thematized is converted by reflection, or intentional consciousness, into clear and distinct data, like those which present the perceived world or a transcendental reduced consciousness.

One may ask, however, whether, beneath the gaze of reflected consciousness taken as self-consciousness, the non-intentional, experienced as the counterpoint to the intentional, does not conserve and free its true meaning. The critique of introspection as traditionally practised has always been suspicious of a modification that a supposedly spontaneous consciousness might undergo beneath the scrutinizing, thematizing, objectivizing and indiscreet gaze of reflection, and has seen this as a violation or distortion of some sort of secret. This is a critique which is always refuted only to be reborn.

The question is what exactly happens, then, in this non-reflective consciousness considered merely to be pre-reflective and the implicit partner of an intentional consciousness which, in reflection, intentionally aims for the thinking self (*soi*), as if the thinking ego (*moi*) appeared in the world and belonged to it? What might this supposed confusion or implication really mean? One cannot simply refer to the formal notion of potentiality. Might there not be grounds for distinguishing between the envelopment of the particular in the conceptual, the implicit understanding of the presupposition in a notion, the potentiality of what is considered possible within the horizon, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the intimacy of the non-intentional within what is known as pre-reflective consciousness and which is duration itself?

III

Does the 'knowledge' of pre-reflective self-consciousness really know? As a confused, implicit consciousness preceding all intentions – or as duration freed of all intentions – it is less an act than a pure passivity. This is not only due to its being-without-having-chosen-to-be or its fall into a confused world of possibilities already realised even before any choice might be made, as in Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*. It is a 'consciousness' that signifies not so much a knowledge of oneself as something that effaces presence or makes it discreet: Phenomenological analysis, of course, describes such a pure duration of time within reflection, as being intentionally structured by a play of retentions and protentions which, in the very duration of time, at least remain non-explicit and suppose, in that they represent a flow, another sort of time. This duration remains free from the sway of the will, absolutely outside all activity of the ego, and exactly like the ageing process which is

probably the perfect model of passive synthesis, a lapse of time no act of remembrance, reconstructing the past, could possibly reverse. Does not the temporality of implicit time, like the implication of the implicit, here signify otherwise than as knowledge taken on the run, otherwise than a way of representing presence or the non-presence of the future and the past? Duration as pure duration, non-intervention as being without insistence, as being that dare not speak its name, being that dare not be; the agency of the instant without the insistence of the ego, which is already a lapse in time, which is 'over before it's begun'! This implication of the non-intentional is a form of *mauvaise conscience*: it has no intentions, or aims, and cannot avail itself of the protective mask of a character contemplating in the mirror of the world a reassured and self-positing portrait. It has no name, no situation, no status. It has a presence afraid of presence, afraid of the insistence of the identical ego, stripped of all qualities. In its non-intentionality, not yet at the stage of willing, and prior to any fault, in its non-intentional identification, identity recoils before its affirmation. It dreads the insistence in the return to self that is a necessary part of identification. This is either *mauvaise conscience* or timidity; it is not guilty, but accused; and responsible for its very presence. It has not yet been invested with any attributes or justified in any way. This creates the reserve of the stranger or 'sojourner on earth', as it says in the Psalms, the countryless or 'homeless' person who dare not enter in. Perhaps the interiority of the mental is originally an insufficient courage to assert oneself in one's being or in body or flesh. One comes not into the world but into question. By way of reference to this, or in 'memory' of this, the ego (*moi*) which is already declaring and affirming itself (*s'affirme*) — or making itself firm (*s'affermit*) — itself in being, still remains ambiguous or enigmatic enough to recognise itself as hateful, to use Pascal's term, in this very manifestation of its emphatic identity of its ipseity, in the 'saying I'. The superb priority of $A = A$, the principle of intelligibility and meaning,⁴ this sovereignty, or freedom within the human ego, is also, as it were, the moment when humility occurs. This questions the affirmation and strengthening of being found in the famous and facilely rhetorical quest for the meaning of life, which suggests that the absolute ego, already endowed with meaning by its vital, psychic and social forces, or its transcendental sovereignty, then returned to its *mauvaise conscience*.

