INTRODUCTION

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It is only then that the relation to exteriority would no longer catch its breath. The metaphysics of the face therefore *encloses* the thought of Being, presupposing the difference between Being and the existent at the same time as it stifles it.

—Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics”

REVISITING THE QUESTION OF LEVINAS AND HEIDEGGER

Who is Heidegger to Levinas? Who is Levinas to Heidegger? What would it mean to think *between* ontology and ethics, *between* the history of Being and the beyond Being? What sorts of issues emerge at these crossroads, and what do those issues have to say about the beginnings and ends of philosophy?

The chapters collected here engage these sorts of questions in pursuit of another kind of relation between Levinas and Heidegger. To be sure, much has been written of this relationship, especially from the perspective of Levinasians concerned with the historical and philosophical roots of ethics as first philosophy. Levinas’s texts offer numerous examples of critique, and perhaps as a result, commentary has often—maybe too often—adopted Levinas’s polemical tone. Levinas’s reading of Heidegger is never especially subtle or restrained. And Heidegger scholars—Heidegger of course did not write on Levinas—have not been especially enthusiastic or especially interested in Levinas’s claim to have subverted and overcome fundamental ontology. At first glance, the Levinas-Heidegger relation appears stalled and, at best, wholly one-sided. But what would it mean to pursue this relation beyond the limits of textual evidence or mere polemic? Another kind of relation; what is the *philosophical* meaning and even possible promise of this relation?
There is a fairly standard narrative about the trajectory of Levinas’s work, and the encounter with Heidegger nearly always proves decisive. Under the direction of Jean Hering, professor of Protestant theology at Strasbourg, Levinas journeyed to Freiburg in 1928–1929 to live and study in the “city of phenomenology.” Initially concerned with the Husserlian prerogative, Levinas, like so many in that city, fell under the spell of Heidegger’s critique of Husserl in both *Being and Time* and the lecture courses of the late 1920s. This particular spell pays its first dividend in the form of his thesis, *Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930), a book that employed Heideggerian notions of transcendence and—in the conclusion—historicity and life to reformulate Husserl’s notions of intuition and intentionality.¹ A cluster of articles by Levinas from the early 1930s in the same spirit appeared, praising the new German philosophical movement with special emphasis on Heidegger’s intervention. At this point, one already sees the problematic of transcendence in Levinas’s work, and so the story goes, this problematic is largely Heideggerian in character and orientation.

But there is a decisive interruption. Levinas’s account of transcendence shifts, with enormous philosophical consequences, from the ecstatic structure of subjectivity toward what becomes a language of alterity. Levinas begins to become “Levinas,” and ethical life moves to the center of his philosophical work. Now, whether that interruption consists of an encounter with other texts and ideas (namely, Rosenzweig and other Jewish thinkers, sacred texts, or even the Kierkegaard revival and Jean Wahl) or derives from outrage at the Heidegger scandal of 1933–34 is a matter of important debate. Levinas scholars have been attentive—while never in wholehearted agreement—to the nuances of these shifts in emphasis and the fundamental interruption of Levinas’s relationship to the Heideggerian transformation of phenomenology. The shift and interruption are famously characterized by Levinas as leaving “the climate” of Heidegger’s work. The obvious question is then: how are we to understand the relationship of a post-Heideggerian thinking—that is, a Levinasian thinking—to Heidegger’s enormous contribution to such a “post”? Indeed, leaving the climate proves more complicated than simply beginning anew; there is always still the trace of Heidegger in the departure from and critique of his work. Levinas will never characterize his work as before or in any way straightforwardly prior to the Heideggerian revolution. Levinas thinks after Heidegger. In this regard, it is worth quoting in full how Levinas articulates this break in *From Existence to Existents* (1947), where he writes: “If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian.”² Thus begins a long body of work that is consistently

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critical of Heidegger, often delivered as short polemics and spanning nearly five decades. We have to take this passage seriously, however, if for no other reason than for the fact that Levinas makes it impossible to pose his break with Heidegger as simple dismissal or refusal: we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian.

