

TOTALITY AND **I** *NFINITY*

AN ESSAY ON
EXTERIORITY

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B. ETHICS AND THE FACE

1. Infinity and the Face

Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises a power over them. A thing is *given*, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same.

The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content.

The Other is not other with a relative alterity as are, in a comparison, even ultimate species, which mutually exclude one another but still have their place within the community of a genus—excluding one another by their definition, but calling for one another by this exclusion, across the community of their genus. The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity.

And yet the Other does not purely and simply negate the I; total negation, of which murder is the temptation and the attempt, refers to an antecedent relation. The relation between the Other and me, which dawns forth in his expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference. Or, more exactly, an absolute difference is not produced in a process of specification descending from genus to species, in which the order of logical relations runs up against the given, which is not reducible to relations. The difference thus encountered remains bound up with the logical hierarchy it contrasts with, and appears against the ground of the common genus.

Absolute difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language. Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of a genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within relationship. Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history.

The incomprehensible nature of the presence of the Other, which we spoke of above, is not to be described negatively. Better than comprehension, *discourse* relates with what remains essentially transcendent. For the moment we must attend to the formal work of language, which consists in presenting the transcendent; a more profound signification will emerge shortly. Language is a relation between separated terms. To the one the other can indeed present himself as a theme, but his presence is not reabsorbed in his status as a theme. 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. Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight acknowledges this evasion of the Other. The knowledge that absorbs the Other is forthwith situated within the discourse I address to him. Speaking, rather than "letting be," solicits the Other. Speech cuts across vision. In knowledge or vision the object seen can indeed determine an act, but it is an act that in some way appropriates the "seen" to itself, integrates it into a world by endowing it with a signification, and, in the last analysis, constitutes it. In discourse the divergence that inevitably opens between the Other as my theme and the Other as my interlocutor, emancipated from the theme that seemed a moment to hold him, forthwith contests the meaning I ascribe to my interlocutor. The formal structure of language thereby announces the ethical inviolability of the Other and, without any odor of the "numinous," his "holiness."

The fact that the face maintains a relation with me by discourse does not range him in the same; he remains absolute within the relation. The solipsist dialectic of consciousness always suspicious of being in captivity in the same breaks off. For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other.

The presence of a being not entering into, but overflowing, the sphere of the same determines its "status" as infinite. This overflowing

is to be distinguished from the image of liquid overflowing a vessel, because this overflowing presence is effectuated as a position *in face of* the same. The facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only as a moral summons. This movement proceeds from the other. 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. Thus a structure analogous to the ontological argument is here produced: the exteriority of a being is inscribed in its essence. But what is produced here is not a reasoning, but the epiphany that occurs as a face. The metaphysical desire for the absolutely other which animates intellectualism (or the radical empiricism that confides in the teaching of exteriority) deploys its *en-ergy* in the vision of the face [vision du visage], or in the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity exceeds my powers (not quantitatively, but, we will see later, by calling them into question); it does not come from our a priori depths—it is consequently experience par excellence.

The Kantian notion of infinity figures as an ideal of reason, the projection of its exigencies in a beyond, the ideal completion of what is given incomplete—but without the incomplete being confronted with a privileged *experience* of infinity, without it drawing the limits of its finitude from such a confrontation. The finite is here no longer conceived by relation to the infinite; quite the contrary, the infinite presupposes the finite, which it amplifies infinitely (although this passage to the limit or this projection implicates in an unacknowledged form the idea of infinity, with all the consequences Descartes drew from it, and which are presupposed in this idea of projection). The Kantian finitude is described positively by sensibility, as the Heideggerian finitude by the being for death. This infinity referring to the finite marks the most anti-Cartesian point of Kantian philosophy as, later, of Heideggerian philosophy.

