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Raschke - From Religion to Faith - JCRT 4.1
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Terrible Spirit, your discourse has smitten me to the ground.

—Johann Gottlieb Fichte

The theoretical question of 'religion' is essentially that of 'divinity,' what the Greeks from Homer through the early Church fathers understand as *ho theos*, that which 'shines forth.' That question belongs appropriately neither to 'theology' nor to philosophy. It is not a question 'about' God, whatever that token may indicate in a 'cross-cultural' or 'multi-traditional' sense. Nor does it cycle within the orbit of what in these later decades has acquired the non-descript classification of 'religious studies,' or 'the study of religion.' It is a question that can only be posed in the breach. The query itself assaults the lattice of significations that girds the discourse we in the Occident have come to know as 'questioning.' It pries open a space; it constitutes a style of _'criture_' that is equally a means of 'erasure,' giving us an epiphany of darkness that has nothing to do with the lucidity of the proposition, representation, or statement which the theoretical mind anticipates.

3. When we speak of 'divinity,' no ontological formulation can perform justice. Since the advent of so-called 'postmodernism,' all 'theological' as well as 'theoretical' matters have been consigned to mapping the rhetorical field whereby the complex topologies of cultural communication are displayed. They have been restricted to an *ontological schematics*, to a diagrammatic webworks of signifying relations inside of an infinite skein of texts. Yet this process of 'deconstructing' textual relationships has laid bare, as we find for instance in Vattimo, the true 'dis-closure' of the semiotic chain whereby every 'systematic' theology, cosmology, or methodology is unchained from its own sun, raising for the first time since Wittgenstein the possibility of something the antimodernists, and now the postmodernists, have identified as 'faith.' Faith creeps into the shadowy space of the 'religious' and makes a claim for *theos*, for divinity._._
4. The intimation of faith, however, does not resolve the problem of divinity. The former suggests a 'posture,' the latter a phenomenality. The problem of faith is as ancient as the struggle between credulity and skepticism. It can be considered a *theo*-logical gesture in the face of a totalizing ontology that has become dispossessed of itself, when God has 'died' in Nietzsche's parable, or the transcendental sign itself has been deposed, hurled down to earth from the heaven of concepts. It is in this sense that the 'overcoming of metaphysics,' with which postmodernism has been obsessed, is a kind of recurring ritual in the history of thought. Metaphysics comes to this moment of 'surmounting' (_'berwindung_') when the order of signs is no longer commensurate with the logic of reference. The chasm' Lessing's 'big ugly ditch' - between signification and grammar summons an 'existential' response, as Kierkegaard has reminded us. That response is faith. Faith seeks to articulate the brokenness, the unsightly apertures, of a fractured ontotheology.
5. At the same time, this effort at articulation serves to emancipate the sign from the thrall of 'natural language.' The sporting of the sign within the space of the negative renders 'theological' thinking in the loosest sense of the term plausible for the first time. It is what has casually been known in the past as the 'moment of deconstruction,' the juncture at which

the discursivities defining a particular epoch in what Heidegger calls the 'destiny' of ontology diffuse into nothingness. This moment is generally misconstrued by critics of postmodernism as 'nihilism,' even though it approximates the special meaning Nietzsche gave the term in his posthumously published writings. The nihilism which Nietzsche prophesied 'stands at the door' of the modern era, however, is in the same breath a revelation of infinite divinity.