Even though Levinas's critique of Heidegger reaches across a handful of decades, sitting at the center of so many pivotal passages from Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being, his critique has three nearly invariant features. First, Levinas, by his own admission and design, generally limits his critical commentary on Heidegger to Being and Time with a few important exceptions. When Levinas articulates the primacy of the Infinite, the otherwise than being, or the trace—those three movements against the transcendence of Being that Levinas interprets as a philosophy of immmanence and totality—his primary opposition is to Heidegger's early project of fundamental ontology. Although Levinas does take up aspects of Heidegger's later thought, such as the issue of ontotheology, in later works, the matter of Heidegger's later thought, which emphasizes the withdrawal of Being and a very different notion of human existence, is mostly left for us to explore. Second, Levinas works with a very simple characterization of Heidegger's work, namely, that it is a reflection of the philosophy of totality inherent, with very few exceptions, in the destiny of the West. Even though they appear to have radically different concerns, being and ethics, both critique the history of Western philosophy as a forgetful and neglectful whole. Further, despite his apparent enthusiasm for Heidegger's work in The Theory of Intuition, Levinas quickly grows suspicious of ontology as a form of thinking totality. Surely, for better or worse, Levinas cannot but hint at the link between fundamental ontology and the scandal of 1933–34. And so, third, beginning with his philosophical and political writings of the 1930s, Levinas is concerned with the connections between Heidegger's thought and National Socialism. The refusal to read or take seriously Heidegger's work after Being and Time gives a certain polemical intensity to Levinas's work, but also, as this volume notes in many chapters, leads one to wonder if Heidegger's work might bear unexpected parallels or intersections with Levinas's experiments with the language of alterity.

If there is no pre-Heideggerian thought, even as Levinas identifies fundamental ontology with the totality and totalitarianism of the Occident's excesses, then we still have little clarity on the opening question of our query: who is Heidegger to Levinas? It is perhaps worth revisiting Levinas's “Signature,” that autobiographical essay that is so telling about questions of influence. In this essay, Levinas comes back to the notion of experience after having spent many decades disrupting and contesting the phenomenological account of Erlebnis, which he first explored in his earliest works. The for-the-Other of Levinasian subjectivity is reinscribed in a
certain kind of experience—what he calls in “Signature” experience par excellence, recalling a characterization from Totality and Infinity. With this notion of experience, Levinas is able to locate his break with Heidegger in the anti-Heideggerian “substitution,” a kind of phenomenological sleight of hand in relation to the existent. Levinas writes:

> By time, language, and subjectivity do not only presuppose a being which tears itself away from totality; they also assume one which does not encompass it. Time, language, and subjectivity delineate a pluralism and consequently, in the strongest sense of this term, and experience: one being's reception of an absolutely other being. In the place of ontology—of the Heideggerian comprehension of the Being of being—is substituted as primordial the relation of a being to a being, which is none the less not equivalent to a rapport between subject and object, but rather to a proximity, to a relation with the Other.3

With the evocation of time, language, and subjectivity, Levinas situates his break with Heidegger as an immanent overturning, where the questions and priorities of Heidegger's philosophy eclipse not only something about experience, but also the very relation that would condition the problematic of fundamental ontology and the history of Being. Levinas holds fast to this story about Heidegger: ontology is always more and less than the Other, and thus always after ethics as first philosophy.