Hegel returns to Descartes in maintaining the positivity of the infinite, but excluding all multiplicity from it; he posits the infinite as the exclusion of every "other" that might maintain a relation with the infinite and thereby limit it. The infinite can only encompass all relations. Like the god of Aristotle it refers only to itself, though now at the term of a history. The relation of a particular with infinity would be equivalent to the entry of this particular into the sovereignty of a State. It becomes infinite in negating its own finitude. But this out-

come does not succeed in smothering the protestation of the private individual, the apology of the separated being (though it be called empirical and animal), of the individual who experiences as a tyranny the State willed by his reason, but in whose impersonal destiny he no longer recognizes his reason. We recognize in the finitude to which the Hegelian infinite is opposed, and which it encompasses, the finitude of man before the elements, the finitude of man invaded by the *there is*, at each instant traversed by faceless gods against whom labor is pursued in order to realize the security in which the "other" of the elements would be revealed as the same. But the other absolutely other—the Other—does not limit the freedom of the same; calling it to responsibility, it founds it and justifies it. The relation with the other as face heals allergy. It is desire, teaching received, and the pacific opposition of discourse. In returning to the Cartesian notion of infinity, the "idea of infinity" put in the separated being by the infinite, we retain its positivity, its anteriority to every finite thought and every thought of the finite, its exteriority with regard to the finite; here there was the possibility of separated being. The idea of infinity, the overflowing of finite thought by its content, effectuates the relation of thought with what exceeds its capacity, with what at each moment it learns without suffering shock. This is the situation we call welcome of the face. The idea of infinity is produced in the *opposition* of conversation, in sociality. The relation with the face, with the other absolutely other which I can not contain, the other in this sense infinite, is nonetheless my Idea, a commerce. But the relation is maintained without violence, in peace with this absolute alterity. The "resistance" of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical. The first revelation of the other, presupposed in all the other relations with him, does not consist in grasping him in his negative resistance and in circumventing him by ruse. I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation.

2. Ethics and the Face

The face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the

hand comes to naught, like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power.* The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.

And yet this new dimension opens in the sensible appearance of the face. The permanent openness of the contours of its form in expression imprisons this openness which breaks up form in a caricature. The face at the limit of holiness and caricature is thus still in a sense exposed to powers. In a sense only: the depth that opens in this sensibility modifies the very nature of power, which henceforth can no longer take, but can kill. Murder still aims at a sensible datum, and yet it finds itself before a datum whose being can not be *suspended* by an appropriation. It finds itself before a datum absolutely non-neutralizable. The "negation" effected by appropriation and usage remained always partial. The grasp that contests the independence of the thing preserves it "for me." Neither the destruction of things, nor the hunt, nor the extermination of living beings aims at the face, which is not of the world. They still belong to labor, have a finality, and answer to a need. Murder alone lays claim to total negation. Negation by labor and usage, like negation by representation, effect a grasp or a comprehension, rest on or aim at affirmation; they can. To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique "matter" possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.

But how does this disproportion between infinity and my powers differ from that which separates a very great obstacle from a force applied to it? It would be pointless to insist on the banality of murder, which reveals the quasi-null resistance of the obstacle. This most banal incident of human history corresponds to an exceptional possibility—since it

* "Mon pouvoir de pouvoir."

claims the total negation of a being. It does not concern the force that this being may possess as a part of the world. The Other who can sovereignly say *no* to me is exposed to the point of the sword or the revolver's bullet, and the whole unshakeable firmness of his "for itself" with that intransigent *no* he opposes is obliterated because the sword or the bullet has touched the ventricles or auricles of his heart. In the contexture of the world he is a quasi-nothing. But he can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance, but the very *unforeseeableness* of his reaction. He thus opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable and consequently presenting itself as though it were part of a whole, but the very transcendence of his being by relation to that whole; not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: "you shall not commit murder." 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 eyes, 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. The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt. If the resistance to murder were not ethical but real, we would have a *perception* of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception. We would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle. The epiphany of the face is ethical. The struggle this face can threaten *presupposes* the transcendence of expression. The face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word. War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the Other; it does not represent the first event of the encounter.

