

Adieu to Levinas

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“ . . . the meaning of death does not begin in death. This invites us to think of death as a moment of death’s *signification*, which is a meaning that overflows death. We must note carefully that ‘to overflow death’ in no sense means surpassing or reducing it; it means that this overflowing has its signification, too.”¹

Signification is stronger than death—the Other continues to interrupt and awaken the living, calling the “I” into responsibility. When one experiences the death of another, one is jarred by the face of the Other who continues to demand of “me” responsibility. As long as one responds to the face of another, death cannot eclipse the power of the Other upon me. Evoking a call from beyond death does not lessen weeping and raw lament for the loss of another who no longer physically walks among us. A definition of a meaningful life is that a face continues to speak from the grave with the demand of responsibility from a particular Other.

As if it was just yesterday, I remember the death of my mother and the depth of pain that penetrated to the core of my soul. As I stood outside my parent’s house, I was confused. I wondered why the world had not stopped with the death of my mother. Cars still moved. Branches tossed in the wind. Small children were still playing. How could such commotion continue after the death of my mother? Yet, somehow my mother continued to demand responsible action from me. A Levinasian understanding of death reminds us of the particularity of a face that demands responsibility of us. We find temporal access to the universal through the particular. Particular faces continue to speak long after their empirical presence is no more—interrupting our lives, calling us to responsibility, and demanding an ethical awakening at times least expected.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo and edited by Jacques Rolland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 104.

This essay addresses responsibility and obligation that the death of another demands of us. The first section examines Levinas the notion of death. The next section turns to Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) *Adieu to Levinas*.² I then conclude this essay visiting Levinas's engagement with the theme of death in *God, Death, and Time*.

Derrida reminded those present at Levinas's physical end of the paradox of *adieu*; he emphasized it as a communicative gesture inclusive of both hello and goodbye. *Adieu* is “a farewell to temporal despair and a welcome to tenacious hope.”³ With this dual conception of *adieu* guiding my understanding of Derrida's reflections, I turn to two of his responses to the Levinas. First, Derrida gave *Adieu* at the burial of Levinas in Pantin, a suburb of Paris, on December 27, 1995. Then a year later, he offered “A Word of Welcome” at the beginning of “Homage to Emmanuel Levinas,” which took place on December 7, 1996 in the Richelieu Amphitheater of the Sorbonne.

Adieu as the Unity of Contraries

Derrida began by stating that he had feared the advent of this day defined by trembling voice and heart. What bequeathed him some solace was Levinas's use of the term *adieu*. As Derrida meditated on the term, he took comfort in Levinas's understanding of *adieu*. Derrida stated: “I would like...[to reflect on Levinas's understanding of *adieu*] with unadorned, naked words, words as childlike and disarmed as my sorrow.”⁴ The responsibility of saying *adieu* is the necessary “work of mourning.”⁵ Levinas emphasized *droiture*, a “straightforwardness,” an “uprightness” that is “stronger than death,” which no matter how necessary cannot “console”

² Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

³ *Adieu* as a greeting or welcome can be traced to the 14th-century French language of Languedoc, Provence, and Gasconne. Ronald C. Arnett, “Philosophy of Communication as Carrier of Meaning: *Adieu* to W. Barnett Pearce,” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 14, no. 1 (2013): 7.

⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 1.

⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 2.

those remaining.⁶ The acknowledgment of death calls forth a movement toward the Other that never returns to its point of origin and must understand that the person is no longer. For Levinas, such moments remind us of “‘unlimited’ responsibility” that calls for a “yes” that is both older and more bold than any form of naïve spontaneity.⁷ Death, when the face of the Other demands responsibility, is denied the first and the last word. Derrida reminds witnesses about the *oeuvre* of Levinas, which affirms the “holy” and the “promised” within a context of “nakedness” and “desert.”⁸ Levinas had, twenty years prior in “Death and Time” (“*La mort et le temps*”), stated that death is both a form of non-response emanating the face of the Other and a “patience of time”⁹ that demands a unique ethical response from the living.

Levinas stated that Shakespeare was wrong when he asked the empirical question of “to be or not to be.”¹⁰ The key to a life is not existence alone, but how one engages “entrusted responsibility”¹¹ to live life through a “‘duty beyond all debt.’”¹² Derrida then offered a sketch of the duty of “hospitality” which defines friendship¹³ and encapsulated Levinas’s love of France. Derrida contended that Levinas had changed the intellectual landscape in France with his personal and intellectual dignity. Levinas detailed the power of responsibility invoked by the Other; he gave an ethical interruption demanded of us by another a place of preeminence. Levinas underlined the “traumatism of [me that is awakened by] the other.”¹⁴ The Other traumatizes us out of routine and moves us to ethical obligation responsive to ethical action and

⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 2.

⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 3.

⁸ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 4.

⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 5.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 3. Drawn from Hamlet’s soliloquy, 3.1.56-90.

¹¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 6.

¹² Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 7.

¹³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 8.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 13.

responsibility. Levinas described the necessary ethical response to the Other: “Here I am.” In such a moment, one assumes an “immense responsibility” for the Other.¹⁵

Derrida referred to Heidegger and stated that Levinas had great admiration for Levinas’s project, even as he contended with some of Levinas’s basic assumptions. The difference between the two men and their work, for Derrida, is that unlike Heidegger, Levinas calls forth respect and thanks without regret. Derrida’s disagreements with Levinas never eclipsed a genuineness of respect. One can sense the depth of the respect for Levinas in Derrida’s closing words:

“The question-prayer that turned me [Derrida] toward him [Levinas] perhaps already shared in the experience of the *à-Dieu* with which I began. The greeting of the *à-Dieu* does not signal the end. ‘The *à-Dieu* is not a finality,’ he says, thus challenging the ‘alternative between being and nothingness,’ which ‘is not ultimate.’ The *à-Dieu* greets the other beyond being, in what is ‘signified, beyond being, by the word “glory.”’ ‘The *à-Dieu* is not a process of being: in the call, I am referred back to the other human being through whom this call signifies, to the neighbor for whom I am to fear.’

But I said that I did not want simply to recall what he entrusted to us of the *à-Dieu*, but first of all to say *adieu* to him, to call him by his name, to call his name, his first name, what he is called at the moment when, if he no longer responds, it is because he is responding in us, from the bottom of our hearts, in us but before us, in us right before us—in calling us, in recalling to us: *à-Dieu. Adieu, Emmanuel.*”¹⁶

Adieu invokes the reality of a genuine end that has no conclusion; the term reminds us of the unity of contraries of a life well lived. There is a uniting of sorrow with a nagging demand for responsibility engendered by an awakened life. *Adieu* in the midst of death acknowledges

¹⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 12.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 13.

goodbye and reminds us of how the face of the Other continues to startle and awaken, beckoning us toward unending responsibility and obligation.