Few Heidegger scholars appear to be either convinced or even challenged by Levinas's criticisms, even as some revise their interpretation of Heidegger in light of this critique. The critical appeal to the otherwise than Being has barely registered in Heidegger scholarship, in no small part due to the dominant perception that Levinas's reading of Heidegger is weak, based on few texts, or in some cases wholly inaccurate. It must be said that Levinas has not helped himself in this case. The refusal to read the middle and late works of Heidegger—all moral high ground notwithstanding—truncates Levinas's claims about Heidegger. How can one make sweeping claims about totality and Sameness in Heidegger's work without following the trajectory of a very complex thinking of being? And one has to wonder: what insights and resources are missed by Levinas when he refuses to read Heidegger's extended reflections on the temporality of the retreat or withdrawal of Being, transcendence in language and dwelling, and the logic of the event and trace of history? That is, Heidegger's work is not only more complicated that Levinas would seem to recognize, but actually takes on many similar motifs in terms of the fracturing of time, history, and subjectivity.
There are philosophical questions to be raised, in a Heideggerian register, about Levinas's work as well. Though Heidegger offers no commentary on Levinas's work, there is certainly a cluster of seeming immovable Heideggerian oppositions to Levinas. From the Heideggerian perspective, one is surely struck by the ontic and ahistorical character—claims to write "otherwise than Being" notwithstanding—of Levinas's deformed descriptions of the face-to-face. The unicity of the ethical, which encompasses both the subject in the accusative and the Other who accuses, neither speaks nor acts in a hermeneutical situation or historical context. There is no relation to a past beyond the temporal dynamics of the face-to-face. No question regarding the conditions and contexts for the possibility of the face-to-face, of the relation of existent to existent, is raised by Levinas. This is in part why Levinas's work functions less like a transcendental philosophy and more like a radical empiricism. Yet, one is certainly justified in asking how one can claim rights to the language of “existent,” “subject,” and so on, without asking about the meaning of Being, about the historical character of language, and about the sorts of questions Heidegger puts to philosophy. As such, Levinas's work may be seen as marked in some profound way by a naiveté derived, primarily, from its inability to ask the Seinsfrage.

It is no surprise that many, if not most, studies of the relationship between Heidegger and Levinas have taken on a polemical form. Indeed, the very terms of their respective philosophical positions seems to warrant such antagonism. Ethics or ontology? This disjunction seems immovable, simply at the level of terms and conceptual schemas. Is this an inevitable direction in scholarship? Is the “and” of Heidegger and Levinas unavoidably an either/or? Alongside this antagonism is also the cluster of important, common influences—Kant, Hegel, and Husserl, to name only three—which would seem to hold out some hope that such antagonism hardly seems unavoidable. Surely such radical and decisive critics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy share something more than a simple disjunct. Also, perhaps more importantly, Heidegger and Levinas are concerned with common philosophical questions derived from phenomenology in particular, and to a lesser yet still significant sense by Neokantianism and "life-philosophy," but also from art, history, language, religion, and of course ethics. What would it mean to address the between of between Levinas and Heidegger in a phenomenological or even more widely philosophical register, where these questions form die Sachen of inquiry? Perhaps in following each thinker, taking the marks on the path of radical reflection as ways of coming to terms with critique, we can find something shared even in moments of separation, disagreement, and contrary groundings of “first philosophy.” This collection pursues this perhaps, in search of another sense of “between Levinas and Heidegger.
The present volume is organized around four thematic groupings. As evident in the reflections in this collection, and in the existing literature on the Heidegger-Levinas relationship, the crux of Levinas’s critique of Heidegger is the distinction between ethics and ontology and different understandings of being, immanence, and transcendence. The opening section “Immanence and Transcendence” poses these questions in the contexts of the intersection and ambivalence of ethics and politics, religion and secularization, and history and what transcends history. This crux of ethics and ontology is immanent to both the Levinasian and Heideggerian projects, as neither can avoid the other term. While Heidegger is largely preoccupied with the question of Being, his “Letter on Humanism” reminds us in bold and unforgettable terms how ontology encroaches upon, then fundamentally alters, the meaning of ethics and even constitutes a more originary ethics, an ethos of dwelling. Levinas’s conception of ethics as first philosophy has the provocative rhetoric of “beyond Being,” but it does not escape ontological claims. The second section “Temporali-ties” adds additional terms to the standard cleavage between Levinas and Heidegger, such as violence, secularization, and history, asking whether and how these problems might draw together and re-form our thinking.

The French feminist Michèle Le Doeuff has shown how idiom and imagery reveal important clues about the philosophy that uses them such that theoretical content is not independent of its presentation in words and images. Ann Murphy pursues this strategy in the context of Levinas’s critique of Heidegger. Murphy traces how the idiom and imagery of violence function ambivalently and mark a tension in his writings, working with and against Levinas’s ethical claims of breaking with the power and violence that he contends are inherent in Heidegger’s ontology, and what this ambivalent complicity entails for the relationship between ontology and ethics. As ontology and ethics are tied up in relations of collusion and difference, and images of power and violence remain at work in Levinas’s portrayal of ethical relations, Levinas’s ethics does not escape the power and violence it exposes and questions. Nevertheless, ethics can imperfectly confront while submitting itself to power in politics. To this extent, power is transformed into justice and is “as close as possible to nonviolence,” in response to being confronted by the Other.