The impossibility of killing does not have a simply negative and formal signification; the relation with infinity, the idea of infinity in us, conditions it positively. Infinity presents itself as a face in the ethical resistance that paralyzes my powers and from the depths of defenceless eyes

rises firm and absolute in its nudity and destitution. The comprehension of this destitution and this hunger establishes the very proximity of the other. But thus the epiphany of infinity is expression and discourse. The primordial essence of expression and discourse does not reside in the information they would supply concerning an interior and hidden world. In expression a being presents itself; the being that manifests itself attends its manifestation and consequently appeals to me. This attendance is not the *neutrality* [*le neutre*] of an image, but a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height. To speak to me is at each moment to surmount what is necessarily plastic in manifestation. To manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation, the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image, in one's nudity, that is, in one's destitution and hunger. In *Desire* are conjoined the movements unto the Height and unto the Humility of the Other.

Expression does not radiate as a splendor that spreads unbeknown to the radiating being—which is perhaps the definition of beauty. To manifest oneself in attending one's own manifestation is to invoke the interlocutor and expose oneself to his response and his questioning. Expression does not impose itself as a true representation or as an action. The being offered in true representation remains a possibility of appearance. The world which invades me when I engage myself in it is powerless against the "free thought" that suspends that engagement, or even refuses it interiorly, being capable of living hidden. The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility, where the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all laughter, is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked. It is thus the irremissible weight of being that gives rise to my freedom. The ineluctable has no longer the inhumanity of the fateful, but the severe seriousness of goodness.

This bond between expression and responsibility, this ethical condition or essence of language, this function of language prior to all disclosure of being and its cold splendor, permits us to extract language from subjection to a preexistent thought, where it would have but the servile function of translating that preexistent thought on the outside, or of

universalizing its interior movements. The presentation of the face is not true, for the true refers to the non-true, its eternal contemporary, and ineluctably meets with the smile and silence of the skeptic. The presentation of being in the face does not leave any logical place for its contradictory. Thus I cannot evade by silence the discourse which the epiphany that occurs as a face opens, as Thrasymachus, irritated, tries to do, in the first book of the *Republic* (moreover without succeeding). "To leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary does not apply here," says Rabbi Yochanan.¹ Before the hunger of men responsibility is measured only "objectively"; it is irrecusable. The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no "interiority" permits avoiding. It is that discourse that obliges the entering into discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for, a "force" that convinces even "the people who do not wish to listen"² and thus founds the true universality of reason.

Preexisting the disclosure of being in general taken as basis of knowledge and as meaning of being is the relation with the existent that expresses himself; preexisting the plane of ontology is the ethical plane.

3. Reason and the Face

Expression is not produced as the manifestation of an intelligible form that would connect terms to one another so as to establish, across distance, the assemblage of parts in a totality, in which the terms joined up already derive their meaning from the situation created by their community, which, in its turn, owes its meaning to the terms combined. This "circle of understanding" is not the primordial event of the logic of being. Expression precedes these coordinating effects visible to a third party.

The event proper to expression consists in bearing witness to oneself, and guaranteeing this witness. This attestation of oneself is possible only as a face, that is, as speech. It produces the commencement of intelligibility, initiality itself, principality, royal sovereignty, which commands unconditionally. The principle is possible only as command. A search for the influence that expression would have undergone or an unconscious source from which it would emanate would presuppose

¹ Treatise *Synhedrin*, 104 b.

² Plato, *Republic*, 327 b.

an inquiry that would refer to new testimonies, and consequently to an original sincerity of an expression.

Language as an exchange of ideas about the world, with the mental reservations it involves, across the vicissitudes of sincerity and deceit it delineates, presupposes the originality of the face without which, reduced to an action among actions whose meaning would require an infinite psychoanalysis or sociology, it could not commence. If at the bottom of speech there did not subsist this originality of expression, this break with every influence, this dominant position of the speaker foreign to all compromise and all contamination, this straightforwardness of the face to face, speech would not surpass the plane of activity, of which it is evidently not a species—even though language can be integrated into a system of acts and serve as an instrument. But language is possible only when speaking precisely renounces this function of being action and returns to its essence of being expression.