A Word of Welcome

Derrida begins his second statement centered on Levinas with “*bienvenue*.” He highlights the power of welcome with his own understanding of “hospitality.”¹⁷ In order to welcome, one must be in a position to address the Other. Hospitality functions as a politics of capacity, for Derrida; it is the *pourvoir*, the power of a host who becomes a guest in the welcoming of the Other—power resides in the welcome of the host-guest. The uniting of the constructs of host and guest moves the communicative gesture of welcome from an act of possession and paternalism into an obligation to attend to the Other. This form of welcome both gives and receives, turning teaching into a simultaneous interplay of offering and reception.

Derrida stated that the reversal of the host becoming the guest moves welcome from ownership to temporal participation dwelling of responsibility. Such a move keeps hospitality within an act of “opening.”¹⁸ Hospitality for Levinas, according to Derrida, was tied to Sinai¹⁹ and to the face. There is both law and particularity of obligation tied to hospitality. For Derrida, there is, in the writings of Levinas, both an ethics of and a law of hospitality.

[There is a relationship] between an *ethics* of hospitality (an ethics *as* hospitality) and a *law* or a *politics* of hospitality, for example, in the tradition of what Kant calls the conditions of universal hospitality in *cosmopolitical law*: “with a view to perpetual peace.”²⁰

¹⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 15–16.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 19.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 63–70. Derrida offers Sinai as a place that embodies the disruption of the self and the unveiling of the face, drawing from Levinas. He offers both geopolitical and theological reflection on this theme, with Sinai representing, in both cases, a border (between Israel and other nations and between G-d and humanity).

²⁰ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 19–20.

Ethics emerges in the face of the Other and law houses concern for those not present in a given moment. Like much of Levinas's insights, the particular and the universal guide, in this case, he exhibits a textured conception of hospitality responsive to ethics and law.

Derrida stated that in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, he seldom uses the word hospitality, approximately six times. Nonetheless, the word hospitality is central throughout this major work. Hospitality is that communicative act that one witnesses in the opening of oneself to the *visage*, the face of the Other. The face welcomes and calls for responsibility for the Other. This welcome begins in the human face generating a burden of accountability for the Other that cannot be understood within the realm of "thematization."²¹ The welcome of the face opens one to "infinity," to a yes that transforms a life.²² The cry of this affirmation necessitates an acceptance of welcome that lives in "anarchy," in a world without limits defined by responsibility that is "pre-originally welcomed."²³ The "yes" and the "welcome" emanate from the Other, shaping a unique view of agency that responds to an immemorial communicative environment that is already and always underway. Even when there is no response and one remains in a "solitary cry of distress," there is still the "promise of response."²⁴ The response dwells within an acknowledged welcome that lives within a particular human face.

Interestingly, welcome is not a primal first gesture; welcome, like the face, rests in a "passive movement,"²⁵ which makes ethics as first philosophy possible. Ethical relation depends upon the reception of the welcome that guides the awareness of ethical responsibility unresponsive to reciprocity. This welcome is a door that opens one to the home of ethics within exteriority and infinity. The welcome demands that we cross the threshold of the door that leads

²¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 22.

²² Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 23.

²³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 23.

²⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 24.

²⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 25.

to responsibility for the Other.²⁶ When welcome is acknowledged the human being responds to an immemorial ethical demand. Welcome invites ethics and responsibility without informing one of the right or correct responses, however. Human responsibility requires existential discernment in the doing of ethics. Welcome invites a dwelling of discernment and ongoing responsibility.

Welcome involves a “thinking of recollection,” which makes possible the notion of “dwelling.”²⁷ Welcome is *a priori* to recollection and collection; welcome makes the act of recollection possible. The welcome lives in the “uprightness” of a real human face; one attends to the “gathered interiority” of the “dwelling.”²⁸ When there is a welcome acknowledged on the face of the Other, ethics arises and is then disrupted by justice, which acts as an interruption of the face-to-face nature of ethics, calling forth attention to those not empirically present at the table of conversation and decision-making. Justice moves one outside the proximity of the face-to-face, *dehors* a sense of “immediacy.”²⁹

Levinas frequently spoke about a “primordial word of honor,” which is sensed as one engages in an “attestation of oneself” that announces the “uprightness of the face to face.”³⁰ The proximity of ethics embraces a companion form of hospitality—the intrusion of justice is an almost “intolerable scandal.”³¹ “Even if Levinas never puts it this way, justice commits perjury as easily as it breathes; it betrays the “primordial word of honor” and swears [jurer] only to perjure, to swear falsely [parjurer], swear off [abjurer] or swear at [injurer]...this ineluctability...imagines the sigh of the just....”³² The sigh of the just emerges with recognition that the enactment of justice is demanded, but is ever so unclear. Just as Levinas offers no easy

²⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 55.

²⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 28.

²⁸ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 34–36.

²⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 31–32.

³⁰ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 34.

³¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 34.

³² Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 34.

framework to do ethics, he refuses such a move in justice. Only in the nourishing of structures and laws can one hope to approximate justice.

There is an ongoing oscillation between ethics and justice, with each interrupting the Other. The face is an ethical reminder for *moi même* of a responsibility that originates in both proximate (ethics) and distant (justice) obligations. Derrida emphasized that hospitality is propelled by the “trace of the face, of the visage” that is a “*visitation*” that “disjoins and *disturbs*.”³³ The visitation of the face cannot be programmed or demanded; it is “unexpected” and “awaited beyond all awaiting.”³⁴ Perhaps one can liken the visitation of the face as a “messianic visit” that is not tied to a past or the present, but rather to a responsibility in ethics of proximity and justice for those not immediately present.³⁵

Derrida’s view of hospitality operates within a background guidance of justice that shapes and interrupts ethics. This form of hospitality enacts radical separation that is essential for space between persons that interrupts the comfort of the proximity of ethics.³⁶ Derrida alludes to the justice connection as a major reason for Levinas rejecting the “I-Thou” construct of Martin Buber; Levinas contends that there is no exclusive sphere of justice in his dialogic and dyadic construct. Justice lives in attentiveness of an exteriority, an Otherness, not within a special located between persons.³⁷

Separation or what Levinas called disinterestedness³⁸ makes hospitality, ethics, justice, and welcome possible, displacing any sense of hospitality that seeks to mask acts of

³³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 62.

³⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 62.

³⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 62.

³⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 47.

³⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 60.