Philip J. Maloney examines issues of religion and secularization and immanence and transcendence in Heidegger and Levinas in light of Levinas’s reception of the later Heidegger in his writings of the 1970s, in which the problem of ontotheology plays a crucial role and reveals their shared horizon and profound disagreement. For Levinas, Heidegger did not pursue
the dismantling of ontotheology radically enough to question the primacy of being and the neglect of transcendence in the history of Western philosophy. Whereas Heidegger abandons his earlier interest in transcendence, as it is inescapably entangled in ontotheological metaphysics, Maloney unfolds how Levinas contests ontotheology precisely through transcendence and a reinterpretation of the “religious.” In response to the paradox that modernity is irredeemably secular, and the secular questionable and insufficient, Heidegger and Levinas articulate two alternative models of secularizing transcendence: poetry and prayer.

In the context of Levinas’s critique of history as violence and totality, and facticity as brutality and indifference, Eric S. Nelson explores Heidegger’s early differentiation of history as object of inquiry and as lived enactment, and his endeavor in the late 1930s to rethink history from an inherently futural—and not merely subjectively or objectively grounded—event (Ereignis) of the not-yet (noch-nicht) and the other beginning (der andere Anfang). Events and works of history are neither simply factual nor socially constructed but exhibit a hermeneutical event of disclosure—via understanding, interpretation, and appropriation—in relation to the facticity and possibilities of the enactment and practices of historical being. Nelson articulates the significance of Heidegger’s thinking of history while recognizing the ethical and social-political failures and limits exposed by Levinas.

What, then, about time? In our second section, “Temporalities,” Didier Franck, Emilia Angelova, and Simon Critchley locate important theoretical sites between Levinas and Heidegger in the structuring and dismantling function of time, which lie at the heart of both Levinas’s and Heidegger’s work. Whether in terms of the temporal stretch of the existential structure of care in Being and Time or the later works’ preoccupation with the history of Being, Heidegger’s work sets the problematic of Being in the element of time. Levinas as well will insist on temporal language as the language of separation and the for-the-Other, especially in Otherwise than Being, where diachrony marks so much of the discussion.

Didier Franck and Emilia Angelova begin their chapters with the motif of death and shift quickly to problems of signification and time. Franck’s chapter, “The Sincerity of the Saying,” is a short and intense meditation on the structure of Saying, that central motif of the opening sections of Levinas’s Otherwise than Being. Framed by the problem of truth—in particular, the truth of the subject as hostage—Franck establishes important links between subjectivity, testimony, and the infinite in order to isolate a crucial break of Levinas from Heidegger: what is the price of finitude? Whereas for Heidegger finitude culminates in my death; for Levinas, Franck argues, finitude initiates my awareness of a surplus of responsibility, which alters our conceptions of truth as finitude and the finitude of truth. For Angelova, the problem
of finitude is also a problem of the structure and nexus of significance. In setting the problem of meaning and finitude within the horizon of time, Angelova argues, Levinas’s critique of Heidegger remains limited by the address to the latter’s earlier work. The withdrawal of being and the logic of the trace in Heidegger’s late work offer a different conception of time and finitude, one in which the kaiological temporality of Being’s excess, found in the early Freiburg lectures, is replaced by an account of “language as that spacing of the thought on which Being is founded.” This motif from the later work brings Heidegger into an unexpected proximity with Levinas, especially around the notions of trace, separation, and disinterestedness.

Simon Critchley’s chapter offers a close reading of two passages from Heidegger’s Being and Time, both of which are linked to the transformative function of death in that work. “Dasein is thrown projection” and “Dasein exists factically” begin Critchley’s long meditation, which is dedicated to the elaboration of how the experience of finitude builds a sense of enigma into the heart of a subjectivity subjected to time. This sense of enigma provokes both Heidegger’s famous claim that death is the possibility of impossibility and Levinas’s reverse claim that death is the impossibility of possibility. Critchley’s careful reconstruction of Heidegger’s account of death and the companion notions of authenticity and inauthenticity suggests important connection to Levinas’s various accounts of how time fractures and separates subjectivity from the alterity constitutive of its (authentic?) sense.