6. Postmodern theological thinking at the commencement of the next thousand-year trajectory, unfortunately, has proven itself incapable of passing its camel through the needle's eye. Postmodernism so far has failed to contend, like ancients and moderns alike before it, with the power of the infinite. Bemused by the Hegelian specter of a 'bad infinity', postmodernist thought has been preoccupied with elaborating a syntactics of absence, a strange hermeticism of hide-and-seek, a Kantian stage play in which the 'thing' at hand (*Vorstellung*) always resolves into the synthesis of the subject and the unseen, rather than struggling to bring forth an idiom of presence. It has shrunk from undertaking the task that Heidegger himself laid out long in advance of Derrida, the task of bringing to presence the fullness of presence (*parousia*). But it is only this turn toward *parousia*, which paradoxically can only be signified 'infinitely' as the full estrangement from the ontotheological, as the utter extremity of Western 'representationalism' reached in Levinas' 'other(wise)ness', in his sense of the *autrement* that can ultimately spring us from the conceptual cul-de-sac where nihilism and 'deconstructionism' have abandoned us. This turn is not in any manner 'postmodernist.' It drives us beyond all postmodernist premises, since it calls for a radical reassessment of the theoretical venue within which the 'postmodern' emerged as a hyphen after the modern. The venue of the postmodern is, and has remained, like its antecedent epochs quintessentially Graeco-Christian. It is coded by a panoply of texts and signs, starting points and ending points, feints and disputations that play themselves out in the agora of discourse where Socrates first found his audience. The postmodern merely activates the 'passive nihilism' of modernist self-referentiality which Nietzsche's madman cast a lantern upon. But such a post-postmodern turning is more than another *Kehre*. We can only term it 'millennialist', not simply because it belongs to the new millennium, but because it confronts for the first time within the vast expanse of Western thought the genuine 'theoretical' issue of eschatology. The issue of the 'otherwise' is essentially that of the end-markers, the *eschata*, which only the mind of faith, not the 'wisdom' of the philosophers, was capable of encountering. It is what supplies the hyphen that annihilates the hyphens that have gone before it. It is the *deposition of the postmodern*.
7. Postmodernism per se has always signified not an era, but a transit between eras. As the passage into the modern is encapsulated in the *skepsis* and subjectivism of Descartes' *Meditations*, the move from the modern to the millennial necessitates a reappraisal of Descartes' dilemma. The postmodern project begins neither with Nietzsche nor with Heidegger, but in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Its origin lies in the disclosure of 'transcendental experience' as the field of intersubjectivity. This peculiar proto-analysis of the postmodernist theme occurs in Husserl's fifth meditation. Taking a critical step beyond Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories of understanding, Husserl identifies the conditions for an 'objective' world in the sense of *we-ness*, which at the same time 'makes constitutionally possible a new infinite domain of what is 'other'.'¹ Husserl trumps Kant's efforts in the second section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to describe a 'transcendental ground of the unity of our consciousness in the

¹Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 107.

synthesis of the manifold of all our intuitions.² The Kantian position is thoroughly Cartesian in the traditional sense. Whereas Kant grounds experience in such a 'transcendental unity of apperception,' Husserl locates his 'Archimedean point' for first philosophy in the 'intrinsically first other,' the 'other Ego.'³ Husserl calls this 'intentionality of experiencing someone else' as a kind of 'analogical apperception,' or more precisely *appresentation*. Yet Husserl still fails to break the spell of Cartesian subjectivism, inasmuch as several paragraphs later he characterizes the 'first other' not as alterity in any pure sense, but as a kind of curious *Doppelgänger* of the ego, the mirror presentation of I-ness. "Alter' signifies alter ego,' Husserl declares. 'And the ego involved here is myself, constituted within my primordial ownness, and uniquely, as the psychophysical unity (the primordial man).'⁴