Expression does not consist in *giving* us the Other's interiority. The Other who expresses himself precisely does not *give* himself, and accordingly retains the freedom to lie. But deceit and veracity already presuppose the absolute authenticity of the face—the privileged case of a presentation of being foreign to the alternative of truth and non-truth, circumventing the ambiguity of the true and the false which every truth risks—an ambiguity, moreover, in which all values move. The presentation of being in the face does not have the status of a value. What we call the face is precisely this exceptional presentation of self by self, incommensurable with the presentation of realities simply given, always suspect of some swindle, always possibly dreamt up. To seek truth I have already established a relationship with a face which can guarantee itself, whose epiphany itself is somehow a word of honor. Every language as an exchange of verbal signs refers already to this primordial word of honor. The verbal sign is placed where someone signifies something to someone else. It therefore already presupposes an authentication of the signifier.

The ethical relation, the face to face, also cuts across every relation one could call mystical, where events other than that of the presentation of the original being come to overwhelm or sublimate the pure sincerity of this presentation, where intoxicating equivocations come to enrich the primordial univocity of expression, where discourse becomes incantation as prayer becomes rite and liturgy, where the interlocutors find themselves playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them. Here

resides the rational character of the ethical relation and of language. No fear, no trembling could alter the straightforwardness of this relationship, which preserves the discontinuity of relationship, resists fusion, and where the response does not evade the question. To poetic activity—where influences arise unbeknown to us out of this nonetheless conscious activity, to envelop it and beguile it as a rhythm, and where action is borne along by the very work it has given rise to, where in a dionysiac mode the artist (according to Nietzsche's expression) becomes a work of art—is opposed the language that at each instant dispels the charm of rhythm and prevents the initiative from becoming a role. Discourse is rupture and commencement, breaking of rhythm which enraptures and transports the interlocutors—prose.

The face in which the other—the absolutely other—presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. This presentation is preeminently nonviolence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As nonviolence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace. The relation with the other—the absolutely other—who has no frontier with the same is not exposed to the allergy that afflicts the same in a totality, upon which the Hegelian dialectic rests. The other is not for reason a scandal which launches it into dialectical movement, but the first rational teaching, the condition for all teaching. The alleged scandal of alterity presupposes the tranquil identity of the same, a freedom sure of itself which is exercised without scruples, and to whom the foreigner brings only constraint and limitation. This flawless identity freed from all participation, independent in the I, can nonetheless lose its tranquillity if the other, rather than countering it by upsurging on the same plane as it, speaks to it, that is, shows himself in expression, in the face, and comes from on high. Freedom then is inhibited, not as countered by a resistance, but as arbitrary, guilty, and timid; but in its guilt it rises to responsibility. Contingency, that is, the irrational, appears to it not outside of itself in the other, but within itself. It is not limitation by the other that constitutes contingency, but egoism, as unjustified of itself. The relation with the Other as a relation with his transcendence—the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one's immanent destiny—introduces into me what was not in me. But this "action" upon my freedom precisely puts an end to violence

and contingency, and, in this sense also, founds Reason. To affirm that the passage of a content from one mind to the other is produced without violence only if the truth taught by the master is from all eternity in the student is to extrapolate maieutics beyond its legitimate usage. The idea of infinity in me, implying a content overflowing the container, breaks with the prejudice of maieutics without breaking with rationalism, since the idea of infinity, far from violating the mind, conditions nonviolence itself, that is, establishes ethics. The other is not for reason a scandal that puts it in dialectical movement, but the first teaching. 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 incessant overflowing of self (which is time). To think is to have the idea of infinity, or to be taught. Rational thought refers to this teaching. Even if we confine ourselves to the formal structure of logical thought, which starts from a definition, infinity, relative to which concepts are delimited, can not be defined in its turn. It accordingly refers to a "knowledge" of a new structure. We seek to fix it as a relation with the face and to show the ethical essence of this relation. The face is the evidence that makes evidence possible—like the divine veracity that sustains Cartesian rationalism.

4. Discourse Founds Signification

Language thus conditions the functioning of rational thought: it gives it a commencement in being, a primary identity of signification in the face of him who speaks, that is, who presents himself by ceaselessly undoing the equivocation of his own image, his verbal signs. 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. This event is irreducible to consciousness, where everything comes about from within—even the strangeness of suffering. To regard language as an attitude of the mind does not amount to disincarnating it, but is precisely to account for its incarnate essence, its difference from the constitutive,

7. *The Asymmetry of the Interpersonal*

The presence of the face coming from beyond the world, but committing me to human fraternity, does not overwhelm me as a numinous essence arousing fear and trembling. To be in relationship while absolving oneself from this relation is to speak. 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 there from the first as an absolute. The I disengages itself from the relationship, but does so within relationship with a being absolutely separated. The face with which the Other turns to me is not reabsorbed in a representation of the face. To hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible, both as more and as less than the being that presents itself in the face. Less, for the face summons me to my obligations and judges me. The being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy. More, for my position as *I* consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for myself. The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated.