³⁸ John Llewelyn, *Appositions to Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas*, series: Studies in Continental Thought. Series ed., John Sallis. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 75-78. Levinas’s concept of disinterestedness was onto-theological. Our relation in love to the other reflects God’s love for us that is beyond interestedness. See also Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 219-224.

interpersonal domination. Hospitality is tied to the infinite, not to totality where one can claim or ideologically assert a particular set of unwavering assumptions. Separation within hospitality interrupts the self, making it a “paradox” capable of attending to an ethical import of a particular face that turns one to an immemorial call without unmasking of the Other; the Other remains an enigma. Levinas suggests a hospitality that is both disclosure and a continued veiling. Without separation, proximity that abides in the face-to-face trace of ethics seeks to eclipse the dual obligation of justice. The “face as a trace” propels ethics and justice in an ethical dwelling constructed with separation.³⁹

Derrida understands that the unity of contraries undergirds the welcome of hospitality: 1) ethics and justice, 2) the particular and the universal, 3) the proximate and the distance, 4) the meeting and separation, and 5) the visual attentiveness to the Other that gives way to an audio recognition of an ethic of immemorial responsibility. There is an ongoing interruption of reversal, as the host becomes the “hostage” of the Other, which results in the invitation of a guest into given dwelling that ceases to be one’s own.⁴⁰ The hostage endures “substitution,” assuming responsibility for the Other.⁴¹ The act of substitution is a profound interruption of the self.⁴² Derrida connects the Sinai Peninsula to a dwelling of interruption, a place where conflict defines the day with contrasting and competing histories and disputed boundaries.⁴³ Derrida contends that three major terms undergird Levinas’s project, with each pointing beyond the self, while demanding responsibility of the self that is beyond the expected via the importance of “*fraternity, humanity, hospitality.*”⁴⁴ These concepts are at the heart of lived experience within

³⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 52–53.

⁴⁰ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 56.

⁴¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 56.

⁴² Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 61.

⁴³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 65.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 67.

the Torah. Even for those unwilling or unable to offer a message of the Torah, all are reminded of life “*before* or outside of the Sinai” by attentiveness to a human face.⁴⁵

The defining contention of Levinas is fraternity; this ethical command thrives throughout his work and life. Fraternity and justice move one to concern for the neighbor and the third. This form of hospitality is more radical than Kant’s understanding of hospitality in a *Perpetual Peace*.⁴⁶ Hospitality for Kant was attentive to interspaces within the public and civic domain. “Levinas, on the other hand, understands hospitality as a ‘dwelling’ that offers an ‘asylum,’ an ‘inn’ for the Other.”⁴⁷ Hospitality is a dwelling of welcome that is attentive to the proximate and the distant, ethics and justice. Such a dwelling, for Levinas, is a “place offered to the stranger.”⁴⁸ This *espace* gathers and collects persons near and far around the vitality of fraternity, humanity, and hospitality. Levinas discloses an immemorial welcome for the person whose face awakens the other and us to those who may never be seen, but are part of a struggle for justice. It is the unending burden of ethics and justice that welcomes the proximate and the distant, the neighbor and the stranger. Levinas’s ethics is misunderstood when termed “*cosmopolitical* hospitality.”⁴⁹ The cosmopolitan embraces the distant; Levinas interrupted justice with ethics in the face-to-face, and justice offers a similar fragmentation of the closeness of ethics.

According to Derrida, Levinas’s project reminded us of a memory that is even prior to the memory of God. This immemorial ethical echo is a voice before and beyond the Torah that meets Sinai, calling forth welcome, responsibility, and the interruption of justice. Levinas illuminates a hospitality beyond the State that welcomes from a ground of ethics more ancient

⁴⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 67.

⁴⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* (New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc., 2010).

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 68.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 68, 71.

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 68.

than time itself. Additionally, Levinas crafts a “politics beyond the political.”⁵⁰ For Levinas, peace exceeds the political. Peace arises in the welcome and the receiving of the Other from a “magisterial height” that can only be assumed by a host who becomes a hostage attentive to responsibility for the Other; the command of ethics demands the construction of a temporal dwelling in which one becomes a guest.⁵¹

The hostage becomes a derivative self formation. The interrupted self leads to the transcendence of the self through the act of substitution for the Other, returning to the self differently, and then revisiting to the other charged with responsibility. This derivative self is a self hostage to the Other, shaped via “substitution,” and acts with absolute passivity, not in a Heideggerian sense of the possibility of the impossibility, but out of “infinite responsibility” that obligates me toward the neighbor—a “passivity is not only the possibility of death in being, the possibility of impossibility. It is an impossibility prior to that possibility, the impossibility of slipping away”.⁵² Our responsibility is awakened by the death of another, reminding us of obligation prior to death and as we stand before death another is called by our own death.⁵³

The hostage of whom Levinas spoke understands the danger of rhetoric that invokes a “careless idealism.”⁵⁴ Additionally, on the side of strife, Levinas rejected Kant’s contention that all begins with war. For Levinas, it is not idealism or the dark reality of war, but the human face functions as the visual origin of ethics and ultimately justice. The human face demands that one tend to places of “non-violence, peace, and hospitality.”⁵⁵ This visual and audio understanding of ethics and responsibility finds prominence within a peace that embraces a radical separation and

⁵⁰ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 79.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 85.

⁵² *Otherwise than Being*, 128.

⁵³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 83.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 84.

⁵⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 92.

distance between and among persons, as we simultaneously respond to the call of the face of a particular Other.

Derrida continues with an outline of Kant's perspective on peace, which assumes that the pivotal point of the human condition is war, negating peace as a natural state of being. Kant's assertion demonstrates that peace is something other than utopia; peace is a state that requires constant vigilance, work, and action. If during a momentary time of peace, one reflects on the possibility of war, then war not peace is better understood as the point of origin. Peace is simply "not natural."⁵⁶ To address the non-natural nature of peace, Kant discussed the importance of universal hospitality that works to offer a dwelling larger and more expansive than a given State or residence; his concern was for those outside the scope of institutional support to discover physical sustenance and safety. Levinas understood this perspective and frequently referred to dangers that lurk within the "tyranny of the State."⁵⁷ Such tyrannies deform the "I" to the point of missing the directives within the face of the Other; the face of the Other is eclipsed. Levinas contended that political hospitality too often morphs into "tyrannical violence."⁵⁸

The political does otherwise with hospitality, moving it from the authentic to the temporally artificial. An act of political hospitality engenders brilliant illumination. However, one discovers later that such a light blinds one to all persons, events, and ideas; it covers over and obscures, rendering yet another form of darkness. Political light obfuscates for Levinas, ignoring the reality of genuine holy sparks. Levinas, like Kant, rejected a civil view of peace that was dependent upon a government alone. Kant's cosmopolitan position supports a dwelling for the sojourner.⁵⁹ Levinas, on the other hand, did not use the term cosmopolitan, due to its

⁵⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 86–87.

⁵⁷ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 97.

⁵⁸ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 97.