8. Husserl's division of the Cartesian *cogito* into the dyad of same and other, nonetheless, has staggering implications for philosophical and religious thought in the twentieth century and beyond. This primordial division is the basis for Heidegger's 'experience of Being', epitomized in a kind of saying that is not simply predicative and does not require the syllogistic format of language to offer demonstration. It is also the context for Derrida's tack in *Speech and Phenomena* toward extruding presence from the realm of signification. Just as the 'thing' after Kant could no longer be regarded as knowable in itself, so the self, or subject, after Husserl can no longer be present to itself in the raw Cartesian sense. This 'deconstitution' of self-presence as the foundation for every kind of 'subject-object' epistemology is what truly marks out the 'postmodern' predicament. The subject remains problematic in the postmodern ambience, because it consistently capitulates to what Pascal termed the 'annihilating' pressure of infinity, the overbearing presence of what is not-self. If modernism is tantamount to the empire of self, postmodernism is the collapse of the imperial order. Postmodernist thinkers, including Derrida, may rightly be branded the newest of 'barbarians'. But barbarism always signals the end of decadence. This new barbarism, like the subtext of the poem Ozymandias, consists in the enthronement of the infinite atop the ruins of a once pretentious finitism. Rome had to succumb to the Goths, as Augustine made clear in his *Civitas Dei*, before the Church could triumph.
9. Levinas has correctly apprehended this grand 'eschatological' assize for modernism in his own examination of Descartes. Modernism, Levinas suggests, is the full flower of Greek idealism wherein 'the first person, the soul conversing with itself, or qua reminiscence, re-discovering the teachings it receives, thus promotes freedom. Freedom will triumph when the soul's monologue will have reached universality, will have encompassed the totality of being, encompassing even the animal individual which lodged this thought.'⁵ This critique of the modern epoch, of course, echoes Heidegger, who regards Cartesian subjectivism as simply the obverse of the one and the same metaphysical coinage. But there is a fatal flaw in Heideggerian ontology, which in stipulating the 'ontological difference' while drawing a boundary line between Being and 'beings' ends up subordinating 'the relation with the other to the relation with the neuter'[and] continues to exalt the will to power, whose legitimacy the other alone can unsettle.'⁶
10. If idealism and subjectivism conclude in a kind of apocalypse of modernist 'autarky,' what

²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans Max M'ller (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 104.

³Husserl, p. 107.

⁴Husserl, p. 110.

⁵Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff, 1987), p. 49.

⁶*Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 52.

Heidegger understands as the 'overcoming of metaphysics', the point of departure for every postmodernist musing, is not at all complete. For Levinas, the Being of beings, which Heidegger views as the transcendence of the Western 'world picture' founded on predicative logic, remains inseparable from the being of Cartesian self-referentiality. For Heidegger, 'Being is inseparable from the comprehension of Being; Being already invokes subjectivity.'⁷ But any possible exit from the subjectivist, and hence modernist, morass does not lie, contrary to the postmodernist strain of thought inaugurated by Heidegger himself, in the deconstitution of substantivist formalities. The deconstruction of both subjectivism and substantivism is an endless loop that ultimately can never be abrogated. The 'end' of philosophy and theology alike is not ontology, even 'fundamental' ontology. It is alterity. And alterity can only be pronounced when one comes up, according to Levinas, against the presence of the infinite, a pure and absolute imposing presence, an eschatological 'presencing' that annihilates presence in the ontological sense of the word. It is the moment Levinas calls *autrement*, the 'otherwise' that is other than Being.

11. This confrontation with the 'otherwise' can be traced backward to the Cartesian Reformation in philosophy, according to Levinas. Cartesianism ironically brings about a deconstruction of the very Cartesian position that overshadows modern philosophy. The true 'Cartesian circle' does not consist in an endless loop of certitude, as our textbooks tell us, whereby the presence of self and the presence of God endlessly implicate each other. As Levinas remarks, 'in Descartes the I that think is maintains a relationship with the infinite.'⁸ The circle is one of finite egotism constantly in contention with infinite undecidability. Descartes' Archimedean point of self-certification is relentlessly assailed and undercut by the presence of the Infinite Other, which must also be 'demonstrated.' Therefore, if we are to rethink modernism, we will have also to rethink postmodernism itself by rethinking the ontology of the Cartesian *subjectum*. How so? The problem was already thought 'insufficiently' by both Descartes and Husserl. At the end of the Third Meditation Descartes ponders the 'production' in his thoughts of the notion of an infinite Deity. Descartes surmises that he has 'not drawn it from the senses', nor is it a 'fiction of the mind,' for it is not in his 'power to take from or add to it.' Moreover, Descartes suggests that 'if God is my Creator, it is highly probable that he in some way fashioned me after his own image and likeness, and that I perceive this likeness, in which is contained the idea of God, by the same faculty by which I apprehend myself.'⁹
12. Descartes' puzzlement over the idea derives from the paradoxical character of what Schleiermacher and nineteenth century theology in large part would have termed 'God consciousness.' For Husserl, the structure of consciousness, or of ideation, is two-fold; it involves what in the phenomenological idiom has come to be called 'intentionality'. Every noetic act includes both thinking and what is thought. But in the Cartesian context where the 'I think' thinks not of itself, but of the 'idea of God,' intentionality reaches its 'eschatological' limit. It can no longer be understood as intentionality in the phenomenological sense because its 'objective' constitution shatters upon this infinite thought. As Levinas affirms, 'the idea of infinity is exceptional in that its ideatum surpasses the idea. In it the distance between idea and ideatum is not equivalent to the distance that separates a mental act from its object in its representations.'¹⁰ Furthermore, the idea of infinity 'has been put into us. It is not a reminiscence.' It can be