These differences between the Other and me do not depend on different "properties" that would be inherent in the "I," on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other, nor on different psychological dispositions which their minds would take on from the encounter. They are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being "starting from oneself" toward "the Other." The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot arise without this orientation) summarizes the theses of the present work.

Being *is* not *first*, to afterwards, by breaking up, give place to a diversity all of whose terms would maintain reciprocal relations among themselves, exhibiting thus the totality from which they proceed, and in which there would on occasion be produced a being existing for itself, an I, facing another I (incidents that could be accounted for by an impersonal discourse exterior to those incidents). Not even the language that narrates it can depart from the orientation of the I to the Other. Language does not take place *in front of* a correlation from which the I would derive its identity and the Other his alterity. The separation

involved in language does not denote the presence of two beings in an ethereal space where union simply echos separation. Separation is first the fact of a being that lives *somewhere*, from *something*, that is, that enjoys. The identity of the I comes to it from its egoism whose insular sufficiency is accomplished by enjoyment, and to which the face teaches the infinity from which this insular sufficiency is separated. This egoism is indeed founded on the infinitude of the other, which can be accomplished only by being produced as the idea of Infinity in a separated being. The other does indeed invoke this separated being, but this invocation is not reducible to calling for a correlative. It leaves room for a process of being that is deduced from itself, that is, remains separated and capable of shutting itself up against the very appeal that has aroused it, but also capable of welcoming this face of infinity with all the resources of its egoism: economically. Speech is not instituted in a homogeneous or abstract medium, but in a world where it is necessary to aid and to give. It presupposes an I, an existence separated in its enjoyment, which does not welcome empty-handed the face and its voice coming from another shore. Multiplicity in being, which refuses totalization but takes form as fraternity and discourse, is situated in a "space" essentially asymmetrical.

8. Will and Reason

Discourse conditions thought, for the first intelligible is not a concept, but an intelligence whose inviolable exteriority the face states in uttering the "you shall not commit murder." The essence of discourse is ethical. In stating this thesis, idealism is refused.

The idealist intelligible constitutes a system of coherent ideal relations whose presentation before the subject is equivalent to the entry of the subject into this order and its absorption into those ideal relations. The subject has no resource in itself that does not dry up under the intelligible sun. Its will is reason and its separation illusory (even though the possibility of illusion attests the existence of an at least subterranean subjective source which the intelligible cannot dry up).

Idealism completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics. The Other and the I function as elements of an ideal calculus, receive from this calculus their real being, and approach one another under the dominion of ideal necessities which traverse them from all sides. They play the role of moments in a system, and not that of origin. Political society appears as a plurality that expresses the multiplicity of the articulations

of a system. In the kingdom of ends, where persons are indeed defined as wills, but where the will is defined as what permits itself to be affected by the universal—where the will wishes to be reason, be it practical reason—multiplicity rests in fact only on the hope of happiness. The so-called animal principle of happiness, ineluctable in the description of the will, even taken as practical reason, maintains pluralism in the society of minds.

In this world without multiplicity language loses all social significance; interlocutors renounce their unicity not in desiring one another but in desiring the universal. Language would be equivalent to the constitution of rational institutions in which an impersonal reason which is already at work in the persons who speak and already sustains their effective reality would become objective and effective: each being is posited apart from all the others, but the will of each, or ipseity, from the start consists in willing the universal or the rational, that is, in negating its very particularity. In accomplishing its essence as discourse, in becoming a discourse universally coherent, language would at the same time realize the universal State, in which multiplicity is reabsorbed and discourse comes to an end, for lack of interlocutors.