The third section, entitled “Subjectivities,” is of course woven quite closely to both prerogatives. The function of Dasein and the interval or even sign of Being comprises one of the strongest threads—whatever the alterations, transformations, and overturnings—through Heidegger’s early to late work. Levinas’s work turns increasingly toward the enigma of subjectivity in the period following the publication of Totality and Infinity, culminating in the descriptions of obsession, recurrence, and persecution in the “Substitution” chapter of Otherwise than Being. Indeed, the philosophical problem of subjectivity today is barely conceivable without the destabilizing accounts of Heidegger and Levinas.

Responding to Levinas’s critique of Heidegger has opened up the reconsideration of Heidegger’s thinking; is it too not a reflection of sociality and alterity and perhaps more radically and appropriately than Levinas’s asymmetrical ethics of the other that remains complicit with monadological thinking? Reconsidering the relation of ethics to philosophy, ontology, and ethics, in the divergence between Heidegger and Levinas, Françoise Dastur contrasts in her contribution Heidegger’s prioritizing of the sociality of being-with, and solitude as its deficient mode, with Levinas’s emphasis on the solitude, separation, and asymmetry between self and other. She argues that for Levinas being and world are part of the I, its intentionality and
self-identification, and thus fundamentally lack alterity as the other can only be outside of and otherwise than this. Alterity in a sense then begins with me, the identity of the ego cogito, which remains the point of departure for Levinas’s analysis of how the I recuperates its world and remains itself, responsible, even in being fundamentally questioned by and responding to the absolute alterity of the other person. Since the I remains central in being questioned by the invocation of the other, as it is always about my responsibility rather than the other’s, there is not so much dialogue between I and other as there is apology; that is, the other is the occasion of my apology for myself. If temporal and social relationality are the condition of alterity, difference, and individuation, the identity of self and other to some extent remain what they are outside of the relational dynamic that would make a difference. Dastur concludes by returning to the freedom of affirmation that she uncovers in Heidegger.

Robert Bernasconi’s contribution to this volume offers a close and provocative reading of Levinas’s notion of sacrifice, in particular the phrase “ethics of sacrifice.” Though the term appears only briefly in Levinas’s essay “Dying for . . . ,” Bernasconi makes the case that a significant point of (alleged) departure between Levinas and Heidegger is located in the relationship between sacrifice and death. Levinas claims that the problematic of authenticity, inseparable as it is from Heidegger’s account of death in Being and Time, renders sacrifice impossible. This would seem to mark Levinas’s departure from Heidegger precisely because it poses the ethical against Dasein and fundamental ontology. Yet, Bernasconi argues—by way of Derrida, but just as much by way of Levinas’s own reading of Heidegger—that Levinas’s conception of sacrifice, and the gravity of the ethical contained therein, is close to that of Heidegger, except at the precise moment at which the question of justification is left behind. In letting go of the question of justification, Levinas’s “ethics of sacrifice” becomes a deformalized, concrete sense of sacrifice without reason or egoism, which gives measure to his distance from Heidegger on one and the same matter for thinking.

The intimacy of Levinas’s claims to Heidegger’s work takes a different turn in François Raffoul’s essay “The Question of Responsibility between Levinas and Heidegger.” In this essay, Raffoul traces out the reversal of Descartes in Levinas’s work, underscoring not only the radical critique in Levinas of Cartesian “egology,” but also how important features of that egology remain intact in the reversal. Raffoul characterizes this as how Levinas’s revolutionary notion of the ethical “owes perhaps more than it would like to admit to the egological tradition that it seeks to reverse, precisely insofar as it determines itself in symmetrical opposition to it and as its reversal.” This symmetrical opposition provides an opening for reasserting the force of ontology against the Levinasian subject and sense of the ethical. Heidegger’s work

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thereby reemerges as a powerful critique of the ethical subject, as well as, perhaps more urgently, drawing our attention to the continuing need for the development of ontological senses of responsibility.