⁷ *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 52.

⁸ *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 53.

⁹ Rene Descartes, *The Meditations*, trans. John Vietch (London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), p. 248.

¹⁰ *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 54.

construed as an experience in 'the sole radical sense of the term'. It is a 'relationship with the exterior, with the other, without this exteriority being able to be integrated into the same.'¹¹

13. It is out of this previously unthought Cartesian aporia regarding thought itself that Levinas offers philosophical, as opposed to theological, justification for the first a 'personal' God. But this still unappreciated bold move of Levinas in the history of philosophy has a quite different impact than the now mostly forgotten 'personalist' movement of the past century, which built on the kind of philosophical subjectivism and idealism conventionally attributed to Descartes. Personalism began with the I of subjecthood, with the transparency and illimitability of one's own self-presence. One's own self-presence thereby is 'extrojected' toward those who are present to me. In personalism subjectivity is primary; alterity is secondary. A personal God, therefore, must be adduced, or 'constructed,' out of this intuitive situation. But Levinas reverses the chain of inference. The *subjectum* becomes an inference itself, a consequence of the experience of absolute alterity. 'God is the other,' says Levinas. Thus the locale, or situs, for this pure signification of otherness can be found in the very Cartesian rumination on self-presence, which has spawned subjectivism as well as personal idealism. Self-presence is impossible as a pure datum, as Husserl understood, but could not elaborate to the extent that Levinas has. The *en soi* is unintelligible without the *pour soi*, as Hegel stipulated. The archaeology of self-consciousness lays bare a proto-relationality, an 'originary' mutuality that Levinas calls 'ethical.' 'If Husserl sees in the cogito a subjectivity without any support outside of itself, this cogito constitutes the idea of infinity itself and gives it to itself as an object. The 'non-constitution of infinity', for Descartes, has epochal theological implications too. The 'reference of the finite cogito to the infinity of God does not consist in a simple thematization of God.' On the contrary, 'Descartes, better than an idealist or a realist, discover a relation with a total alterity irreducible to interiority, which nevertheless does not do violence to interiority' a receptivity without passivity, a relation between freedoms.'¹² Such an unconditioned alterity, or *wholly otherness*, is the precondition for the freedom of the ego. The reciprocity between the infinity of God as *totaliter aliter* and what Kant would later term the 'constitutive' role of the *cogito* forces us to rethink the very essence of thinking itself. The 'I think' must think of necessity not only a world, but an infinity that reveals itself in the world through a unique mode of signification 'the infinite qua 'finite' personality, what Levinas designates as the 'face.'
14. The face is presence beyond representation, beyond the logic of predication and induction, beyond the nexus of logical and syntactical connections that makes 'theological' talk in the usual sense possible at minimum. Theology inhabits the order of language, the horizontal and 'disseminated' production of discourse that arises in Chomsky's phrase out of the various 'generative grammars' of human speech. The appearance of the face cannot be coded in explanation or argumentation. *The face demands dialogue*. The face is impenetrable to theological discourse, because it summons the claim of the Other as a signification of the 'otherwise.' The otherwise opens a grand chasm in the topology of language. The 'otherwise' defies 'infinitely - the ontological. Its relationship to the sentence remains mysterious, because it cannot be 'shaped' as a representation, as a determination. It is not a *terminus*. It is the *eschaton*. Roughly said, the 'otherwise' can only be addressed. Its 'grammar' is thoroughly confused, if not consigned to chaos, by the orthogonality of the second person. The face cannot be

¹¹Collected Philosophical Papers, p. 54.