To distinguish formally will and understanding, will and reason, nowise serves to maintain plurality in being or the unicity of the person if one forthwith decides to consider only the will that adheres to clear ideas or decides only through respect for the universal to be a good will. If the will can aspire to reason in one way or another, it is reason, reason seeking or forming itself; its true essence is revealed in Spinoza or in Hegel. This identification of will and reason, which is the ultimate intention of idealism, is opposed by the entire pathetic experience of humanity, which the Hegelian or Spinozist idealism relegates to the subjective or the imaginary. The interest of this opposition does not lie in the very protestation of the individual who refuses the system and reason, that is, in his arbitrariness, which the coherent discourse could hence not silence by persuasion—but in the affirmation that makes this opposition live. For the opposition does not consist in shutting one's eyes to being and thus striking one's head madly against the wall so as to surmount in oneself the consciousness of one's deficiencies of being, one's destitution, and one's exile, and so as to transform a humiliation into desperate pride. This opposition is inspired by the certainty of the surplus which an existence separated from and thus desiring the full or immutable being or being in act involves by relation to that being, *that*

is, the surplus that is produced by the society of infinity, an incessant surplus that accomplishes the infinitude of infinity. The protestation against the identification of the will with reason does not indulge in arbitrariness, which, by its absurdity and immorality, would immediately justify this identification. It proceeds from the certitude that the ideal of a being accomplished from all eternity, thinking only itself, can not serve as the ontological touchstone for a life, a becoming, capable of renewal, of Desire, of society. Life is not comprehensible simply as a diminution, a fall, or an embryo or virtuality of being. The individual and the personal count and act independently of the universal, which would mould them. Moreover, the existence of the individual on the basis of the universal, or the fall from which it arises, remains unexplained. *The individual and the personal are necessary for Infinity to be able to be produced as infinite.*⁵ The impossibility of treating life in function of being is manifested compellingly in Bergson, where duration no longer imitates, in its fallenness, an immobile eternity, or in Heidegger, where possibility no longer is referred to *ἔργον* as a *δύναμις*. Heidegger dissociates life from the finality of potency tending toward act. That there could be a more than being or an above being is expressed in the idea of creation which, in God, exceeds a being eternally satisfied with itself. But this notion of the being above being does not come from theology. If it has played no role in the Western philosophy issued from Aristotle, the Platonic idea of the Good ensures it the dignity of a philosophical thought—and it therefore should not be traced back to any oriental wisdom.

If the subjectivity were but a deficient mode of being, the distinguishing between will and reason would indeed result in conceiving the will as arbitrary, as a pure and simple negation of an embryonic or virtual reason dormant in an I, and consequently as a negation of that I and a violence in regard to oneself. If, on the contrary, the subjectivity is fixed as a separated being in relation with an other absolutely other, the Other, if the face brings the first signification, that is, the very upsurge of the rational, then the will is distinguished fundamentally from the intelligible, which it must not comprehend and into which it must not disappear, for the intelligibility of this intelligible resides precisely in ethical behavior, that is, in the responsibility to which it invites the will. The will is free to assume this responsibility in whatever sense it likes; it

⁵ See below, "The Truth of the Will," pp. 240 ff.

is not free to refuse this responsibility itself; it is not free to ignore the meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced it. *In the welcoming of the face the will opens to reason.* Language is not limited to the maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings. It does not accelerate the inward maturation of a reason common to all; it teaches and introduces the new into a thought. The introduction of the new into a thought, the idea of infinity, is the very work of reason. The absolutely new is the Other. The rational is not opposed to the experienced; absolute experience, the experience of what is in no way a priori, is reason itself. In discovering, as correlative of experience, the Other, him who, being in himself essentially, can speak, and nowise sets himself up as an object, the *novelty* contributed by experience is reconciled with the ancient Socratic exigency of a mind nothing can force, an exigency Leibniz again answers to in refusing the monads windows. The ethical presence is both other and imposes itself without violence. As the activity of reason commences with speech, the subject does not abdicate his unicity, but confirms his separation. He does not enter into his own discourse to disappear in it; it remains an apology. The passage to the rational is not a dis-individuation precisely because it is language, that is, a response to the being who in a face speaks to the subject and tolerates only a personal response, that is, an ethical act.