Pre-reflective, non-intentional consciousness would never be able to return to a moral realization of this passivity, as if, in that form of consciousness, one could already see a subject postulating itself in the 'indeclinable nominative', assured of its right to be and 'dominating' the timidity of the non-intentional like a spiritual infancy that is outgrown, or an attack of weakness that becomes an impassive psyche. The non-intentional is from

the start passivity, and the accusative in some way its 'first case' (Actually, this passivity, which does not correlate to any activity, is not so much something that describes the *mauvaise conscience* of the non-intentional [as] something that is described by it). This *mauvaise conscience* is not the finitude of existence signalled by anguish. My death, which is always going to be premature, does perhaps put a check on being which, *qua* being, perseveres in being, but in anguish this scandal fails to shake the *bonne conscience* of being, or the morality founded upon the inalienable right of the *conatus* which is also the right and the *bonne conscience* of freedom. However, it is in the passivity of the non-intentional, in the way it is spontaneous and precedes the formulation of any metaphysical ideas on the subject, that the very justice of the position within being is questioned, a position which asserts itself with intentional thought, knowledge and a grasp of the here and now. What one sees in this questioning is being as *mauvaise conscience*; to be open to question, but also to questioning, to have to respond. Language is born in responsibility. One has to speak, to say *I*, to be in the first person, precisely to be me (*moi*). But, from that point, in affirming this *me* being, one has to respond to one's right to be. It is necessary to think through to this point Pascal's phrase, 'the I (*mon*) is hateful'

IV

One has to respond to one's right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one's fear for the Other. My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun',⁵ my being at home,⁶ have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? Pascal's 'my place in the sun' marks the beginning of the image of the usurpation of the whole earth. A fear for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence. A fear which reaches back past my 'self-consciousness' in spite of whatever moves are made towards a *bonne conscience* by a pure perseverance in being. It is the fear of occupying someone else's place with the *Da* of my *Dasein*; it is the inability to occupy a place, a profound utopia.

In my philosophical essays, I have spoken a lot about the face of the Other as being the original site of the sensible. May I now briefly take up again the description, as I now see it, of the irruption of the face into the phenomenal order of appearances?

The proximity of the other is the face's meaning, and it means from the very start in a way that goes beyond those plastic forms which forever try to

cover the face like a mask of their presence to perception. But always the face shows through these forms. Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions, which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, vulnerability itself. This extreme exposure – prior to any human aim – is like a shot ‘at point blank range’ Whatever has been invested is extradited, but it is a hunt that occurs prior to anything being actually tracked down and beaten out into the open. From the beginning there is a face to face steadfast in its exposure to invisible death, to a mysterious forsakenness. Beyond the visibility of whatever is unveiled, and prior to any knowledge about death, mortality lies in the Other.

Does not expression resemble more closely this extreme exposure than it does some supposed recourse to a code? True *self-expression* stresses the nakedness and defencelessness that encourages and directs the violence of the first crime: the goal of a murderous uprightness is especially well-suited to exposing or expressing the face. The first murderer probably does not realize the result of the blow he is about to deliver, but his violent design helps him to find the line with which death may give an air of unimpeachable rectitude to the face of the neighbour; the line is traced like the trajectory of the blow that is dealt and the arrow that kills.

But, in its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business. It is as if that invisible death, ignored by the Other, whom already it concerns by the nakedness of its face, were already ‘regarding’ me prior to confronting me, and becoming the death that stares me in the face. The other man’s death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before vowing myself to him, I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his mortal solitude. The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.

Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more exactly, as if I had to answer for the other’s death even before *being*. A guiltless responsibility, whereby I am none the less open to an accusation of which no alibi, spatial or temporal, could clear me. It is as if the other established a relationship or a relationship were established whose whole

intensity consists in not presupposing the idea of community. A responsibility stemming from a time before my freedom – before my (*moi*) beginning, before any present. A fraternity existing in extreme separation. *Before*, but in what past? Not in the time preceding the present, in which I might have contracted any commitments. Responsibility for my neighbour dates from before my freedom in an immemorial past, an unrepresentable past that was never present and is more ancient than consciousness of

A responsibility for my neighbour, for the other man, for the stranger or sojourner, to which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me – nothing in the order of the thing, of the something, of number or causality.

It is the responsibility of a hostage which can be carried to the point of being substituted for the other person and demands an infinite subjection of subjectivity. Unless this anarchic responsibility, which summons me from nowhere into a present time, is perhaps the measure or the manner or the system of an immemorial freedom that is even older than being, or decisions, or deeds.

V

This summons to responsibility destroys the formulas of generality by which my knowledge (*savoir*) or acquaintance (*connaissance*) of the other man re-presents him to me as my fellow man. In the face of the other man I am inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one. By this freedom, humanity in me (*moi*) – that is, humanity as me – signifies, in spite of its ontological contingency of finitude and mortality, the anteriority and uniqueness of the non-*interchangeable*.

This is the anteriority and chosen nature of an excellence that cannot be reduced to the features distinguishing or constituting individual beings in the order of their world or people, in the role they play on history's social stage, as characters, that is, in the mirror of reflection or in self-consciousness.

Fear for the Other, fear for the other man's death, is *my* fear, but is in no way an *individual's* taking fright. It thus stands out against the admirable phenomenological analysis of *Befindlichkeit*⁷ found in *Sein und Zeit*: a reflective structure expressed by a pronominal verb, in which emotion is always emotion for something moving you, but also emotion for oneself. Emotion therefore consists in being moved – being scared by something, overjoyed by something, saddened by something, but also in feeling joy or sadness for oneself. All affectivity therefore has repercussions for my being-for-death. There is a double intentionality in the *by* and the *for* and so there is a turning back on oneself and a return to anguish for oneself, for one's finitude: in the fear inspired *by* the wolf, an anguish *for* my death. Fear for

the other man's death does not turn back into anguish for my death. It extends beyond the ontology of the Heideggerian *Dasein* and the *bonne conscience* of being in the sight of that being itself. There is ethical awareness and vigilance in this emotional unease. Certainly, Heidegger's being-for-death marks, for the being (*étant*), the end of his being-in-the-sight-of-that-being as well as the scandal provoked by that ending, but in that ending no scruple of being (*être*) is awakened.

This is the hidden human face behind perseverance in being! Hidden behind the affirmation of being persisting analytically – or animally – in its being, and in which the ideal vigour of identity identifying and affirming and strengthening itself in the life of human individuals and in their struggle for vital existence, whether conscious or unconscious or rational, the miracle of the ego vindicated in the eyes of the neighbour – or the miracle of the ego (*moi*) which has got rid of self (*soi*) and instead fears for the Other – is thus like the suspension, or epochè, of the eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself and of the intangible nature of its logical and ontological privilege. What is suspended is its ideal priority, which wipes out all otherness by murder or by all-encompassing and totalizing thought; or war and politics which pass themselves off as the relation of the Same to the Other (*l'Autre*). It is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its 'hateful' modality), that we find ethics and also probably the very spirituality of the soul, but most certainly the question of the meaning of being, that is, its appeal for justification. This first philosophy shows through the ambiguity of the identical, an identical which declares itself to be *I* at the height of its unconditional and even logically indiscernable identity, an autonomy above all criteria, but which precisely at the height of this unconditional identity confesses that it is hateful.

The ego is the very crisis of the being of a being (*de l'être de l'étant*) in the human domain. A crisis of being, not because the sense of this verb might still need to be understood in its semantic secret and might call on the powers of ontology, but because I begin to ask myself if my being is justified, if the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of somebody else's place.