¹²Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh PA: Dusquesne University Press, 1969), p. 211.

comprehended; it requires instead an *invocation*. Thought only occurs in the first person. That is true as well for the thought of God, from which theological thinking proceeds. But God's thought is not the primary signifying property of the word God. Even the unthought thought of God, or 'about' God, is not the essence of God. To say God in the primary sense one must abandon all attempt to make statements concerning God, or to 'refer' to God. One must 'defer' to God's sovereign initiative. One must take off one's shoes and stand in awe, like Moses before the bush. One must listen.

15. The unrealized genius of Levinas lies in his stuttering toward this 'conceptual' breakthrough, which he himself never fully articulated, certainly not in a conventional philosophical, or even 'theological', manner. Levinas' truth lies in the discovery that same and other, or ipseity and 'illeity' (his' term), are not dialectical 'opposites'. They maintain the strange, rectilinear relationship between the dual nodes of the dialogical. It is 'dialogy' as the 'conversing' of the speaker and the one spoken to, rather than the deconstruction of the textuality of the text, that overcomes ontotheology. Deconstruction in the final analysis still remains locked within the history of ontotheology. Deconstruction is the same old dance of the same, a rondo between Being and beings, between the eidetic and the mimetic, endlessly renamed as 'presence' and 'absence,' as grammatics and difference. Ontotheology has always fallen back on some semblance of the crypto-infinite as it moves toward what Heidegger terms its 'destiny', a more profound understanding of the meaning of 'Being.' As Jean-Luc Marion points out in his exhaustive, but brilliant study of the 'metaphysical' character of Cartesianism, the notion of the *res cogitans* 'the 'thinking thing' ' does not lay Descartes open to the charge of solipsism, as he is regularly accused by Heidegger. In fact, Descartes 'with an unsurpassable authority' stakes out the 'limits of metaphysics.' Instead he was bold enough to engage 'the contradiction that is necessarily imposed on the finite by the infinite advancing upon it.'¹³ The contradiction, however, has still not been entertained. According to Levinas, Descartes tried to face up to it, but failed. The failure within modern thinking is virtually unavoidable because of the structural imperative of Western philosophy. The structures of philosophical thought 'mark the return of absolute thought to itself, the identity of the identical and non-identical in consciousness of self recognizing itself in infinite thought.'¹⁴ These structures enfold the identity of the identical and non-identical, of the in-itself and for-itself, in self and not-self, in the 'absoluteness' of Hegelian identity-in-difference, not to mention the pure 'identity' of the differentialism of *differ_a_nce*. Modern philosophy cannot stop from spinning on its own wheel of destiny, coming to rest over and over again at different points of a closed circuit delineated by the very binary code of predicative logic. The wheel offers no space for genuine alterity. Any approximation of, or approach to, the *autrement* eventually revolves toward the identity of self-consciousness, returning 'to the immanence of subjectivity which itself, and in itself, exteriorizes itself.'¹⁵
16. Theological thinking - whether it undertakes to think from 'on high' or from the underside of things, whether it takes as its subject matter the 'supernatural' or the 'unthought' ground of being ' can never go to the place within discourse where the Other, that is the Infinite Other, intersects. This denial of access has nothing to do with the 'ineffability' of otherness qua otherness. It has everything to do with the strange grammar of the 'second person.'

¹³Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theo-logy in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1999), p. 276.

¹⁴Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 137.

¹⁵*Entre Nous*, p. 137.