⁵⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 87.

ideological connotations used to render credence to “modern anti-Semitism.”⁶⁰ Hospitality, for Levinas, is both the proximate and the distant with each interrupting the certainty of the other. This ongoing interruption includes an excessive love for the stranger. The unwillingness to announce oneself is a “holy separation” that propels the human and God to love the stranger.⁶¹ The “Saying *à-Dieu* would signify hospitality. This is not some abstraction that one would call, as I have just hastily done, ‘love of the stranger,’ but (God) ‘*who* loves the stranger.’”⁶² Derrida stressed in his final pages the call of *Adieu* as a desire to rest and dwell. It is a dwelling in God. A city of refuge was contrary to Levinas’s view of dwelling, which emerged from the Torah and the charge of responsibility for the Other. Even in the midst of death, however, the face of the Other calls forth responsibility from beyond. The dwelling within death has an active demand for responsibility from the face of the Other after death. Interruption from the face continues. Levinas pointed to an ethical dwelling that houses an echo that carries the burden of responsibility and a “promise”⁶³ that demands a holiness of responsibility for the Other. The *adieu* is a goodbye and, like in seventeenth-century France, a hello to the Other within a realm of ethics and responsibility that has no end. For Derrida, *adieu* is a continuing form of signification—the face of the one for which we grieve still calls forth responsibility from the living: death becomes yet another form of ethical awakening. *Adieu*, as understood by Derrida, included an immemorial call, which for Levinas defines relationship to *God, Death, and Time*.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 88.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 104.

⁶² Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 104–105.

⁶³ Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, 113.

⁶⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo and edited by Jacques Rolland (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

I now turn to a series of lectures on this three-fold engagement that are attentive to an immemorial responsibility.⁶⁵

God, Death, and Time

There are forty-seven essays in *God, Death, and Time*; they are the product of two lecture courses taught by Levinas in the 1975–1976 academic year; my task in the wisdom of Walter Benjamin is to enact “pearl-diving” that searches for ideas that assist the performative characteristics of *adieu*—the goodbye and hello to responsibility that acknowledges the face of the dead to call forth responsibility. This series of lectures centers on the “word beyond measure”⁶⁶ that gives structure to what Levinas understood as an immemorial echo of “ethics as first philosophy.” He understood this primordial word as offering an ethical trace stronger than death itself. In the lectures we sense a trace of Levinas’s face; he is lecturing, talking to students, and now continuing to call us. For each essay, I offer a brief statement about an idea imperative to Levinas and then follow with a response in italics.

Part I: Death and Time

Initial Questions—Friday, November 7, 1975. Time is “duration” with death assuming the patience of all time.⁶⁷ Death is a departure to the unknown. It appears as a passage from being to no longer being. Duration in death is thus understood as a “fission” that reunites one with an *a priori* that is before the *a priori*.⁶⁸ The death of another is not the same experience as my own death. *The former requires my attentiveness to the face of the Other and the latter offers*

⁶⁵ These lectures were compiled by Jacques Rolland. Rolland was a student of Levinas’s at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, wrote his dissertation on Dostoevsky under Levinas’s direction, and later became friends with Levinas in the 1980s. See Bettina Bergo, “Translator’s Foreword” in Emmanuel Levinas’s *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), xi.

⁶⁶ Jacques Rolland, “Foreword” in Emmanuel Levinas’s *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

⁶⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 7.

⁶⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 10.

responsibility for another; the death of another awakens my ethical responsibility and my own death calls forth responsibility in another.

What Do We Know of Death?—Friday, November 14, 1975. Death is the “stopping of expressive movements.”⁶⁹ However, one is awakened by the Other with recognition that I am the “survivor.”⁷⁰ The meaning of life flows beyond the moment of death, offering “surprise” that heals and reminds us of impotence to inevitability.⁷¹ Death is the recognition of duration defined by the mortality of a single one. *The Other’s death informs us; our own death, at the least, reminds those around us of duration, both its infinite calling and its finite sense of stoppage.*

The Death of the Other [D’Autrui] and My Own—Friday, November 21, 1975. Levinas counters both Husserl and Heidegger, suggesting that emotion cannot be limited to intentionality or “rooted in anxiety.”⁷² Death is better understood as a “disquietude;” it is a finite moment that defines infinity.⁷³ Death is a “nonsense” that must be met.⁷⁴ *A life of finitude confirms the infinite; it connects us to those before us and those not yet among us.*

An Obligatory Passage: Heidegger—Friday, November 28, 1975. Levinas offers his voice in discussion of death’s disquieting restlessness and the awakening we receive from another that is “beyond measure.”⁷⁵ For Heidegger, the point of Being in relation to *Dasein* is a “mineness” associated with the potential loss of being.⁷⁶ Heidegger later reflected on the question of time as, “it is a being.”⁷⁷ Existentially, we end with the question “*Who is time?*”⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 11.

⁷⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 12.

⁷¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 13–14.

⁷² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 18.

⁷³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 17.

⁷⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 21.

⁷⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 22.

⁷⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 25.

⁷⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 27.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 27.

Levinas reminds us of a call from the Other from the grave; Heidegger reminds us of a sober note; it is me that dies.

The Analytic of Dasein—Friday, December 5, 1975. In addition to nature and natural science, the human offers a “rupture” in the advent of Being, reason, and any claim to objectivity outside of existence.⁷⁹ The human is awakened by the face of the Other who directs one to ethics. Heidegger, on the other hand, explicates a care that is routinely expected. The structure of Heidegger’s care is three-fold: “*being-out-ahead-of-oneself* (the project), *being-always-already-in-the-world* (facticity), being in the world as *being-alongside-of* (alongside the things, alongside of what is encountered within the world).”⁸⁰ Levinas stresses that time defines care of project being future, facticity the past, and along-side of being the present. Care is tied to time and to the structure of things. Even the notion of despair fits within the structure in that there is anticipation of more agony. *Dasein* in the act of care finds a lack, that being death, and is connected to time, as one cares for structures on the way to death.⁸¹ *Heidegger’s view of care is time-centered* *Levinas’s understanding of care linked to ethics as a response to an immemorial echo—a responsibility before and beyond time that shapes the human with joy, not the anticipation of death.*

Dasein and Death—Friday, December 12, 1975. Levinas contended that Heidegger’s contribution was describing *Dasein* as moving toward death of annihilation, which reframes our understanding of time and Being.⁸² Heidegger embraces an ontological preoccupation with “being-there” in the “*proper*” or “*authentic*” sense.⁸³ Death then becomes the end of “being-in-the-world” with Levinas being unwilling to forget the possibility of the “beyond,” the

⁷⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 28.

⁸⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 30.

⁸¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 32.

⁸² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 33.

⁸³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 34.