The fourth and final section extends the question of otherness beyond the transcendences found in Heidegger’s and Levinas’s work. The animal interrupts the interhuman sense of place. Peter E. Gordon’s chapter “Displaced” takes up the phenomenological mode of inquiry in relation to this very interruption in asking about the limits of Heidegger’s and Levinas’s accounts of the foreign and the strange. For both, Gordon argues, place and home function as central motifs and indeed set many of the parameters of inquiry. Yet, any phenomenological account of our place in home, our home in place, must also account for the uncanny. The uncanny is also part of Heidegger’s and Levinas’s accounts of place, of course; there is always interruption, the strange, and the unexpected in transcendence.

In his chapter, Krzysztof Ziarek identifies two points of proximity in Heidegger and Levinas. First, there is what Ziarek calls the “dignity” restored by attention to a posthumanist humanism. Second, there is the force of alterity, which is borne by the face in Levinas and for Heidegger in the notion of Seyn as a freedom without power. This latter item from Heidegger’s late work is nicely distinguished by Ziarek from what Levinas describes as Being’s impersonality and propensity toward violence. Yet, whatever this proximity between Heidegger and Levinas, Ziarek raises the question of whose sense of the ethical is best suited to the problems of twenty-first-century life. In particular, Ziarek’s attention to the “power-free event” in Heidegger’s work, the thinking of ethics in the Da, allows us to begin thinking how the dignity of the human, this shared proximity with Levinas, might open upon the animal and the nonanimal as sites of ethical life.

The final chapter in this collection concerns the problem of language and home. For both Heidegger and Levinas, language stands in a peculiar and unstable relation to our sense of home. On the one hand, language makes home possible. We find ourselves in language and the possibility of address from and to the Other—whether the alterity of Being or the alterity of the other person—derives at least in part from that sense of being-at-home in words. On the other hand, language is always disrupted by this address from what is elsewhere of the home. John E. Drabinski’s contribution “Elsewhere of Home” begins with an examination of this movement between home and elsewhere in Heidegger and Levinas, with special attention to how language provokes this incessant movement. Yet, Drabinski argues, Heidegger and Levinas are seen to share an unexpected presupposition: the monolingualism of address and its disruption. What would it mean to consider the address from within language by those for whom the home
of language is already an elsewhere? And, further, how is the movement of home and elsewhere transformed by the creolizing, rather than disrupting or fracturing, of language—which begins with what we might call, in a Levinasian turn of phrase, the preoriginality of this elsewhere in language? Drabinski draws on the very potent, yet underappreciated resources of the creolité movement to indicate an other other in the other of home, language, and the now global sense of any elsewhere.

EPIGRAPH

In the epigraph to the present reflections, Derrida remarked on the double movement of Being and the existent, noting the tension between Levinas and Heidegger as the oscillation between ontological difference and the claims of the existent over Being. In that remark, Derrida captures something at stake in this collection: is the difference between Levinas and Heidegger, between ethics and ontology, and so between kinds of fractured subjectivities a decidable difference? Or do the profundity and gravity of both Levinasian and Heideggerian thinking render such differences undecidable? And what would it mean to call this difference or between “undecidable”? Are their discourses simply incommensurable, with no paths of communication much less argumentation, or do they both intensify the stakes of communication and the philosophical game? For both, after all, the destiny of the West ends in the first half of the twentieth century—which is to say, the destiny reaches its end in technologically enabled mass death and suffering. Whether we conceive that end as totality as totalitarianism or technology as the epoch of calculative thinking, the stakes of identifying or not identifying sites of resistance to history’s great violence and trajectory toward even more violence and standardization are clear. It is a matter of how we are to live after such death and disaster and the specter of an “end” that is only more of the same. What interrupts this terrifying history and its shadow? An ethics of the face and the priority of the Other or an ethos of dwelling in the openness of Being? To be sure, there is no easy or readily desirable answer. There is perhaps only the cross-saturation of ontological difference and the stifling presence of the Other person. In that perhaps undecidable, certainly saturated, space is precarious and urgent thinking.

NOTES