The semiotic shift between first and third persons is thoroughly 'natural' in terms of the semantics of attribution. The lucidity of the ego to itself in the Cartesian moment certifies the 'representational' truth of the phenomena themselves. Of everything we say 'there is' (*il y a*) remains vouchsafed by the 'I am.' That is the nub of the Cartesian argument. But this correlation of noumenal and phenomenal, which becomes a standard of measure for modern thought, shrinks before the 'perpendicularity' of the Other suddenly encountered, and addressed, as *You*, a *You* that sets its 'face' toward and addresses the I as it holds forth in reply. This reciprocal correlation of the I and You in itself cannot be correlated, let alone with the subject-predicate relations of discourse. The relationship between I and You is not a 'linguistic' relationship. It is a relationship of dialog, is no longer a 'signifying' relationship. It is, as Kierkegaard puts it, 'a relationship that relates,' a relationship of entreaty, of dialogue. The Derridean *suppl'ment*, connoting a kind of 'parapresence' within the space of representation, becomes *suppliant*. This relationship of 'suppliance' manifests as a null factor, an 'erasure,' within predication. Just as a cube appears as a square, a square as a line, and a line as a point, if we strip away progressively the dimensions of geometry, so the Infinite appears as the Other, the Other as a 'not-I', and the 'not I' as a mere *negative sign*, if we move from the mode of address to the formalism of logic. God is *Nichts*, not because *nothing of God can be spoken*, but because God is the One not *of*, but *to* whom we speak.

17. The original meaning of the word 'God' in the Germanic language family has this curious inflection. God is 'the one we invoke.' But the One cannot be 'named.' The One can only be called. 'To be' and 'to be called' (in German, for instance, *S_ein_* and *Heissen*) are infinitely separable in the original grammar of things. There is in the Levinasian Other a 'transcendence' that differs entirely from the difference of the sign. The difference of the sign emerges from the play of syntactical collations that constitutes both propositional and representational discourse. The difference of the Other stems from the disruption of syntax with the act of address. Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative difference,' which implies the absolute alterity of the God-human, or eternity-time disjunction, has something of this tenor. But the notion of alterity we find in Kierkegaard has more to do with the incommensurability of finite existence with the infinite passion of faith than it does with the peculiarities of dialogue. Dialogue is a re-vectoring of language away from the process of reflection toward the interlocutory moment. It is this interlocutory moment that preoccupies Levinas. The difference between Hegel's *das Anderes* and Levinas' *l'autre* is the difference between the declarative and the prophetic. The prophetic discloses an 'exteriority' which 'does not become simply the content of interiority.' It is the *vox auditu*. It is sustained by the 'paradoxical' relationship between signification and communication, between saying and conversation, between the self-mediation of the 'speculative sentence' and 'the explosion of the 'more in the less' that Descartes called the idea of the Infinite.'¹⁶
18. The infinite 'more' is not a concealed given to be searched out and rummaged from the clutter of percepts and ideas. The Infinite cannot be construed. It is presence in the sense of that which sets the bounds for beings in their coming-to-presence. The infinite crisscrosses and overreaches the register of finite sign-operations. It is there, but 'not there', at the same time. Like God at the instant of creation it casts light upon the waters and brings 'what is' into existence.. The infinite is a movement that Levinas terms 'infinite.' Levinas contrasts the event of infinity with the phenomenology of finite existence. Postmodern philosophical

¹⁶Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Subject: Talmudic Readings and Lectures* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 149.

thought, beginning with Nietzsche and finding its stride in Heidegger, opens the quest for the meaning of Being in terms of the 'thereness' of existents. Heidegger characterizes this locus of thereness as *Dasein*, 'there-being,' *il y a*, 'there is.' But the 'there is' is not a starting point for genuine philosophical or theological thinking, according to Levinas. The meaning of Being is impossible to discern from the analysis of finite existence. In Heidegger the 'there' is unintelligible without the reflexivity of the 'there-being' that understands itself in relationship with what is there. In Levinas the being of the *there* is not autochthonous in the way it is in Heidegger. The *there* can only be manifested through the presence of the Other. Apart from the intervention of the transcendent Other as the act of infinity, finite being within the matrix of temporality vanishes. Its space is a negative one. 'The absolute indetermination of the there is' is an incessant negation, to an infinite degree, consequently as infinite limitation.¹⁷