“infinite,”⁸⁴ which leads Levinas to a natural claim—the face of the Other continues to speak after death.

The Death and Totality of Dasein—Friday, December 19, 1975. Heidegger asserts that death emerges as a totality of “being there” in the experience of the death of another.⁸⁵ *Dasein* works with a debt to be paid, a “distance relative to itself,” in response to death.⁸⁶ The “being-out-ahead-of-oneself” is the movement of *Dasein* to death.⁸⁷ Death is that which actually completes *Dasein*.⁸⁸ *Levinas admires the recognition of the power of death and its import on us via our experience of and response to the death of another. Unlike Heidegger’s conception of death, however, the visage of another continues to speak.*

Being-Toward-Death as the Origin of Time—Friday, January 9, 1976. For Levinas, death is tied to significance and responsibility. Death announces the mortality of *Dasein*, but it is not an abrupt end, but rather an ongoing recognition of the not-yet. *Dasein* lives as if close to the end in every moment of life; death becomes a defining characteristic of one’s own being. Death then shapes not a moment, but the “manner of being”. Death is not an “unfulfilled future,” but the very root of being. “Just as *Dasein*, as long as it is, is always a ‘not yet,’ it is also always its end.”⁸⁹ The movement toward death carries with it an ever-present recognition of the question of non-being. *For Levinas, on the other hand, focus is on responsibility for the Other, not on a preoccupation with one’s own death.*

Death, Anxiety, and Fear—Friday, January 16, 1976. One lives with the “to-be-in-question.”⁹⁰ *Dasein* responds to anxiety “for” and “of,” which render insight to a “being-toward-

⁸⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 37.

⁸⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 38.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 39.

⁸⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 40.

⁸⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 41.

⁸⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 43.

⁹⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 46.

death.”⁹¹ One flees death into the “They” of “idle talk.”⁹² The certainty of death makes all other possibilities of life possible, according to Heidegger. *Levinas would agree that flight from meeting existence is an escape and, additionally, an eclipse of one’s responsibility for the Other.*

Time Considered on the Basis of Death—Friday, January 23, 1976. Death is a “reversal of appearing”,⁹³ it makes *Dasein* and time possible. In every moment in life, *Dasein* is in relationship with death.⁹⁴ *For Levinas, the human is in relationship with responsibility for the Other in each moment of life.*

Inside Heidegger: Bergson—Friday, January 30, 1976. Levinas stresses Bergson’s contribution to time via *duration*, which breaks with the Western equation of time with measurement.⁹⁵ Duration assumes a heaviness that descends into and with the self. Duration makes intersubjectivity between persons possible, as one attends to the “interiority” of another.⁹⁶ *Levinas recounts that such a view of duration accounts for signification that transpires long after the empirical death of another.*

The Radical Question: Kant Against Heidegger—Friday, February 6, 1976. Levinas explicates what he considers a fundamental difference between Kant and Heidegger with the latter focused on Being and the former on transcendence, which permits Kant to understand signification not tied to Being. Kant’s transcendental ideal understands meaning otherwise than finitude.⁹⁷ *Levinas highlights an alternative to finitude—the signification of the face that continues....*

⁹¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 47.

⁹² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 48.

⁹³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 50.

⁹⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 53.

⁹⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 55.

⁹⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 56.

⁹⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 60.

A Reading of Kant (Continued)—Friday, February 13, 1976. This section continues a differentiation between Heidegger and Kant with the latter’s emphasis on a sense hope that is not linear, but tied to happiness manifested in the doing of a universal maxim.⁹⁸ This hope offers signification that is more than and beyond Being. For Kant, hope is a product of happiness; it is the “rational character of a virtue” that works with a universal imperative. Happiness is then tied to virtuous work; it is not morality that is the “Sovereign Good,” but the doing of ethical reasoning and action. “Therefore, neither happiness alone nor virtue alone—both of these injure Reason”.⁹⁹ *Levinas concurred with the dangers of the reification of morality, happiness, and virtue; he recognized the power of finitude and the reality of making ethical decisions without pure assurance of correctness; in such living one finds meaning and hope beyond an impending sense of annulation.*

How to Think Nothingness?—Friday, February 20, 1976. Levinas asserted that the notion of nothingness has “defied” much of recent Western philosophy.¹⁰⁰ Contrary to this perspective is Kant’s understanding of “rational hope” as a counter to nothingness.¹⁰¹ Rational hope is outside the temporal sequence of events. Rational hope is outside of time; it assumes the power of self-legislation attentively tied to the categorical imperative. *For Levinas, the joy of existence, trumps notion of nothingness; in existence the face of the Other matters.*

Hegel’s Response: The Science of Logic—Friday, February 27, 1976. Levinas emphasizes that “pure being” as understood by Hegel is indeterminate, including its commencement; genesis, corruption, and decomposition are subsumed within the “absolute.”¹⁰² Nothing is new, and at the same time, annihilation never ceases. Nothingness is part of Being,

⁹⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 63–65.

⁹⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 64–65.

¹⁰⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 70.

¹⁰¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 67.

¹⁰² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 72–73.

with beginning ignited within nothingness that gives shape to the absolute. *For Levinas, there is a beginning before all beginnings that is part of an immemorial past; it is an origin prior to origins.*

Reading Hegel's Science of Logic (Continued)—Friday, March 5, 1976. For Hegel, ““pure being and pure nothingness are the same.””¹⁰³ There is an identity of nothingness/being.¹⁰⁴ One cannot name the difference between being and nothingness. *For Levinas, however, there is an origin of ethics fundamentally prior to an origin of being.*

From the Science of Logic to the Phenomenology—Friday, March 12, 1976. Belief that is theoretically constructed is better understood as *doxa*.¹⁰⁵ The thinking of being connects nothingness with thought, connecting one to a world beyond measure. “*I think*” permits consciousness to engage in reciprocal recognition.¹⁰⁶ This consciousness becomes an ethical state that clarifies human law and divine law.¹⁰⁷ The double form of consciousness permits the spirit to function as individual within a community.¹⁰⁸ The universal is lost when an individual dies; it is only the individual who can glimpse the universal. *For Levinas, sociality is a defining shaper of our humanness—only through the particularity of personal responsibility does one meet the possibility of the universal.*

Reading Hegel's Phenomenology (Continued)—Friday, March 19, 1976. Hegel, like Kant, does not equate the individual with Spirit or an ethic.¹⁰⁹ The person is the individual Other, which is the dwelling place of the universal. Universality, for Hegel, rests in the individual.¹¹⁰

Death of an individual is the continuing progress of thought. For Hegel, death is not a person or

¹⁰³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 79.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 84–85.