This question has no need of a theoretical reply in the form of new information. Rather it appeals to responsibility, which is not a practical stopgap measure designed to console knowledge in its failure to match being. This responsibility does not deny knowledge the ability to comprehend and grasp; instead, it is the excellence of ethical proximity in its sociality, in its love without concupiscence. The human is the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness, to *mauvaise conscience*, to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which justifies being over that which assures it.

VI

To be or not to be – is that the question? Is it the first and final question? Does being human consist in forcing oneself to be and does the understanding of the meaning of being – the semantics of the verb to be – represent the first philosophy required by a consciousness which from the first would be knowledge and representation conserving its assurance in being-for-death, asserting itself as the lucidity of a thought thinking itself right through, even unto death and which, even in its finitude – already or still an unquestioned *mauvaise conscience* as regards its right to be – is either anguished or heroic in the precariousness of its finitude? Or does the first question arise rather in the *mauvaise conscience*, an instability which is different from that threatened by my death and my suffering? It poses the question of my right to be which is already my responsibility for the death of the Other, interrupting the carefree spontaneity of my naive perseverance. The right to be and the legitimacy of this right are not finally referred to the abstraction of the universal rules of the Law – but in the last resort are referred, like that law itself and justice – or for the other of my non-indifference, to death, to which the face of the Other – beyond my ending – in its very rectitude is exposed. Whether he regards me or not, he ‘regards’ me. In this question being and life are awakened to the human dimension. This is the question of the meaning of being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice. The question *par excellence* or the question of philosophy. Not ‘Why being rather than nothing?’, but how being justifies itself.

NOTES

- 1 We have decided to leave the phrases *bonne conscience* and *mauvaise conscience* in the original French. This is because, in addition to suggesting a good and a bad conscience (which is how they are translated in *Time and the Other*, p. 110, for example) or a clear and a guilty conscience, they also carry the connotation of consciousness and *unhappy consciousness*. For Hegel, unhappy consciousness (*das unglückliches Bewusstsein*) is an inwardly disrupted one, with a dual and essentially contradictory nature. It is therefore ‘the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both’ (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 126). It is the coexistence of master and slave, eternal and mortal, ‘the Unchangeable’ and the ‘changeable’ Critics are divided, however, over whether or not this duality is a sincerely felt representation of Christianity.
- 2 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, 1981).
- 3 A reference to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘body intentionality’ See the *Phenomenology of Perception*, part 1, pp. 67–199. In addition, see *Totality and Infinity*, p. 181.
- 4 Hegel characterizes the Absolute as A=A in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of*

- Spirit*, p. 9. The equation is in turn a reference to Leibniz, who calls $A=A$ 'the law of identity', arguing ultimately that no distinctions are real, and that identity with itself is the only ultimate equivalence.
- 5 A reference to Pascal's *Pensées* (Brunzschvicq 295/Lafume 112).
- 6 Levinas is alluding here to Heidegger's sense of *bei sich*, the real and ordinary sense in which the existent comes to exist 'for itself'. The meaning of 'bei' is close to that of 'at' in 'at home' or 'chez' in 'chez moi'. Cf. *Being and Time*, p. 80, H.54: "The expression "bin" is connected with "bei", and so "ich bin" (I am) mean in its turn "I reside" or "dwell alongside" the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. "Being" (*Sein*), as the infinitive of "ich bin" (that is to say, when it is understood as an *existentiale*), signifies "to reside alongside . . .", "to be familiar with . . ." "Being-in" is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of *Dasein*, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.'
- 7 *Befindlichkeit* has always been translated into English as 'state-of-mind', an expression also used for 'befinden' and 'befindlich'. More literally, it means 'the state in which one may be found', which is the sense it carries here in Levinas. As such, Heidegger's translators make it clear that 'the "of-mind"' belongs to English idiom, has no literal counterpart in the structure of the German word, and fails to bring out the important connotation of finding oneself (*Being and Time*, footnote to H.134, p. 172).

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