19. The negation cannot be overcome 'dialectically', as is the case in ontotheology. Nor can it be considered a 'clearing' for the presencing of Being held in tension with existents. The alchemy of negative ontology in Heideggerian thought turns out to be a mere *trompe l'oeil*. The limitation of the *there is* comes not from the veiling and unveiling of Being, as in Heidegger, but from the advent of infinity, which is prior to existence. The Infinite, therefore, can never be thought in either a speculative sense or as a moment of 'fundamental' ontological thinking. The Infinite is not an unthought thought to be made present. The infinite arrests the discourse of the Same and commands attention to its inassimilable alterity. The infinite cannot be 'apprehended'. It can only be implored. Discovery of the Levinasian 'Other' may be considered equivalent to desecrating the fourth dimension from the standpoint of simple sense awareness. But this ulterior dimension of language, couched in the orthogonality of address, carries us to the summit of Sinai where theology ends and the voice of the unnamable calls upon us. Like Moses in the wilderness, we are dumfounded. We cannot suborn this voice to disclose its name.
20. From the 'theological' standpoint God is the transcendental signified, the sign of signs, the name which names no other. From the 'religious' point of view, we are naming something that is incapable of any sort of singularity. We are naming what flashes forth from the discontinuity within the signifying web. We are seeking to come up with a language for what is purely *heterological*, for what cannot be found in accord with the selfsameness of the philosophical or 'scientific' experience of the world at large. In both instances heterology remains within the narrative of the Same. It can call attention to the gaps, lesions, and fissures within the texture of the 'there', or as with theological discussions it can offer some kind of ontotheological closure to the movement of transcendence within language.
21. The accession to the heterological within postmodern thought has shattered the stranglehold of predicative ontology, which held sway since the ancient Greeks. But the heterological - more precisely the power of the differential - cannot suffice as an interpretative task. All efforts after Derrida to absolutize, or totalize in some odd way, the differential intrusion of the Not-same, do not achieve the aim, proclaimed since the break of postmodernism with linguistic structuralism, of going beyond the metaphysics of the West. To privilege the 'not,' or to 'have the void for meaning' (Nietzsche), is still to create a hypostasis, to validate ontotheology. The experience of the heterological dilutes, but does not overcome, the signification attached to the *theos* of the ontotheological. To overcome that signification demands a reappraisal of the chemistry of signification.

¹⁷Totality and Infinity, p. 281.

22. We must ask ourselves what would be the meaning - plainly and simply stated - of a theology that is 'otherwise than theology', of a *heterotheology*? If a 'paratheology' is the nomenclature we would give to the investigation of religion, would a heterotheology be the right locution for considering theology from the standpoint of the 'heights' of radical otherness, from the standpoint of the *autrement*? The *heteros* is much more problematical for Levinas, and for those of us who embrace the standpoint of dialogy, than it is, say, when we deploy the 'paralogy' of deconstruction. In the dialogical setting the *heteros* does not signify disruption or disjunction, but the re-orientation of the first person toward the non-totalizable presence of the second. It is the Other that makes a claim, that cannot be subsumed within the parameters of one's own self-presence, that disturbs the equanimity and integrity of the subject as it spins its own world. The surety of the *cogito* thus disappears from sight. The nomadism, or 'errancy', of the postmodern predicament does not ensue from a critique of Cartesianism, but from the meeting between the finite ego, claiming a kind of 'metaphysical' insuperability, and the infinite One that thought invokes 'a point of embarkation for both modernism and postmodernism proceed. The dialectical division in Descartes, and later on in the critical philosophy and in phenomenology, between the *je suis* and the *il y* is put out of play by the very catastrophe of thought which the 'idea of God' in the Third Meditation precipitates. It is not the 'I am' of the *cogito*, but the infinite I AM which metaphysics wrongly and fatefully associated with the Aristotelian *prote ousia*, which forces the division.¹⁸
23. In Descartes the alleged indubitability of the I is cast in doubt by the 'demon hypothesis.' In effect the demon hypothesis is a recognition of the finitude of the egoic assertion. The certitude, and in the long view the 'rationality' of the *je pense*, cannot be claimed until the 'existence' of an infinite Being is proven. But this 'proof', concealed within a tortuous style of late Scholastic rhetoric, amounts essentially to the acknowledgement of the Infinite Other as guarantor of any ontological content, even the most fundamental contention that all we can ultimately know is the 'I' that knows.¹⁹ Descartes is both the father and executioner for modern idealistic philosophy. He is the author of everything that is 'otherwise' than what characterizes modernism and postmodernism.
24. The 'otherwise' Levinas terms ethics. Levinas' use of the word 'ethics' to characterize the philosophical account of the Other-relation poses a dilemma for those who wish to move from ontology to heterology. Levinas' oft-quoted statement that ethics is 'first philosophy' tends to prioritize intersubjective relations over the attempt at theorizing them. But Levinas never really makes the transition to 'practical reason' after the fashion of Kant. Instead he remains focused on the critique of a totalizing metaphysics as it has been handed down from the Greeks. Levinas gives a precise and philologically correct meaning to the very term that has stood in the history of philosophical thought for the ethical imperative 'deontology.' Heterology is deontology in this trenchant sense, inasmuch as it takes us along an entirely different route than ontology permits. A 'deontological' rendering of language is one that forbids that thematization of the other as representation, as object. Deontology amounts to the inclination of speech toward the other *as other*, and hence toward the face of the other as the summons of the infinite through a finite ensemble of signs.