¹¹⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 85.

thing, but a “shadow” that points to the obscure world of thought and appearances akin to Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*.¹¹¹ Death is a nothingness that returns to the “ground of being.”¹¹² *Levinas, on the other hand, finds the universal through the particular, which permit a glimpse of an anarchical origin.*

The Scandal of Death: From Hegel to Fink—Friday, April 9, 1976. The nothingness of Hegel and Aristotle assumes that there is “already a beginning.”¹¹³ Death is a “destiny;”¹¹⁴ for the real that was always “destined for destruction.”¹¹⁵ Death connects one to the beginning once again with self-grasping thought.¹¹⁶ Eugen Fink (1905-1975),¹¹⁷ contrarily, connects death to intelligibility. Death is a “rupture” that must be met in silence¹¹⁸ that functions as a “scandal” in that it is a estrangement from intelligibility.¹¹⁹ *For Levinas, death is not a scandal, but intimately linked to an immemorial echo of responsibility that continues to call forth the actions of another.*

Another Thinking of Death: Starting from Bloch—Friday, April 23, 1976. Levinas contends that Ernst Bloch (1885-1977)¹²⁰ engages a humanism that yearns for a “habitable

¹¹¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 86–87.

¹¹² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 87.

¹¹³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 88.

¹¹⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 88.

¹¹⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 89–90.

¹¹⁷ Ronald Bruzina, *Edmund Husserl & Eugen Fink: Beginnings and Ends in Phenomenology, 1928-1938* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 1-72, 529-543. Born in Konstanz, Fink attended the University of Freiburg in 1925, studying with Husserl as well as Heidegger. He became Husserl’s assistant in 1928. He submitted his doctoral dissertation in 1929, under readers Husserl and Heidegger (marking the only PhD project the two ever oversaw together). Fink was present when Husserl was dismissed from his Rectorship and was caught in the political, personal and intellectual divide between his teachers. Though able to escape Nazi persecution due to his non-Jewish, German lineage, he remained Husserl’s assistant after his dismissal. Husserl would come to acknowledge Fink as his “collaborator” rather than assistant, with Fink making substantial contributions to *Cartesian Meditations* and other Husserl works. He worked with Husserl up to Husserl’s death in 1938 and delivered a eulogy at his cremation service. He went onto to teach at Freiburg in 1946, following Husserl’s work while also declaring that his work “decisively differences” himself from Husserl.

¹¹⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 90.

¹²⁰ Vincent Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 1-45. Ernst Bloch is a Jewish-German and Marxist philosopher who wrote across several academic disciplines, concerned with matters of culture, religion, nature and utopias in a career that spanned over six decades. He was at one time a student of Max Weber and was a friend at various points of György Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Tillich and other

site.”¹²¹ What led many people to socialism was the “spectacle of misery” that called for concern for the neighbor.¹²² Bloch understands Marx as offering a philosophy about a progress toward the enactment of human dignity. Alienation of labor represents the time of incompleteness of the progress.¹²³ “Social evil” is then understood a “fault” or an obstacle in the path toward progress.¹²⁴ For Bloch, time is a dwelling of hope that lives within culture that “vibrates in sympathy” toward a progressive ideal of human dignity.¹²⁵ *Levinas responds with affirmation to the role of neighbor’s suffering and our eternal responsibility in addressing another’s pain as the keystone to attentiveness to the demands for justice.*

A Reading of Bloch (Continued)—Friday, April 30, 1976. Bloch assumes the importance of hope tied to a utopian future.¹²⁶ Anxiety about death originates in the incompleteness of one’s work, a stoppage of progress.¹²⁷ Bloch contends that when the light emanating from utopia bursts upon the “obscurity of subjectivity,” we witness “astonishment.” Through astonishment one senses the penetrating rain of progress at work.¹²⁸ *Levinas responds to hope, not via progress, but in an unending obligation to attend to a voice before all voices.*

A Reading of Bloch: Toward a Conclusion—Friday, May 7, 1976. The subject in a dark world works for “a better world” with the fear of dying before necessary work is accomplished.¹²⁹ Culture shaped by such work is then understood as a cultural revolution.¹³⁰

“Astonishment” emerges in moments that one glimpses a perfected utopia in which the

prominent 20th century thinkers. Some have criticized parts of his work as having Stalinist sympathies, though Vincent Geoghegan argues that his relationship to this form of thought is more nuanced than some of his critics have allowed.

¹²¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 94.

¹²² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 94.

¹²³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 95.

¹²⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 95.

¹²⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 96.

¹²⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 98.

¹²⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 99.

¹²⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 100.

¹²⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 101.

¹³⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 101.

uniqueness of person emerges.¹³¹ During these moments one understands work as “leisure.”¹³² Bloch connects astonishment with leisure in a manner that refuses to equate leisure with “the unfinished or capitalist world” of empty time and “sad Sundays” that urge one to exploit holidays that can offer rejuvenation. Leisure connected with the temporal world of astonishment is stronger than “any possession or any property;” astonishment counters the world of melancholia.¹³³ Bloch has the audacity to celebrate astonishment, culture, and leisure as coordinates of work that invite and ultimately glimpse a dwelling for utopian hope. *Levinas recognizes that the oeuvre of a life matters. Additionally, he understands the power of astonishment through the expressive voice of saying.*

Thinking About Death on the Basis of Time—Friday, May 14, 1976. Death opens the door to attentiveness to others; it functions as an interruption in time.¹³⁴ The “flux” of time lives within interruption that makes our understanding of the infinite possible.¹³⁵ *Levinas understood that the infinite as interrupted by the finite; the infinite embraces as a form of totality yields a world without interruption, saying, and interruption.*

To Conclude: Questioning Again—Friday, May 21, 1976. Death is not of our current world; it is forever a “scandal.”¹³⁶ Death unites us to an origin before origins, while bringing us face to face with the finite. In the authority of death there is yet a greater power—the face of the Other that calls us into responsibility. *When all analysis is complete there is one fundamental fact remaining—the death of the Other matters when it calls someone into responsibility.*

¹³¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 102.

¹³² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 102.

¹³³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 102.

¹³⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 106.

¹³⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 107–108.

¹³⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 113.

In this series of lectures Levinas addressed his perspective on death tied to calling of a face that speaks with a power greater than death. His project attends to that which is before the before and the beyond; such a project requires final reflections on a God that cannot be named.

Part II: God and Onto-theo-logy.

Beginning with Heidegger—Friday, November 7, 1975. Levinas examines Heidegger's question of being after God. Heidegger's project, became a Onto-theo-logy with an epoch announcing a particular way of being. Being is then differentiated from human beings with language functioning as the "house of being."¹³⁷ Unlike Hegel, where philosophy aligns with progress, Heidegger moves backward in order for questioning and thinking about Being to be understood and opened up. *Levinas understands the move backward, otherwise, toward a primordial ethics. Levinas does not endorse thinking about Being of thinking, but rather a passive thought that attends to an ancient ethical echo in a disinterested and determined fashion.*

Being and Meaning—Friday, November 14, 1975. Heidegger posits Being as the origin of meaning. Levinas states that to separate God from Onto-theo-logy means that the Same and the Other cannot be equated; the key is difference. For Levinas, this suggests that questioning and thinking about Being is no longer central, but rather difference and ethics are primary, not Being. The Greeks tied meaning to discourse, but Levinas understands meaning as *a priori* to Being. Communication about Being comes long after an ancient commanding communication about ethics. *Levinas begins with immemorial responsibility that existed long Being and thinking about the importance of Being.*

Being and World—Friday, November 21, 1975. In the Western tradition, it is "rhetoric" that functions as the carrier of meaning. This tradition privileges the synthesizing through thought. Levinas asserts that Heidegger works within this rhetorical position in a questioning

¹³⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 122.

fashion, undoing metaphysics, as he gestures toward another metaphysics in which the “Same is still the rational, the meaningful.”¹³⁸ *Levinas’s conception of ethics is prior and beyond synthesis, metaphysics, and the rational; it is an archaistic and immemorial command of obligation.*

To Think God on the Basis of Ethics—Friday, November 5, 1975. Heidegger offered a rationality of disquietude, as he questioned Being. Only through the questioning of Being does one engage and understand Being. Levinas privileges ethics that is an origin prior to any disquietude of Being. *Levinas did, however, understand the vitality of disquietude. Unlike Heidegger he understood disquietude arising from the interruption of the face of the Other that imposes on me, activating an immemorial patience of ethics that reshapes my own identity.*

The Same and the Other—Friday, December 12, 1975. Pure passivity of response to an ethical call emerges from the Other; we answer within the diachrony of time.¹³⁹ Levinas repeatedly announces the importance of meaning before knowledge within a duration before time. It is the Other that sobers the Same into awareness of this ancient ethical call before, during, and after time. *The face of the Other acts as a spiritual awakening to a sacred command of responsibility.*

The Subject-Object Correlation—Friday, December 19, 1975. Transcendence happens in the Other awakening the Same. Difference, not synthesis and correlation of subject and object, counters the Western impulse to absorb. *Levinas does not begin with an originative subject, but with an awakened subject, the derivative I.*

The Question of Subjectivity—Friday, January 9, 1976. The gathering of structures frames signification and constitutes the “said”. “Saying” grows silent within the said, while a

¹³⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 135.

¹³⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 141.

trace of saying remains within the said. Heidegger stated that the poet enlivened the said of a poem and permitted it to speak; a poet awakens the voice of a saying that dwells in the silence of the said. The facticity, the saidness of the Other, houses a trace of saying that redirects one's responsibility as an "I" with obligations that are unique and particular manner. *Levinas understood the said as the dwelling of the trace of saying; the interaction between saying and said makes signification of responsibility possible.*

Kant and the Transcendental Ideal—Friday, January 16, 1976. The dialectic of transcendence suggested by Kant assumes thinking that is both empirical and general, permitting one to sense what is and might be. In Western philosophy, communication announces the signification of a representation of Being. Signification that is thematized lives with the "said;" "saying" is independent of content, bursting forth into meaning not yet reified. *The Other points us to the call of responsibility that dwells within "saying"—an inarticulate, yet definitive voice.*

Signification as Saying—Friday, January 23, 1976. The signification of saying fuels responsibility for the Other. There is no said or clear programmatic answer that calls forth responsibility; the I of ethics lives within a dwelling of saying that is forever moved to the particular. The call of responsibility charges an ethical I with obligation held hostage/indebted to the Other who renders possible my identity. The manner in which this debt is carried out has no formula; it is unique, not distinct; one must offer a one-of-a-kind response. *Saying carries signification that cannot be packaged or framed in a manner that technicians would seek to duplicate and imitate.*

Ethical Subjectivity—Friday, January 30, 1976. This form of subjectivity habituates within the saying and is manifested in uniqueness response to the Other. Saying dwells prior to language in the before, the above, and the beyond. The accusative *moi* finds signification in

uniqueness of response that emerges in response to saying. *Ethical subjectivity is performative, commanded by an ancient ethical echo.*

Transcendence, Idolatry, and Secularization—Friday, January 6, 1976. When one connects transcendence to ethics we discern a “secularization of the sacred.”¹⁴⁰ Ontology becomes the idolatry of our time. Perhaps one can understand secularization as the idolatry of the West. Levinas discusses the secularization of transcendence as tied to the pursuit of Being. With Being an ideology, it misses the world of the hungry and the poor in daily life. Even technology as a secularization “is destructive of pagan gods.”¹⁴¹ *Levinas understood the danger of false height through ideology, reification, and secularization, as well as the ethical necessity of countering a local that members seek to seize and possess. .*

Don Quixote: Bewitchment and Hunger—Friday, February 13, 1976. Levinas states that the world is always proportionate to our knowledge with God functioning as an ultimate metaphor of “dis-proportion.”¹⁴² The sense of dis-proportion can be avoided by anything that brings about “bewitchment,” which Levinas states is core to the story of *Don Quixote*. One can be bewitched by any ideology or reification that misses the face of the Other, which can too easily occur when one is in a “well fed slumber.” Interestingly, Levinas underscored that in *Don Quixote*’s enchantment there was a “transferable responsibility.” *Even in the midst of bewitchment there is a trace of the saying of ethics that calls forth responsibility.*

Subjectivity as Anarchy—Friday, February 20, 1976. Levinas’s conception of ethics originates prior to a beginning in “*an-archy*.” Ethical signification dwells in act of

¹⁴⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 163.

¹⁴¹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 166, 275 fn6. In distinction from Heidegger, Levinas has argued that technology has philosophical implications and does not necessarily reject it in all its forms. He affirms the exposure of some pagan gods as “gods of the world.” An extended discussion of this exists in Emmanuel Levinas, “Secularization and Hunger,” trans. Bettina Bergo, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 20, no. 2-21, no. 1 (1998).