¹⁸This point is emphasized by Hans-Dieter Gondek, *Cogito and S'paration*, in Sarah Harsym (ed.), *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 30.

¹⁹Levinas writes that 'for Descartes, the idea of God is innate to the soul, and I am more certain of God than of myself: the finite is known against the background of the infinite. The intellectual priority of the infinite is henceforth added to its ontological priority.' Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*. Trans. Michael Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 65.

25. Deontology is what we undertake when we attempt to inscribe the glance and voice of the Other as the 'moral' purpose to which Kant argue we are 'divinely' called., thereby clarifying the ethical intuition by reason and reflective judgement. It is the point Fichte made obscurely and within the rhetoric of German Romanticism and metaphysical idealism when he spoke of human 'vocation' (*Beruf*), 'There is nothing real, lasting, imperishable in me,' says Fichte, 'save these two elements: the voice of conscience, and my free obedience.'²⁰ The 'intentionality' of consciousness always shatters against what Fichte called 'Infinite Will', which confronts me with a 'call' rather than a schema of perception. Deontology is what results in the epoch of the West when the Hellenic project of *theoretical* knowledge clashes with the Hebraic testament to the 'acts' of the God of Sinai. In its formative stage we call it 'Christian theology.' Theology and philosophy, as historically configured, have always been non-negotiable, not so much as a result of the opposition between 'reason' and 'revelation' as because of this twofold bearing of speech 'predication and address. Philosophy says 'it is.' Theological speech says 'it is' only because it must first say 'thou art'. As Saint Augustine proclaims in his *Confessions*,

With you inspiring me I shall be affirming true things, which by your will I draw out these words. For I do not believe I give true exposition if anyone other than you is inspiring me. You are the truth, but every man is a liar.²¹

26. The grammar of address cannot be considered a 'deep logic' in Wittgenstein's sense because it defies every attempt at predication. It is not embedded within the propositional architecture. Nor does it belong to the *logos* of Greek rationality that 'swings', as Heraclitus put it, between the positive and negative poles of signification. The grammar of address instantiates what the philosophy of existential encounter several generations back termed the *Sprachereignis*, or 'word-event'. But this event is not necessarily some sort of mystical rendezvous between seeker and Deity. The *mysterium tremendum* of the encounter can be understood in terms of the radical 'deconstruction' of the predicative relationship that opens forth the reciprocity of the interpersonal, the 'dialogy' of the dialogical, the road from Athens to Jerusalem that Levinas, perhaps infelicitously, has termed 'ethics.' Levinasian ethics takes us beyond postmodernism in this most critical sense. It is the passage from heterology to dialogy. The heterological mission of postmodernism describes the difference within difference only to storm through the needle's eye of discourse and to hear the thunder of the heavenlies.

Notes

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²⁰Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 134.

²¹St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 296.

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