¹⁴² Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 167.

responsibility. Unlike Heidegger, Levinas's version of freedom emerges from response to a demand for responsibility. Ethical subjectivity is detached from Being and intimately tied to an original echo—"I am my brother's keeper." The ethical command for investiture in the Other is impersonal; it shapes the personal identity. *Levinas does not equate ethics with a program or a set of skills; ethics is an originary anarchy that fuels uniqueness of responsibility.*

Freedom and Responsibility—Friday, February 27, 1976. Freedom emerges in the act of responsibility for the Other; freedom is the enactment of a "uniqueness" of responsibility that generates "superindividuation," which can be carried forth by no one other than me. This responsibility is a vocation and is far from utopian; it demands an inequality of me toward and for the Other. It is a call for responsibility heard via a demanding whisper since time immemorial. *For Levinas ethics is performed in an inequality of self in relation to the Other.*

The Ethical Relationship as a Departure from Ontology—Friday, March 5, 1976. Ethics begins with a dis-inter-estedness, a dissymmetry of relationship with the Other that demands substitution of me for the suffering of another, which abandons the "free ego." But, even the responsibility of ethics has limits. Justice attends to "the third party's intervening in the relationship of nearness."¹⁴³ Meaning dwells within the revelatory that emerges in responsibility that originates beyond and before the assurance of technique, clarity of ethics, of confidence in a singular conception of justice. *Levinas reminds us that totality cannot subsume ethics; it must give way to justice that mitigates our responsibility for the proximate Other, just as ethics must temper the assurance of justice.*

The Extra-Ordinary Subjectivity of Responsibility—Friday, March 12, 1976. Levinas stated that subjectivity is the "extra-ordinary" dimension of my own responsibility for another. This responsibility is not a disclosure of an ethical act, but a bearing witness of me manifests in

¹⁴³ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 183.

the “Here I am.”¹⁴⁴ *This call of responsibility is both extra-ordinary and simultaneously otherwise than the convention of Being.*

The Sincerity of Saying—Friday, March 19, 1976. Meaning begins with giving bread to another and requires practical material acts. Such gestures offer sincerity when they dwell within saying; sincerity lives until it is absorbed into a programmatic said. Sincerity is a witnessing that does not return the focus to oneself. Sincerity of saying offers a “model without a world.” *Sincerity cannot name itself in the witnessing of saying; it lives beyond reflection and in practical acts for the Other.*

Glory of the Infinite and Witnessing—Friday, April 9, 1976. Inspiration witnesses to ethics and responsibility in response to the Other. It is not a form of representation, thematization, but a saying that temporally manifests itself in a witnessing burst of responsibility—“Here I am.”¹⁴⁵ *Witnessing begins with saying moves to the said and then fades once again within the said as a trace until it is called forth once again.*

Witnessing and Ethics—Friday, April 23, 1976. Witnessing is the fulfilling of responsibility. One bears witness in the “Here I am.” It is the fulfilling of responsibility propelled by an “anachronism of inspiration.” It is a fulfilling of a witnessing for God without ever using the word God. “God is not uttered.”¹⁴⁶ Witnessing is performed in the doing, not in representation. *Ethics emerges from an immemorial sacred call that is derailed in representation and solidification of the said.*

From Consciousness to Prophetism—Friday, April 30, 1976. Bearing witness is not an act of making manifest, but rather being responsible in response to an immemorial command. The notion of God reminds us of a height of responsibility beyond being that does not pause in

¹⁴⁴ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 188–189.

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 197.

¹⁴⁶ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 200.

idolatry; it “speaks beyond being.”¹⁴⁷ *To witness is to bear responsibility; the focus remains on the responsibility, not the communicator. Responsibility, not the prophet must speak.*

In Praise of Insomnia—Friday, May 7, 1976. Insomnia is tied to consciousness; it is an awakening tied to a *diachrony* of time. Insomnia is the Other is an awakening of the Same; it is the spiritual activity of the soul. Consciousness “descends from insomnia.”¹⁴⁸ *Levinas points to consciousness that witnesses its presence in a spiritual insomnia that awakens us to responsibility.*

Outside of Experience: The Cartesian Idea of Infinite—Friday, May 14, 1976. Within the West there is a privileging of Being and immanence. Even much discussion of God rests within representation and immanence, which is a form of ontology. Such a focus can miss a signification prior to Being and immanence.¹⁴⁹ *It is the ethical command before Being that Levinas calls us to attend and witness.*

A God “Transcendent to a Point of Absence”—Friday, May 21, 1976. The final contribution in this series of essays announces with exceptional clarity the danger of turning the good and the infinite into a totality of assurance. One eclipses the power of the infinite when it is used to eclipse the finite. The infinite cannot be embraced as a weapon of self-assurance. The infinite dwells within incomprehensibility, unable to be grasped and possessed. The infinite is awakened in responsibility for and to the Other. The infinite arises in a “trauma of awakening....”¹⁵⁰ The awakening is a love without eros, a desire that cannot be quenched, a disinterested responsibility, and a signification that is both beyond, and before Being. Such a

¹⁴⁷ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 202.

¹⁴⁸ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 210.

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 217–218.

¹⁵⁰ Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, 220.

view of ethics when enacted witnesses to God as transcendent to a point of absence. *Infinite responsibility is played out by a derivative me who stands and acts—Here I am.*

The Saying and the Said

We witness in the words of Derrida the reality of a saying that lives within a trace that rests within the ultimate form of the said—death. Levinas’s project suggests the inability of death to extinguish ethics, which is not tied to a person, but to immemorial time that houses ethics. A transcendence to the point of absence is a God without Being and immanence; acknowledgement of God is performed in responsibility for the Other. In each case, Levinas articulates meaning beyond meaning, time before time, responsibility before necessity—an obligation of ethics that speaks in spite of death with recognition of a transcendence so powerful that self-assurance is forsaken. Levinas offers us insight into an immemorial world of responsibility that connects us to a universal ethic, “I am my brother’s Keeper.” This audio ethical echo moves one to responsibility for the Other—witnessing, “Here I stand.” At such a moment, personal decision-making begins—one must discern how to be uniquely responsible for a particular Other. There is no blueprint for such acts of responsibility, just an immemorial command to be responsible.

1. *The said of death* cannot erase the trace of ethics;
2. *The face of the Other* calls through a saying that interrupts the assurance of ideologies, procedures, and culturally imposed finality;
3. *Transcendence* houses an ethic that is beyond clarity of definitive description;
4. *Death and God* both announce the possibility of spiritual awakening when the trace, not solidified anguish or assurance, calls us forth;

5. *Ethics and justice* dwell within *adieu* of goodbye and hello, goodbye to self-assurance and hello to an immemorial ethical echo that demands us to stand and to respond in uniqueness and particularity forever obligated and ever fearful of self-righteousness. Yet, even the call of ethics has limits, as one considers those not at the table of decision-making. The interruption of ethics makes justice possible. Finitude and infinity, the said and saying, justice and ethics, the universal and the particular interrupt one another, defining human identity with responsibility and ambiguity. There is no code, process, procedure, or rule that will ensure the universal enactment of ethics and justice. There is, however, a demand to forever perform acts of responsibility for the Other, the neighbor, the Third—ever reminded of a *me* that originates in exteriority of responsibility unresponsive to self-righteousness and self-assurance.